

Forces Goal 2030: Geopolitical Significance for Bangladesh and the Region

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Introduction

Every country in this multipolar world is concerned about preserving national security, protecting territorial integrity, projection of power, and thereby maintaining absolute sovereignty. Therefore, superpowers, great powers, and small powers aim to bolster their own military forces to create partnerships and spread dominance over others. With that being said, Bangladesh has adopted a great plan named “Forces Goal 2030”, which is aimed at modernizing and enhancing the defense capabilities of the country. This commentary will shed light on the concept of Forces Goal 2030, initiatives taken for the farsighted strategy, analysis of the goals, regional and national implications for Bangladesh due to the mega defense plan, expansion of defense ties by Bangladesh, geo-political interests of military powers in the South Asian region, and lastly, conclusions.

What is the Forces Goal 2030?

The Forces Goal 2030 is an initiative taken by the Bangladesh Armed Forces under the leadership of the government of Bangladesh. It is a long-term strategic plan that aims to make the armed forces more capable, versatile and prepared to tackle various threats and challenges. The plan was first proposed in 2009 with the aim of developing and bolstering the military capabilities of the three services: Army, Navy and Air Force, with a view to meeting the challenges of the 21st century. It took a year to gain the approval of the then government, and in 2010, necessary implementations began in phases. In 2017, the plan was revised and officially launched.

The primary objective is to transform all three dimensions (land, water and air) of the Bangladesh military into a modern, technologically advanced and well-trained force capable

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of effectively safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The plan includes various goals, such as creating partnerships in terms of military cooperation, improving disaster response capabilities, and modernizing military logistics and infrastructure.



Initiatives Taken for the Goal

During the past few decades, the organizational structure of the Bangladesh Army has gone through unprecedented developments. The impressive addition made to meet the Forces Goal-2030 includes the raising of three full Infantry divisions (7,10, and 17), engineer construction battalions, armored regiments, and establishing brigades (a tactical formation of the Army), where eight infantry battalions (a tactical group lower than brigades) and one infantry brigade have been mechanized.² In recent years, the number of cantonments have also been increased. Recently, the Honorable Prime Minister inaugurated "The Abdul Hamid cantonment," named after the former President of Bangladesh.³ The army has already made a number of upgrades to its equipment, including the procurement of helicopters, unmanned planes, and anti-aircraft missiles, in accordance with the strategy. Many of these transactions used Chinese equipment: Bangladesh has ordered 36 WS-22 multiple rocket launcher systems (MRLS), 44 MBT-2000

² Mohammad Sazzad Hossain Bhuiyan, "Development and Modernisation of Bangladesh Army over the Last Decade." *The Daily Observer*, May 7, 2022, sec. Op-Ed. <https://www.observerbdt.com/news.php?id=364553>.

³ The Business Standard, "PM Inaugurates Freedom Fighter Abdul Hamid Cantonment in Kishoreganj," February 28, 2023. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/pm-inaugurates-freedom-fighter-abdul-hamid-cantonment-kishoreganj-591902>.

Main Battle Tanks, two regiments of FM-90 short range surface to air missiles, QW-2 and FN-6 hand-held anti-aircraft missiles, and PF-98 anti-tank rockets.⁴

The modernisation plan placed a high priority on the Bangladesh Navy. The Navy has seen a major increase in firepower and weapon production capabilities. Over the past 14 years, the Navy's Fleet has grown by 31 vessels, including four frigates, six corvettes, four big patrol craft, five fuel craft, and two training ships, transforming it into a fully operational three-dimensional force.⁵ Two new Chinese built submarines⁶, two corvettes⁷, and a number of patrol boats have been delivered to the Bangladesh Navy. In order to provide secure jetty facilities for submarines and warships in the harbor, Bangladesh is getting ready to operationalize its first submarine base with modern basin facilities for the Navy at Pekua of Cox's Bazar.⁸ Also, a new naval base (BNS Sher-e-Bangla) in the Bay of Bengal will be able to offer maritime and coastal defense, air support for the seaport and the communities around it, and defense against external enemy attack.⁹

The Bangladesh Air Force will be transformed by Forces Goal 2030 into a technologically sophisticated, well-trained, and well-equipped force that is capable of thwarting any threat to Bangladeshi airspace. Since the formulation of the goal, the BAF had received 23 PT-6 basic trainers, 16 Chengdu F-7BGI fighters, 16 Yakovlev Yak-130 advanced jet trainers, 9 K-8W jet trainers, 3 Let L-410 Turbolet transport trainers, and 16 Yakovlev Yak-130 advanced jet trainers. The Force is poised to acquire high-performance, ultra-modern fighter planes as part of the government's 'Forces Goal 2030'; this will give the air force a much-needed facelift and improve and modernize its overall military capabilities. This improvement is long needed.

⁴ Shakil Bin Mushtaq, "Bangladesh's Ambitious Military Modernization Drive – The Diplomat." *The Diplomat*, January 9, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/bangladeshs-ambitious-military-modernization-drive/>.

⁵ Saume Saptaparna Nath, "A Step towards Maritime Capacity Building." *The Financial Express*, March 22, 2023. <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/reviews/a-step-towards-maritime-capacity-building>.

⁶ *The Daily Star*, "Bangladesh Navy Gets 2 Submarines," November 14, 2016. <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/bangladesh-navy-gets-2-chinese-submarines-1314553>.

⁷ Gabriel Dominguez, "Bangladesh Navy Receives Final Two Chinese-Made Type C13B Corvettes." *Janes.Com*. April 29, 2019. <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/bangladesh-navy-receives-final-two-chinese-made-type-c13b-corvettes>.

⁸ Ali Asif Shawon, "Bangladesh's First Submarine Base Starts Operation Monday." *Dhaka Tribune*, March 20, 2023. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2023/03/20/bangladeshs-first-submarine-base-starts-operation-today>.

⁹ Bangladesh Navy Condition Under Construction, "Wikiwand - BNS Sher-e-Bangla." Wikiwand. Accessed May 6, 2023. https://wikiwand.com/en/BNS_Sher-e-Bangla.

Nevertheless, there are plans to acquire an unmanned aerial vehicle system, a mobile gap filler radar, and an ultra-modern air defense radar notwithstanding challenges.¹⁰

In order to meet the upgrading criteria, Bangladesh Government adds funding specifically for the 2030 program to the defense budget. A total of Tk 399.95 billion, or Tk 27.15 billion higher than the current fiscal year's budget, has been set aside for the defense sector in the proposed budget for the 2022–23 fiscal year.¹¹ The military spending has been gradually increasing in the recent years.

FY	Budget (bn)	Change	Expenditure (%)
2022-23	4.8 ^[5]	7.53%	0.91%
2021-22	4.5 ^[6]	8.0%	1.3%
2020-21	4.06	9.50%	1.16%
2019-20	3.87 ^[7]	9.40%	1.28%
2018-19	3.59	10.7%	1.31%
2017-18	3.45	9.40%	1.38%
2016-17	3.24	10.6%	1.46%
2015-16	2.82	8.70%	1.45%
2014-15	2.36	8.36%	1.36%
2013-14	2.05	11.3%	1.36%
2012-13	1.82	1.20%	1.36%
2011-12	1.80	9.05%	1.39%
2010-11	1.62		1.40%

Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Military_budget_of_Bangladesh.

In the most current edition of *Global Firepower 2023*, Bangladesh is ranked as the world's first paramilitary power and 12th among "Powers on the Rise", making it the third South Asian nation to achieve this feat, behind Pakistan and India. The country now ranks 40th globally in terms of defense spending, totaling USD 3.8 billion, as part of its modernization effort.¹² Only behind India and Pakistan in South Asia in terms of defense spending, Bangladesh comes in third, indicating that the nation's diplomatic efforts go beyond soft power.

¹⁰ *Dhaka Tribune*, "ED: An Upgrade for Our Air Force," December 22, 2020, sec. Editorial. <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/opinion/editorial/2020/12/22/ed-an-upgrade-for-our-air-force>.

¹¹ *Prothom Alo*. "Defence Sector Budget to Be Increased by Tk 27.15b." June 9, 2022, sec. Local. <https://en.prothomalo.com/business/local/defence-sector-budget-to-be-increased-by-tk-2715b>.

¹² Towkir Hossain, "Global Firepower Ranking 2023: Implications for Bangladesh | The Daily Star." *The Daily Star*, March 18, 2023, sec. Views. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/global-firepower-ranking-2023-implications-bangladesh-3274386>.

Military Partnerships and Procurements

Many nations that manufacture military hardware are eager to expand their defense cooperation with Bangladesh by selling their goods and services to that nation. The United Kingdom¹³, the United States, France, Italy, Turkey, Belarus, India and others are among the nations that have sought to put in place processes or to make the already-existing tools for supplying Bangladesh with military equipment operational.¹⁴ High-tech weapons, such as fighter jets, helicopters, submarines, air defense systems, and minesweepers, have attracted the interest of major countries like Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, and a fleet upgrade for Bangladesh's air force is also being discussed by the UK, France, Germany, and Italy.¹⁵ These countries are the sources for the modernization of Bangladesh Armed Forces which takes the country forward to accomplishing the goal.

India has the capacity to fulfill a substantial portion of Bangladesh's 'Forces Goal 2030' objectives, including the introduction of new weaponry and the improvement of infrastructure, which will help strengthen defense cooperation between the two nations. Bangladesh has published a wish list of military platforms and systems that its armed services would want to purchase from India, marking some movement on the delayed implementation of the \$500 million defense Line of Credit (LoC) given by India.¹⁶ According to the wish list, the Bangladesh Army has authorized the purchase of 11 Mine protective vehicles from the Tata group for around \$2.2 million, five Bridge Layer Tanks (BLT-72) from the Tata Group at a cost of about \$10 million, and seven Bailey movable steel bridges. Moreover, it contains a wide variety of tools, such as an oil tanker for the Bangladesh Navy, a logistics ship, and a floating dock.

Bangladesh and Japan agreed to continue promoting security cooperation through activities including unit-to-unit exchange, training programs, and goodwill exercises in light of the

¹³ *The Daily Star*, "Bangladesh-UK Defence Dialogue Soon: High Commissioner Muna Tasneem." November 24, 2021. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/bangladesh-uk-defence-dialogue-soon-high-commissioner-muna-tasneem-2901756>.

¹⁴ Shahidul Islam Chowdhury. "Many Countries Keen to Sell Weapons to Bangladesh." *New Age*. Accessed May 6, 2023. <https://www.newagebd.net/article/150058/many-countries-keen-to-sell-weapons-to-bangladesh>.

¹⁵ Raheed Ejaz, "Europe Increasingly Interested in Selling Arms to Bangladesh." *Prothomalo*, November 11, 2021. <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/europe-is-increasingly-interested-in-selling-arms-to-bangladesh>.

¹⁶ Dinakar Peri, "Bangladesh Shares Wish List of Military Hardware for Procurement from India." *The Hindu*, September 6, 2022, sec. India. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bangladesh-shares-wish-list-of-military-hardware-for-procurement-from-india/article65856825.ece>.

Memorandum of Cooperation and Exchanges.¹⁷ Additionally, both prime ministers have made the decision to take into account opening Defense Wing in Tokyo and National Security Wing in Dhaka in their respective embassies soon.¹⁸ In a recent visit to Tokyo, the Honorable Prime Minister have shared Bangladesh’s plans and thoughts on Forces Goal 2030, which was acknowledged by the government of Japan to support their respective regional peace and security.¹⁹

Russia has reassured its dedication to Bangladesh for the expansion of their military and military-technical cooperation. Recently, a Government to Government (G2G) agreement between Russia and Bangladesh allowed for the acquisition of eight Mi-28 NE Attack helicopters at a price of BDT 4,100 crore by the Bangladesh Air Force.²⁰



Source: <https://www.defseca.com/procurements/bangladesh-air-force-purchasing-mi-28ne-attack-helicopters/>

¹⁷ Rafiqul Islam, “Dhaka, Tokyo Sign 8 Instruments to Boost Cooperation for Mutual Benefit.” *The Business Standard*, April 26, 2023. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/dhaka-tokyo-sign-8-instruments-boost-cooperation-mutual-benefit-622338>.

¹⁸ *The Daily Observer*. “Dhaka, Tokyo to Open Defence Wings at Their Embassies - Front Page - Observerbd.Com.” April 28, 2023. <https://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=417063>.

¹⁹ *The Business Standard*, “Dhaka, Tokyo to Deepen Defence Co-Op for Regional Peace.” April 27, 2023. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/dhaka-tokyo-deepen-defence-co-op-regional-peace-622882>.

²⁰ Isa Khan, “Bangladesh Air Force Purchasing Mi-28NE Attack Helicopters.” *DefenceHub | Global Military & Security Forum*, December 26, 2021. <https://defencehub.live/threads/bangladesh-air-force-purchasing-mi-28ne-attack-helicopters.11348/>.

By supplying defense supplies and training, the US intends to help Bangladesh's armed services modernize and develop institutionally. The US emphasized the signing of two defense accords, GSOMIA and ACSA, which serve as the cornerstones of international defense commerce and collaboration.²¹ Bangladesh has expressed interest in purchasing the Boeing AH-64E Apache attack helicopter, outbidding rivals on price for a future programme in Bangladesh through a US Foreign Military Sale.²² Under the Excess Defence Article (EDA) program, the US provided the Bangladesh military with 15 International M1224 MaxxPro MRAP (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected) Trucks.



Source: <https://www.defseca.com/procurements/us-delivers-15-more-mraps-to-bangladesh/>

Bangladesh is able to get military equipment and training in defense from Turkey. The two nations' relationship has become stronger as a result of the recent signing of a security cooperation agreement.²³ Bangladesh is Turkey's fourth largest arms importer.²⁴ It has received

²¹*New Age*, "Bangladesh, US Discuss Defence Cooperation." January 9, 2023. <https://www.newagebd.net/article/191265/bangladesh-us-discuss-defence-cooperation>.

²² "Bangladesh Forces Goal 2030 and Apache Helicopters | The Asian Age Online, Bangladesh," February 22, 2022. <https://dailyasianage.com/news/282298/bangladesh-forces-goal-2030-and-apache-helicopters>.

²³ *Dhaka Tribune*, "Bangladesh, Turkey Sign Deal on Security Cooperation, Counterterrorism." January 9, 2022. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/foreign-affairs/2022/01/09/bangladesh-turkey-sign-deal-on-security-cooperation-counterterrorism-dhaka-ankara-sign-deal-on-security-cooperation>.

²⁴ SM Najmus Sakib, "Bangladesh Stepping up Defense Ties with Turkey," June 23, 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladesh-stepping-up-defense-ties-with-turkey/2280868>.

the TRG-300 Kaplan missile system from Turkish weapon company 'Rocketsan'.²⁵ LAVs (Light Armored Vehicles) were recently bought by the Bangladesh Army from Turkey.



Source: <https://www.defseca.com/procurements/bangladesh-army-purchasing-lavs-from-turkey/>

Geopolitical implications

There are various geopolitical implications of Bangladesh's "Forces Goal 2030" plan for both Bangladesh and the region. A few of these are as follows:

1. **Increasing Bangladesh's defense capacity:** The "Forces Goal 2030" strategy seeks to upgrade and modernize the capabilities of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. As a result, Bangladesh would be less susceptible to outside dangers and its development would take place in a more secure atmosphere.
2. **Regional Security:** Due to several ongoing conflicts and tensions, the South Asian region is vulnerable to crises. By discouraging possible aggressors and decreasing the likelihood of conflict, a more effective Bangladesh Armed Forces could contribute to regional security and stability.
3. **Fighting Terrorism:** In recent years, extremism and terrorism have posed a serious threat to Bangladesh. Enhancing Bangladesh's counterterrorism capabilities is a priority

²⁵ "Rocketsan Delivers TRG-300 Kaplan Multiple Launch Rocket System To Bangladesh Army - MilitaryLeak," June 7, 2021. <https://militaryleak.com/2021/06/07/rocketsan-delivers-trg-300-kaplan-multiple-launch-rocket-system-to-bangladesh-army/>.

of the "Forces Goal 2030" plan, which could help the battle against terrorism in the area.

4. **Regional Cooperation:** Bangladesh might contribute significantly to regional security if it becomes more competent and self-assured. As a result, Bangladesh and its neighbors may work together more frequently on regionally significant issues.
5. **Stabilizing Regional Power Dynamics:** By increasing Bangladesh's influence on regional security, Bangladesh's improved defense capabilities may have an effect on regional power dynamics. This can result in a shift in the balance of power in the area.
6. **Economic Development:** Economic development requires a safe and stable environment. The "Forces Goal 2030" initiative could aid in establishing a more secure environment for regional and Bangladesh's economic growth.

Conclusion

The Forces Goal 2030 strategy is highly significant from a geopolitical perspective for Bangladesh and the surrounding area. The Bangladesh Armed Forces have undergone extensive modernization and growth, and the addition of cutting-edge military hardware and gear, including submarines, has made it possible for it to become a fully operational "three-dimensional" force. The desire of superpowers across the world to give Bangladesh with cutting-edge weapons and defense training underlines Bangladesh's expanding significance as a major role in the area. To maintain stability and security in the region, it is advised that Bangladesh continue to improve its defense capabilities and its ties with key allies.