

Contributor Profile: Bangladesh

Dr. Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas

University of Dhaka

Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget ²	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other significant deployments
157,053 World Ranking (size): 34 Army 126,153 Navy 16,900 Air Force 14,000 (Paramilitary 63,900)	Total: 23 14 Multi Role: 12 Mi-17 <i>Hip H</i> ; 2 Mi-17-1V <i>Hip H</i> (VIP) 9 Transport: 3 Mi-171Sh 6 Light Range (2 Bell 206L <i>Long Ranger</i> ; 4 Bell 212)	2009-10: \$1.21bn 2010-11: \$1.48bn (1.5% of the GDP) 2011-12: \$1.6bn (1.5% of the GDP)	8,843 (224 female) (30 April 2013) (78% armed forces, 21% police, 1% observers) Ranking: 1st	MINUSTAH: 319 police UNMIL: 1,408 (13 experts, 15 police, 1,380 troops) UNOCI: 2,543 (13 experts, 360 police, 2,170 troops) UNAMID: 962 (17 experts, 556 police, 198 troops) UNFIL: 327 troops MONUSCO: 2,953 (17 experts, 389 police, 2,547 troops) UNMISS: 303 (3 experts, 22 police, 278 troops) MINURSO: 28 (8 experts, 20 troops)	None
Defense spending / troop: ³ US\$9,500 (compared to global average of approx. US\$68,000).					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Bangladesh is a leading provider of UN peacekeepers and as of April 2013, Bangladesh has participated in 52 missions in 40 countries. [In April 2013](#), Bangladesh had 6,921 troops, 71 military experts and 1,851 police personnel deployed in various UN peacekeeping operations. Since 2000, Bangladesh's troop contributions have increased about 280% (see figure 1). The army contributed 93% of this figure and the police 7%. 104 Bangladeshi uniformed peacekeepers have died while serving under the UN flag (see table 1).

Figure 1: Bangladeshi Uniformed Personnel in UN Peacekeeping Operations

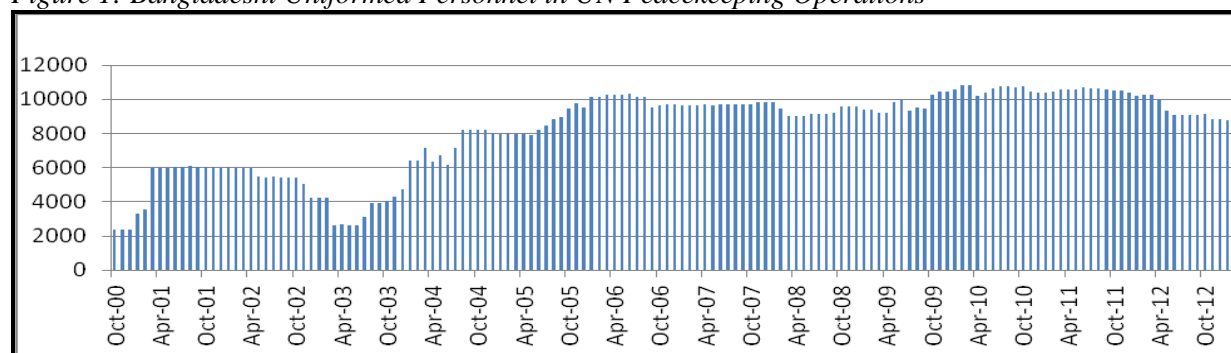


Table 1: [Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping Operations](#) (52 missions in 40 countries)

	Army	Navy	Air Force	Police	Total
No. of Peacekeepers (completed missions)	94,768	2,039	3,207	7,415	107,429
Deceased peacekeepers	91	1	4	8	104

The Bangladesh police force first contributed to UN peacekeeping in 1989 through the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. Since then Bangladeshi police officers have participated in all the major peacekeeping missions where the UN has deployed police. Between 2001 and 2011, there has been a 968% increase in the number of Bangladeshi police personnel in UN missions, surpassing 2,000 officers in 2011. These have deployed as individual police experts and Formed Police Units (FPU) in East Timor, DR Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, South Sudan, and Haiti. Bangladesh is a [top contributor](#) of female police (191, as of April 2013). One officer of the rank of Additional Inspector General of Police has served in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) headquarters. Bangladesh deployed its first naval contribution to a UN mission in May 2011: a naval frigate and an offshore patrol vessel to the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Part 2: Decision-making Process

Bangladesh sends troops and police personnel to UN missions based on a generic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in December 2007 as part of the UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS).

Neither the Government of Bangladesh nor the Bangladesh Armed Forces have specific policy guidelines regarding contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. The military has tended to monopolize decisions about Bangladesh's participation in UN peace missions and the civilian authorities have not challenged this prerogative. The decision-making process usually starts when Bangladesh receives a request for peacekeepers from the UN Secretariat. Dhaka's Permanent Mission at the UN receives this request on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and examines it in light of Bangladesh's broader foreign policy priorities and existing international commitments. The Defense Attaché in the Permanent Mission in New York deals with the bureaucratic procedures and subsequently forwards the requests to the relevant agencies in Bangladesh. Requests relating to troops are directed to the Armed Forces Division (AFD), which is the coordinating headquarters of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The Overseas Operations Directorate deals with peacekeeping operations in the Army Headquarters in Dhaka.⁴ Requests for naval and air force components are transferred to the respective Navy and Air Force Headquarters in Dhaka, which then issue necessary directives for the upcoming operations. For troops, the Overseas Operations Directorate issues the necessary instructions to all other concerned branches of the armed forces for the requisite preparations. This involves the selection of personnel and the provision of equipment and training. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) receives requests related to the deployment of the police personnel for the UN missions. After the initial notification, the MoHA transfers the order to Police Headquarters in Dhaka to take decisions on the selection of personnel.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political and Security Rationales: Bangladesh's checkered political history plays an important role in explaining the country's active participation. The bloody and painful separation from Pakistan helped create an army that was heavily politicized due to its participation in the war of 1971. This politicization resulted in the military taking control of the state between 1975 and 1990. Only in 1990 was democracy restored. However, this did not mean a complete end to the military's involvement in politics. The army remains one of the country's most powerful actors. Bangladeshi political parties have welcomed the military's involvement in peacekeeping because they believe participation in such missions will imbibe the Bangladesh Army with democratic values and lead to healthier civil-military relations at home. Further, participating in UN missions with active support from

development partners like the United States enhances Bangladesh's profile in regional and global forums.

Economic Rationales: Bangladesh is a low-income developing country with a [gross national income per capita of \\$700](#) (between 2007 and 2011). Despite considerable economic progress over the last two decades, Bangladesh still struggles to cope with a very high population density and limited economic resources. This encourages the government to look for economic opportunities abroad and explains why UN compensation rates for peacekeepers are attractive to Bangladeshi soldiers and police. The financial benefits accrued by Bangladeshi peacekeepers thus play an important role in supporting the economy. Official sources indicate that during 2001-10, the government received \$1.28 billion from the UN as compensation for troop contributions, contingent-owned equipment, and other forms of compensation.⁵ UN peacekeeping helps the Bangladesh Army to purchase and maintain military equipment that it would not be able to obtain under normal circumstances and to reward its personnel. UN peacekeeping may also produce other indirect economic benefits through facilitating contracts in new markets for Bangladeshi businesses, especially in the pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors. (One example is Bangladeshi entrepreneurs leasing land in African countries to establish farms to help meet the food requirements of both Bangladesh and the host countries.)

Normative Rationales: Bangladesh has constantly reiterated its commitments to the principles of the UN, including the maintenance of international peace and security. Providing UN peacekeepers allows Bangladesh to promote a positive image of the country abroad. In [her address](#) on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers in 2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her gratitude to Bangladeshi peacekeepers for enhancing the country's image in the international arena. So did [UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#). As [The Economist](#) observed in 2007, donning blue helmets gave Bangladeshis the chance to be known for something other than bad politics and natural disasters.

Institutional Rationales: As noted above, the military usually plays the major role in decisions about Bangladesh's participation in UN peacekeeping and it has strong institutional reasons for contributing. First, peacekeeping allows Bangladeshi soldiers to interact with foreign armed forces and improve their professional skills. Such multinational exposure helps them gain operational expertise and first-hand knowledge of the latest doctrines and military equipment. Second, peacekeeping helps finance equipment and weapons platforms that might otherwise be out of reach. Third, peacekeeping enhances the military's professional skills through language training, increased inter-personal skills, and by providing opportunities to interact with foreign troops in military tasks. Finally, peacekeeping has promoted institutional development at home. To cater for increasing demand for trained peacekeepers, the Bangladesh Army has established the [Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training](#) (BIPSOT), a prestigious facility that provides training to foreign and Bangladeshi personnel. BIPSOT has benefited from active support provided by United States and other Western countries and helps strengthen the professional image of Bangladesh Army hosting world-class training institutions.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Difficult domestic politics: This is not a barrier to Bangladesh's peacekeeping contributions. The two major political parties of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have strongly supported UN peacekeeping despite disagreements on most other issues. Even leftist political parties, which are usually vocal

about Western countries and the pernicious impact of their policies on states like Bangladesh, do not criticize Dhaka's involvement in UN peacekeeping. However, political leaders must be careful not to antagonize Bangladesh's majority Muslim population. It would have been very difficult, for instance, for Bangladesh to participate in the mission in post-invasion Iraq even with the UN's authorization.

Civil society groups and academics in Bangladesh have not focused much attention on matters related to UN peacekeeping. Only [one article](#) has raised critical questions about the potential influence of such missions on Bangladesh's politics, especially with regard to civil-military relations. The article also posed questions about how the government and armed forces would cope with reduced demand for peacekeepers from the UN. The domestic power of Bangladesh's military prevents any serious opposition to its participation in UN peacekeeping. So far, political actors are content to let the armed forces participate in peacekeeping in the hope this will neutralize any potential praetorian desires.

Part 5: Challenges and Issues

UN peacekeeping has had an enormous impact on Bangladeshi defense institutions. The Armed Forces now accommodate peace-based modules and post-war state-building components in its training discourse. By nature such modules focus on "human" rather than simply "national" security and combat roles. They therefore pose a challenge for more traditionally oriented sections of the military.⁶ After 25 years of UN peacekeeping, some argue that [Bangladesh Armed Forces need to balance](#) their role as peacekeepers with more traditional national defense tasks. So far, little or no thought has been given to how the transformation brought on by peacekeeping has impacted the capacity of the Bangladesh Armed Forces to carry out traditional combat missions.

Peacekeeping has also influenced defense budgeting and procurement. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh concluded an arms deal worth US\$1 billion with Russia. The deal includes purchase of large-bodied Mi-17 helicopters, combat trainer aircraft, pontoon bridges, armored personal carriers and anti-tank missiles. The Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh Army pointed out that [this purchase was crucial for Bangladesh's peacekeeping missions](#) and it was also mentioned that the UN had suggested Bangladesh procure modern weapons for its peacekeepers operating in troubled regions of the world where armed groups often use weapons that are advanced compared to those used by Bangladeshi troops.

Undoubtedly, some of these new acquisitions will ensure the necessary logistical and combat support to Bangladeshi contingents in UN missions. However, such procurements may face significant challenges with adverse consequences for civil-military relations. The government's defense purchases are often not transparent and may lead to questions about Bangladesh's role in UN peace keeping missions. [Transparency International](#) recently identified Bangladesh as one of the 15 countries with high risk of corruption in defense purchases. Moreover, while justification for the arms deal has been linked to UN peacekeeping missions, [some analysts have claimed](#) that participation in such missions does not provide a convincing argument for the purchase of Russian arms, and that other complex rationales may be at work. Also, the additional money for the defense budget comes at the expense of other priority sectors, which could have an adverse effect on the country's overall economic development. Finally, the Armed Forces Division has not indicated its future plans for this expensive equipment beyond its immediate use in UN peacekeeping.

Although there is wide consensus that participation in UN peacekeeping will reduce praetorian aspirations in the Bangladesh armed forces, during the 2007 political crisis the army indirectly intervened to topple the caretaker government and install its preferred alternative interim government. The military actively supported the formation of a non-political cabinet to create a level-playing field for the political parties. The army was not neutral and the whole act was a [reminder of the fragility of civilian rule](#). Although parliamentary elections eventually took place, the army's role proved deeply divisive and reinvigorated debate about its place in domestic politics. It is notable, for instance, that the civilian legislature's control of the military has diminished, as reflected in the inactive role of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defense Affairs.⁷ Moreover, the presence of military personnel in the civilian administration has not declined sharply from the authoritarian era of 1975-90. The outcome is a blurring of the traditional division between civil and military institutions.

Another question involves the desire of members of paramilitary forces like the Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP), and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to participate in UN peacekeeping along with their colleagues from the Bangladesh Armed Forces and the Police. Until now this has not been permitted. But the Government's reluctance may cause disaffection, which may adversely affect performance of these paramilitary organizations in the long run.

Financial issues will also continue to impact the future of Bangladeshi peacekeeping. At the micro level, it is notable that financial gain has become the primary reason why many join the military.⁸ This could be seen as a type of brain-drain that captures precious (often educated and trained) human capital in the military service. Participation in UN missions also seems to be more lucrative than serving on any other assignment, and officers often leave or retire early after completing a UN mission.⁹ Furthermore, the money they earn contributes to the overall remittance flow, and hence, strengthens the national economy. Nevertheless, the impact of UN peacekeeping on the national economy is hard to quantify. Interviews with former peacekeepers suggest that UN earnings were normally spent in non-productive sectors, for example, in consumption goods and real estate, or invested in small and medium enterprises, and stock markets.

There is also the troubling issue of peacekeeping becoming mired in the domestic politics of Bangladesh. Only recently, [the opposition party alleged](#) that police activities directed against that party could have an adverse impact on Bangladeshi police personnel's deployment to UN missions. The government, meanwhile, [strenuously denied](#) that such a scenario could materialize and pointed out that the number of Bangladeshi police officials were on the rise. Also, it pointed out that [Bangladesh had recently received a UN request](#) to send 600 troops to Mali. Nevertheless, given the zero-sum nature of Bangladesh's politics, there is a risk that Bangladesh's participation in UN peace missions may get tainted by partisan politics.

Finally, [allegations](#) that the Bangladesh security forces might have engaged in extrajudicial killings of ethnic minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and elsewhere raise questions about the military's compliance with international human rights standards, which could affect future participation in UN missions.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

There is no critical public debate in Bangladesh on its contribution to UN peacekeeping. Despite ideological differences, political parties across the spectrum view Bangladesh's

contribution as a great source of national pride. The [Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies](#) (BISS), a top think-tank of the Bangladesh Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has hosted conferences and published papers highlighting Bangladesh's participation in peacekeeping.

The burgeoning electronic and print media in Bangladesh are known for their critical views on many issues but they have seldom raised critical questions with regard to UN peacekeeping. It is more common for special reports to highlight positive work done by Bangladeshi peacekeepers.¹⁰

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

A well-trained, professional Bangladesh military that is eager to participate is a significant capability for in UN peacekeeping. This is enhanced by widespread domestic support for such participation. The Government of Bangladesh and the Armed Forces are also clearly willing to procure new equipment specifically for its participation in peacekeeping operations.

Bangladesh would find it difficult to take part in peacekeeping missions that did not generate popular support among its Muslim-majority population. While the existing technical capability of the Bangladesh Armed Forces is not outdated, it is not adequately equipped to face heavily-armed opponents in extremely demanding missions. These are significant caveats for Bangladesh. In addition, decision-making pertaining to UN peacekeeping missions rests firmly with the Bangladeshi military. There is a longer-term risk that as UN peacekeeping becomes a more multidimensional enterprise requiring more civilian contributions, Bangladesh's major role in it will be diminished.

Part 8: Further Reading

- D. Banerjee, "South Asia: Contributors of Global Significance" in D. Daniel et al. (eds.), *Peace Operations* (Georgetown University Press, 2008), pp.195-96.
- N. Islam, "The Army, UN Peacekeeping Mission and Democracy in Bangladesh," *Economic & Political Weekly*, XLV: 29 (17 July 2010): 77-85.
- IWGIA, *Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh –The Slow Demise of the Region's Indigenous Peoples (Report 14)*, (Amsterdam: IWGIA, Organising Committee CHT Campaign and Shimin Gaikou Centre, 2012).
- K. Krishnasamy, "Bangladesh and UN Peacekeeping: The Participation of a 'Small' State," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 41:1 (2003): 4-47.
- M. Rahman, "Blue Beret in the UN Peacekeeping Process: The Case of Bangladesh Police," *Indian Journal of Politics*, 14:1 (2009): 19-44.
- R. Zaman & N. Biswas, "Bangladesh" in A.J. Bellamy & P.D. Williams (eds.), *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges, and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013* (London: IISS/ Routledge, 2013).

² Budget figures and calculations are drawn from "[Sentinel Security Assessment - South Asia](#)", *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, 11 April 2012.

³ Defense Spending/Troop is the total defense budget (in USD) divided by the total number of active armed forces. Uses latest figures available from IISS, *The Military Balance 2013*.

⁴ The Overseas Operations Directorate was set up in 2005 in order to free the Military Operations Directorate from the added responsibility of UN missions for the Bangladesh Army. Authors' communication with DPKO officer, January 2012.

⁵ "Role of BD Armed Forces in UN Peacekeeping Missions," restricted Bangladesh Army document (no date, anonymous author).

⁶ Authors' interview with a serving officer of Bangladesh Army, Dhaka, 2 April 2012.

⁷ See Syed Imtiaz Ahmed, "Civilian Supremacy in Democracies with 'Fault Lines': The Role of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in Bangladesh," *Democratization*, 13:2 (2006), pp.283–302.

⁸ A Bangladesh Army officer elaborated further on this matter when he pointed out that participation in UN peace missions' times leads to venality among some officers who became too involved with money-making ventures like investing in shares, buying real estate. Such activities, at times, tend to divert officers away from soldiering and hamper the professionalization of the military.

⁹ Authors' communication with DPKO officer, January 2012.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ilyas Iftekhar Rasul, "[International Day for UN Peacekeepers](#)," *The Daily Star*, 29 May 2011; Staff Correspondent, "[Bangladesh to bolster peacekeeping missions President lauds peacekeepers on Int'l Day](#)," *The Daily Sun*, 30 May 2012; "[Dhaka largest troops-contributor to UN missions Int'l Day of UN Peacekeepers today](#)," *The New Age*, 29 May 2011; Brig Gen Md. Abdul Hakim Aziz, psc, "[Heroes beyond national frontiers](#)," *The Daily Star*, 18 June 2011.