



BANGLADESH DEFENSE STRATEGY: CAPABILITY GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

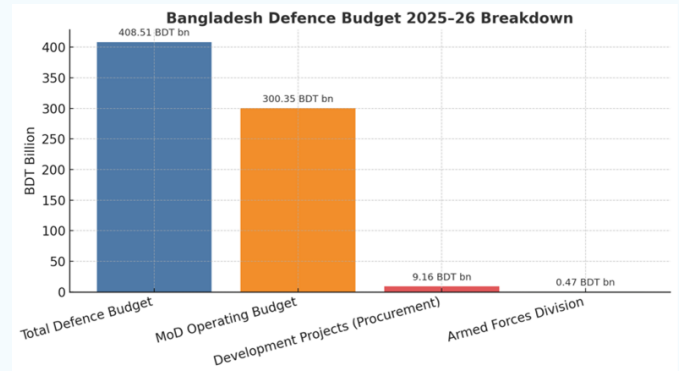
Bangladesh, strategically located in the Indo-Pacific, faces escalating regional threats and internal instability. Despite significant modernization under Forces Goal 2030, critical capability gaps persist in the army, navy, and air force. This policy brief identifies the conceptual, institutional, and capability deficits in Bangladesh's defense architecture, argues for a comprehensive national security strategy, and outlines strategic recommendations for robust defense reform, civil-military integration, and domestic production.

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh's defense policy remains underdeveloped relative to its evolving regional environment. While Forces Goal 2030 has advanced military modernization, these efforts are constrained by the absence of a coherent national security framework, effective civil-military collaboration, and structured contingency planning. Bangladesh currently lacks an articulated and prioritized assessment of external and internal threats within its policy and military orientation, with no formal document outlining its security vision, objectives, or priorities. As a result, policy responses often remain reactive and fragmented rather than strategically guided. Additionally, the concept of "national security" is neither clearly defined nor widely discussed within policy circles, limiting the development of an integrated approach necessary to address emerging security challenges effectively.

OBJECTIVES

- Defending the homeland from external attack and Safeguarding Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity
- Deterring adversaries from aggression safeguarding the Nation and its citizens
- Enhance Deterrence Capabilities, both Offensive and defensive
- Strengthen internal Stability and Counterterrorism Capacity
- Build capabilities in cybersecurity, drone defense, and countering hybrid warfare threats in alignment with evolving regional dynamics
- Integrate Civil Defense and Human Security
- Contribute to Regional and International Peacekeeping



FINDINGS

- Bangladesh lacks a national security strategy and institutional contingency planning for modern threats.
- The army has limited armored capabilities and lacks advanced sensor fusion and digital battlefield coordination systems.
- The army's mechanized units rely on older APCs, reducing survivability in contested environments.
- The army has no integrated electronic warfare and cyber defense capacity for modern conflict scenarios.
- The air force is obsolete, with outdated jets and insufficient squadrons.
- Fighter jets are non-homogenous, with incompatible platforms and systems, complicating maintenance and operations.
- Bangladesh lacks licensed defense production facilities, leading to dependency on foreign suppliers for critical platforms and spares.
- The navy lacks modern missile systems, VLS-capable platforms, and domestic missile production.
- Naval missile range is limited compared to neighboring states, reducing maritime deterrence.
- The air force lacks in-flight refueling, modern radar, and advanced air combat systems.
- Training procedures across services remain conventional, with limited emphasis on multi-domain and electronic warfare readiness.
- Technical maintenance and indigenous upgrade capacity remain underdeveloped across all forces.
- Civil-military relations are weak, hindering strategic coordination and whole-of-government defense planning.
- Defense budgeting is insufficient, heavily operational rather than strategic, and vulnerable to inflation and foreign currency fluctuations.

STRATEGIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a National Security Council (NSC) and adopt a comprehensive National Security Strategy (NSS) to replace fragmented defense planning.
- Institutionalize regular Strategic Defense Reviews (SDRs) every five years to keep modernization aligned with technological and global shifts.
- Shift from land-centric, conventional doctrines to multi-domain, technology-driven warfare readiness.
- Gradually increase defense spending within a phased, multi-year framework focused on modernization, not just operational costs.
- Pursue technology transfer and licensed local production in procurement to reduce dependency and build domestic capacity.
- Diversify arms suppliers beyond China, deepening partnerships with Turkey and others for technology access and quality improvement.
- Develop cyber and electronic warfare capabilities across all forces.
- Expand domestic defense production, prioritizing UAVs, armored vehicles, and artillery, and build Bangladesh as a regional defense hub.
- Modernize the Air Force, targeting 12–15 squadrons with advanced fighters, in-flight refueling, and integrated radar systems.
- Upgrade the Navy with VLS-capable platforms, domestic missile production, and enhanced maritime domain awareness.
- Establish civil defense and emergency preparedness plans, including CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) readiness and public drills.
- Improve civil-military coordination to align operational readiness with strategic goals.
- Align defense modernization with economic development goals for sustained consistency.

