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# Peace and Security Review

Volume 12 ■ Number 26 ■ Fourth Quarter 2023

## I N S I D E

**Countering Cyber-Hacking:  
An Apex Threat to Government of Sri Lanka**  
*T. C. B. Bulathgama*

**The Urgency of Common Bay of  
Bengal Climate Security Framework**  
*Asheer Shah*

**Suffering of the Stateless:  
The Securitisation of the Rohingya and  
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**The Geopolitical Implications of  
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**MNCs' Strategies to Face COVID Shocks  
in the Era of Post-Covid Competitiveness**  
*Showkat Ara Khanam*  
*Laila Ferdousy*  
*Sumaya Binta Junnat*



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The Journal provides a forum for debate and discussion on peace, security and development issues in national, regional and extra-regional perspectives.

Original write-up between 6000 to 8000 words not published or submitted elsewhere, may be submitted to the Editor of the journal. The Chicago Manual of Style should be followed in the write-up placing notes either at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or at the end of the essay (endnotes). Table, map and diagrams should be placed in separate sheets.

Contributors are requested to enclose short biographical note and abstract of the article.

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## **Editor's Note**

In this edition of our Peace and Security Review, we present a diverse array of articles that delve into pressing global issues, shedding light on their implications and potential solutions. These articles cover a spectrum of topics ranging from cyber security threats to climate security, the Rohingya crisis, international relations, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on multinational corporations (MNCs). Each contribution offers a unique perspective, contributing to our understanding of these complex issues.

The first article titled ‘Countering Cyber Hacking: An Apex Threat to Government of Sri Lanka’ is by T. C. B. Bulathgama. The impact of cyberspace and the internet on national security, with a special focus on Sri Lanka, is the main topic of this study. These tools are being used by terrorist groups more frequently, and they pose a serious concern since they can be used to compromise government websites. The study comes to the conclusion that changes are needed to improve security and lessen terrorist cyber attacks since Sri Lanka's present legislative framework for cyber crimes is insufficient to handle this problem.

The second article, ‘The Urgency of Common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework’ by Asheer Shah investigated the relationship between climate change and security in the Bay of Bengal region with the goal of preventing climate difficulties from becoming security challenges. The ontology and epistemology of climate security are first covered, and then a case study of the dynamics in the Bay of Bengal is examined. The research proposes an elitist strategy with major actors being India, Thailand, and Bangladesh, and is influenced by European integration. The report suggests these nations' engagement in promoting supranational Asian integration and lays out a plan for creating a climate security framework in the Bay.

The third article, 'Suffering of the Stateless: The Securitisation of the Rohingya and Spill Over Security Implications for South Asia' by Sean McCafferty examines The Rohingya issue, its securitization in Bangladesh, and the related security risks. The discussion of securitization's theoretical dimensions highlights the significance of physical security measures and how they interact with language. The narrative that currently characterizes Rohingyas as security concerns is examined, along with the actions taken by the international community and the Bangladeshi government, with a focus on how the conditions in the camps exacerbate security issues. The ramifications for the larger area are also explored in the article. Finally, it considers how physical security measures and securitization contribute to ongoing security problems in an increasingly unsustainable environment.

Raisha Jesmin in the fourth article, 'The Geopolitical Implications of Rekindled Japan-ROK Relations' explored the relationship between South Korea and Japan which is complicated and tainted by past conflicts. A possibility for reconciliation is indicated by the new leadership of Fumio Kishida in Japan and Yoon Suk Yeol in South Korea. Yoon pledged to repair the relationship, and their last meeting was the first formal gathering in a decade and a half. This study examines the security implications of strengthening Japan-ROK relations in light of the challenges to regional security posed by China and North Korea. In light of past complaints that reemerge from time to time, it cautions prudence in order to guarantee a durable relationship.

The fifth article, 'MNCs' Strategies to Face COVID Shocks in the Era of Post-Covid Competitiveness' by Showkat Ara Khanam, Laila Ferdousy, Sumaya Binta Junnat looks at the economic empowerment strategies used by multinational corporations (MNCs) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular emphasis on the strategic orientations these companies have taken to become more competitive. In the wake of COVID-19 and other crises, it tackles issues with MNC efforts to safeguard profitability, lessons learned in adjusting to new work practices, and plans for robust supply chains and better results. For these businesses, rethinking business strategies and implementing new technology are crucial factors. The study also emphasizes programs that affect international commerce from a macroeconomic perspective.



We hope this collection of articles provides insightful analysis of these important international topics and encourages a more thorough comprehension of the opportunities and difficulties they raise. These papers add to the current conversation and offer workable answers to challenging issues that arise in the real world.

**Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (retd.)**

Editor



# Countering Cyber-Hacking: An Apex Threat to Government of Sri Lanka

**T. C. B. Bulathgama<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

*Due to relentless development of technology, the globe now has access to beneficial channels that make daily life easier. At the same time, technology has exposed the world to wide range of fresh dangers and difficulties that was never faced before. The internet and cyber-space surely have made the world smaller in many ways, but they have also made things more complicated. The internet and cyber-space activities have a significant impact on a nation's national security. Terrorist organizations have started to use the internet and cyber-space more and more as they have expanded and become more widely available. One such instance as well as an enticing possibility for contemporary terrorists is hacking into websites, especially those owned by governments of nations. The objective of this study is to examine whether the existing legal*

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*framework on cyber-crimes in Sri Lanka is adequate to effectively deal with the hacking of government websites by terrorist groups. This study suggests reforms and recommendations to mitigate the incidence of these types of cyber-crimes. A qualitative research approach on both the library research method and empirical research method have been used for this study. It was identified in this study that the current status of the legal framework on cyber-crimes in Sri Lanka is woefully inadequate to deal with hacking into government websites by terrorist organizations. Sri Lanka needs to address the issues and drawbacks highlighted in this study that render the government websites unsafe and risky against hacking activities of terrorists.*

**Key words:** Cyber-Crime, Hacking, Sri Lankan Government, National Security, Terrorists

## 1. Introduction

The world now has access to useful and positive channels that make daily life easier, thanks to the unrelenting advancement of technology in the twenty-first century. Additionally, technology has left the world open to a plethora of new threats and challenges that the world has never had to deal with in its conventional ways. In many ways, the internet has undoubtedly made the globe smaller, but it has also made complex issues more approachable. The entire globe arena has, however, been made vulnerable to many inescapable and evil elements that lack a clear path to triumph or defeat.

Activities in cyber-space have an enormous impact on the national security of a country. As the internet developed and became more accessible to people, terrorist organizations have started to increasingly make use of it to achieve their ends. The hacking into websites, particularly those belonging to the governments of countries, is one such instance as well as an attractive option for the terrorists. A sizeable number of cyber-crimes have been reported in Sri Lanka in recent years to the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT) and the cyber-crime unit of the Sri Lankan Police. Even while some cases properly resolved, there are some instances when the appropriate solution did not succeed since there are no cyber-laws place in place for certain unique situations.

It is clear that Sri Lanka has become a soft target for cyber-hacking and hacking into websites of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has become an attractive option for the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). The first part of this study examines the main incidents of LTTE hacking into the websites of GoSL during the period 2009-2022 to highlight the scope and extent as well as the gravity of the problem of terrorist cyber-hacking in Sri Lanka. Secondly, it deals with the legal framework relating to hacking into websites in Sri Lanka and how laws have been enforced in the case of the main incidents identified above. The third part of this paper explores whether the existing legal framework on hacking into websites in Sri Lanka is adequate to effectively prevent, investigate, and mitigate incidents of hacking into websites of GoSL by terrorist organizations. Finally, the paper suggests and recommends legal reforms.

## **1.1 Research Problem**

While Sri Lanka has enacted the *Computer Crime Act No.24 of 2007* to provide for the identification of cyber-crimes and to provide the procedure for the investigation and prevention of such crimes, the issue remains as to whether the provisions in this Act are adequate to effectively deal with the incidents of cyber-hacking. Against this backdrop, it is proposed to initiate a research study that examines whether the existing legal framework on cyber-crimes in Sri Lanka is adequate to effectively deal with the hacking of government websites by terrorist groups.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The proposed research study will be initiated to find answers to the following research questions:

### **Primary Research Questions**

1. How has the legal framework on the hacking into websites in Sri Lanka been enforced/applied to the instances of hacking into websites of the GoSL by the LTTE?
2. Is the existing legal framework on hacking into websites in Sri Lanka adequate to effectively prevent, investigate, and mitigate incidents of hacking into websites of GoSL by terrorist organizations?
3. What is the legal framework relating to hacking into websites in Sri Lanka?

### **Secondary Research Questions**

1. How did the LTTE hack into the websites of GoSL during the period 2009-2022?
2. What legal reforms can be suggested/recommended to prevent and/or mitigate the incidents of hacking into government websites by terrorist organizations in Sri Lanka?

## **2. Literature Review**

An increasing threat, cyber-hacking impacts people, companies, and governments all around the world. To gain illegal access to computers, networks, and databases, cyber-criminals employ a variety of techniques in order to steal information, money, or

intellectual property. The most recent studies on cyber-hacking defense will be covered in this literature review, along with the tools, methods, and tactics employed to stop, identify, and defend against cyber-attacks. Using cyber-security technologies and strategies is one of the most efficient ways to stop cyber-hacking. They consist of encryption, firewalls, antivirus software, and intrusion detection and prevention systems. In order to prevent unwanted access, firewalls monitor and filter network traffic. Intrusion detection and prevention systems, on the other hand, can identify and stop suspicious activity. Antivirus software helps to identify and remove malware, and encryption is used to protect data by converting it into a coded format that can only be read by authorized users.

Training staff in cyber-security best practices is a crucial method for preventing cyber-hacking. According to research, human mistake is one of the main reasons for cyber-breaches, with phishing and social engineering assaults being particularly effective at preying on people's weaknesses.<sup>2</sup> By teaching staff how to recognize and respond to cyber-risks, employee training can help lower the likelihood of human error. Big data and machine learning have also become effective tools for thwarting cyber-attacks. While machine learning uses algorithms to automatically learn from data and improve performance over time, big data refers to enormous, complex data sets that can be studied to find patterns and insights<sup>3</sup>. By spotting trends in network traffic and forecasting assault times, these technologies can be utilized to detect and stop cyber-attacks.

Using a threat intelligence technique is another method for preventing cyber-hacking. Threat intelligence entails gathering and analyzing data on online threats in order to spot trends and patterns and create a more proactive cyber-security strategy.<sup>4</sup> This strategy

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<sup>2</sup> Shaw and Chen, The impact of information richness on information security awareness training effectiveness. *Comput Educ.* 2022

<sup>3</sup> Alawfi, K., Alharbi, A., & Jamil, M. (2021). A comprehensive review on cyber-security techniques and tools for big data and machine learning. *Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Humanized Computing*, 12(8), 7695-7714.

<sup>4</sup> Kolias, C., Kambourakis, G., Stavrou, A., & Gritzalis, S. (2021). Threat intelligence in cybersecurity: A comprehensive review of the state of the art. *Computers & Security*, 106, 102260.

makes use of technologies and strategies to keep an eye on the dark web, social media, and other sources of threat information in order to spot new threats and create defenses in advance of an assault.

Last and, it's crucial for governments, businesses, and organizations to work together to combat cyber-hacking. Cyber-security is a worldwide problem that neither one country nor organization can solve on their own. Collaboration can take many different forms, such as exchanging threat intelligence, participating in collaborative cyber-security drills, and creating uniform cyber-security standards and procedures.<sup>5</sup> A multifaceted strategy, including the deployment of cyber-security tools and techniques, employee training, big data and machine learning, threat intelligence, and cooperation between enterprises and governments, is needed to combat cyber-hacking. Organizations can create a more proactive and successful cyber-security strategy by integrating these techniques, which can aid in the detection, prevention, and reaction to cyber-attacks.

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in cyber-threats in Sri Lanka, with both individuals and organizations coming under attack. Phishing scams, malware infections, ransom ware assaults, and data breaches are some of these dangers. The most important cyber-threats to Sri Lanka will be covered in this article, along with the steps being taken to combat them.

In Sri Lanka, phishing assaults are a frequent type of online threat. Cyber-criminals deceive people into disclosing personal information including usernames, passwords, and financial information by using email, social media, and messaging apps. Phishing attempts against banks and other financial institutions in Sri Lanka have sharply increased in 2019, according to the SLCERT.<sup>6</sup> The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has issued instructions for financial institutions on how to stop and handle phishing attempts in response.

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<sup>5</sup> Bashroush, R., Kala, J., Treharne, H., & Colombo, A. W. (2021). Cybersecurity governance: A systematic literature review. *Computers & Security*, 107, 102305.

<sup>6</sup> SLCERT. (2020). Cyber-Security News - June 2019. Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team. Retrieved from <https://www.slcert.gov.lk/sites/default/files/CyberSecurityNewsJune2019.pdf>



Another important online danger in Sri Lanka is malware attacks. Malware is a term used to describe malicious software that can infect networks and computers in order to steal data, take over systems, or propagate to other computers. A new malware variant named "Lemon Duck" targeted Sri Lankan companies in 2020. This software is intended to steal sensitive data as well as mine crypto currencies.<sup>7</sup>

To combat this, the Sri Lankan government has urged businesses to embrace cyber-security best practices and update their security systems. Attacks using ransom ware are also becoming more and more of a worry in Sri Lanka. A form of virus known as ransom ware encrypts the data of an organization and demands payment in exchange for the decryption key. The email systems of numerous ministries and departments were hit by a large ransom ware attack against the Sri Lankan government in 2019.<sup>8</sup> To counter the attack, the government shut down the impacted systems and put new security measures in place.

Another serious cyber-hazard in Sri Lanka is data leaks. Theft or unauthorized access to sensitive or identifiable data constitutes a data breach. One of Sri Lanka's top telecommunications companies experienced a significant data breach in 2019, exposing the personal data of over 5 million users.<sup>9</sup>

The Sri Lankan Telecommunications Regulatory Commission has responded by issuing instructions for telecom providers on how to strengthen their cyber-security defences and stop data leaks.

Phishing assaults, malware infections, ransom ware attacks, and data breaches are the most serious risks from cyber-space, which is of growing concern in Sri Lanka. By applying cyber-security best practices, modernizing security systems, and enhancing threat intelligence capabilities, the Sri Lankan government and companies

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<sup>7</sup> Weerakkody, T. (2020). LemonDuck Malware: What You Need to Know. CISO Mag. Retrieved from <https://cisomag.eccouncil.org/lemonduck-malware-what-you-need-to-know/>

<sup>8</sup> Bandara, T. (2019). Sri Lanka hit by massive cyber-attack. BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48266662>

<sup>9</sup> Sivaganeshan, S. (2019). Sri Lanka telecom data breach affects 5 million customers. Verdict. Retrieved from <https://www.verdict.co.uk/sri-lanka-telecom-data-breach/>

are taking action to counter these threats. Sri Lanka can lower the risk of cyber-attacks and shield people and businesses from the negative effects of cyber-crime by taking a proactive approach to cyber-security.

To maintain the safety and security of people and organizations, it is crucial to combat cyber-dangers as they continue to rise in Sri Lanka. This article will go over some of the steps Sri Lanka is taking to prevent cyber-hacking. To handle cyber-dangers, the Sri Lankan government has set up a number of institutions and regulatory bodies. Monitoring and handling responses to cyber-security issues in Sri Lanka are the responsibilities of the SLCERT. In order to avoid cyber-attacks, it also offers instructions and training to people and organizations. Another government agency tasked with advancing and expanding the ICT industry in Sri Lanka is the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA). To improve the nation's cyber-security, the ICTA has put in place a number of programs, including the SLCERT.

In Sri Lanka, there are numerous private sector businesses that provide cyber-security services. These businesses offer a variety of services, such as security audits, vulnerability assessments, penetration testing, and incident response. Companies can work with these service providers to find cyber-security flaws in their systems and put them into place, preventing cyber-attacks. The Sri Lankan government has also put up a number of rules and directives to enhance cyber-security.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has published best practices for cyber-security for financial institutions, including advice on avoiding phishing scams, guarding against malware infections, and handling security issues. The Sri Lankan Telecommunications Regulatory Commission has recently released advice for telecom providers on how to strengthen their cyber-security defenses and stop data leaks.

The Sri Lankan government has put in place cyber-security awareness programs in addition to rules and laws. These initiatives seek to inform people and businesses about the value of cyber-security and the dangers of cyber-attacks. To help law enforcement agencies better recognize and respond to cyber-threats, the government has also implemented cyber-security training programs.

Cyber-attacks continue to represent a serious risk to people, companies, and governments all over the world. High-profile cyber-attacks in recent years, such as data leaks and ransom ware assaults, have caused large monetary losses, reputational harm, and even concerns to national security. This paper will go through some practical measures that people and businesses can take to combat online dangers.

**Strong passwords:** One of the most basic, yet effective, strategies to prevent cyber-attacks is to use strong passwords. Strong passwords are those that are at least eight characters long, contain both uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. It is also essential to use a different password for each account and to change passwords regularly.

**Multifactor authentication:** Multifactor authentication (MFA) is an additional layer of security that requires users to provide more than one form of authentication to access their accounts. MFA can be in the form of a password and a code sent to the user's mobile device or a fingerprint scan.

**Regular updates and patches:** One of the most common ways that cyber-attackers gain access to systems is through vulnerabilities in software. Regularly updating software and applying security patches can prevent attackers from exploiting these vulnerabilities.

**Employee training:** Many cyber-attacks are the result of human error, such as clicking on a malicious link or downloading a malware-infected attachment. Employee training on cyber-security best practices, such as identifying phishing emails and avoiding suspicious websites, can significantly reduce the risk of cyber-attacks.

**Encryption:** Encryption is the process of converting data into a code that can only be deciphered with a key. By encrypting sensitive data, individuals and organizations can protect it from unauthorized access.

**Backup and recovery:** In the event of a cyber-attack, having a backup of critical data can help individuals and organizations to recover quickly. Backups should be stored in a secure location and should be regularly tested to ensure their reliability.

**Cyber-security insurance:** Cyber-security insurance can provide financial protection in the event of a cyber-attack. This type of insurance can cover the costs of data recovery, business interruption, and legal fees.

**Incident response plan:** Developing an incident response plan is essential for individuals and organizations to respond quickly and effectively in the event of a cyber-attack. The plan should outline the steps to be taken in the event of a security breach, including who to contact and how to mitigate the damage.

In order to combat cyber-threats, Sri Lanka has also formed alliances with other nations and international organizations. The government and the US and UK have inked agreements to improve information sharing and cyber-security cooperation. Sri Lanka is a signatory to the Commonwealth Cyber-Declaration, which aims to strengthen member governments' cyber-resilience and promote cyber-security.

Sri Lanka has taken a number of steps to combat cyber-hacking, including the creation of regulatory authorities, businesses in the private sector that offer cyber-security services, rules and guidelines, awareness campaigns, and international collaborations. These initiatives show Sri Lanka's dedication to countering online threats and strengthening the nation's cyber-security posture. Sri Lanka can lessen the danger of cyber-attacks and shield people and organizations from the negative effects of cyber-crime by continuing to invest in cyber-security and adopting a proactive approach to cyber-security. Cyber-risks are becoming a bigger issue for people, companies, and governments.

Employing strategies such as using strong passwords, multifactor authentication, regular updates and patches, employee training, encryption, backup and recovery, cyber-security insurance, and incident response planning can significantly reduce the risk of cyber-attacks. By taking a proactive approach to cyber-security, individuals and organizations can protect themselves from the harmful effects of cyber-crime.

### **3. Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research based on both the library research method and the empirical research method. The library research employed and relied on information that already existed in the forms of legislation, case reports, journal articles, treaties, textbooks, periodicals, historical records, and the internet. The empirical part involved collecting information through interviews. Key stakeholders in the fields of cyber-security, law enforcement, and strategic studies were interviewed in this connection. This involved interviewing

personnel from Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT), Cyber-Crimes Investigation Department (CCID), Sri Lanka Police, and General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

This chapter will put forward an interpretation of the findings obtained, why the findings are relevant to the research and the findings are related to another research carried out. According to this study, the researcher used the Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyze the gathered data. Therefore the researcher going to discuss the analysis part under six topics-

- a. Hacking Incidents
- b. Reasons for Website Hacking
- c. Laws related to Cyber-Hacking
- d. Are the Existing Laws Sufficient to Mitigate Cyber-Hacking?
- e. Draft Cyber-Security Bill
- f. Why Sri Lanka is Vulnerable to Website Hacking?

##### ***a. Hacking Incidents***

Cyber-crimes are a threat to national security. Cyber-hackers can infiltrate security systems, destroy valuable data and disseminate false news, resulting in unrest in the community. In the Sri Lankan context, several cyber-attacks have happened in past years. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009, the LTTE hacked into the Sri Lankan Army website where they posted some gruesome pictures of alleged victims of war. The Sri Lankan Army responded to this by stating that after months of heavy fighting, the LTTE was reduced to their last few hundred fighters, and the hacking of the Army website was their last resort to attack the GoSL. The aptitude to carry out such cyber-attacks on the GoSL websites proved the LTTE's ability to use information technology to create a threat perception in the rival's mind. This technological potential of the LTTE compelled the Sri Lankan Government to be more concerned with its information security.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> AK Samarakoon, 'Ethnic Wars on Cyberspace: Case of Tamil Tigers and the Majoritarian Sinhalese State in Sri Lanka' (Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, 2011) 4-5.

The Sinhala version of the official website of the Ministry of Tourism Development and Christian Religious Affairs and the website of the Sri Lankan Consulate in Kerala were hacked on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018 by the Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force. This time, the relevant websites displayed a long message from the Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force together with a rolling news feed message which said: “Hacked by Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force”.<sup>11</sup>

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, the Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force carried out cyber-attacks on several Sri Lankan websites.<sup>12</sup> Before this incident, the Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) Sri Lanka had detected that several websites which were registered under the “.com” and “.lk” domains, including that of the Kuwait Embassy in Sri Lanka, had faced a cyber-attack on the morning of the same day. According to Sri Lanka CERT, the attacks had taken place with ease since precautionary measures had not been taken to protect such websites from cyber-attacks.<sup>13</sup>

On 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the Chinese Embassy, operating in Sri Lanka website, the Ministry of Health website, and the Rajarata University website were the subject of cyber-attacks. These cyber-attacks were also steered by the group called “Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force”.<sup>14</sup>

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha’s website was also hacked on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2021. ITSSL said the Prime Minister’s website was hacked in a manner in which any visitor to the website would be redirected to another website that displays content related to Bit coin Crypto currency. Due to all these website hackings, the security data in government

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<sup>11</sup> Chaturanga Samarawickrama, ‘Tourism Ministry Website Hacked by Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force’, *Daily Mirror* (Online) 18 May 2018 <<https://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Tourism-Ministry-website-hacked-by-Tamil-Eelam-Cyber-Force-150113.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> Times Online (Official Website of the Sunday Times in Sri Lanka), ‘Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force’ Behind Cyber-Attack on Sri Lankan Sites’, 19 May 2019, <https://www.timesonline.lk/news/tamil-eelamcyber-force-reportedly-behind-cyber-attack-on-sri-lankan-sites/18-1088542>

<sup>13</sup> Times Online (Official Website of the Sunday Times in Sri Lanka), ‘Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force’ Behind Cyber-Attack on Sri Lankan Sites’, 19 May 2019, <https://www.timesonline.lk/news/tamil-eelamcyber-force-reportedly-behind-cyber-attack-on-sri-lankan-sites/18-1088542>

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

institutions were threatened.<sup>15</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022, the Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force attacked the website of the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka displaying a message concerning the so-called “Tamil genocide”.<sup>16</sup> The hackers shared a screenshot of the website which they hacked together with the photographs from the Mullivaikkal incident and the message: “We Never Forget! We Never Forgive!”<sup>17</sup>

Several Sri Lankan websites including at least two government and several private sector institutions were hacked by an internationally based organization, targeting “National War Heroes Day”. According to the Cyber-Security Engineer at Sri Lanka CERT, a total of five websites were compromised. However, this was normal compared to the last couple of years because the attack had been carried out every year targeting “National War Heroes Day”. In any event, these incidents have led to the establishment of a task force with experts from Sri Lanka CERT, Sri Lanka Air Force and officials from the respective institutions to restore the usual operation of the websites.<sup>18</sup>

### ***b. Reasons for Website Hacking***

The LTTE's communication network, which is comprised of websites, emails, blogs, videos, e-papers, photos, audio, and podcasts, has been recognized as one of the organization's most important apparatuses that are still in operation even after it was defeated as a ground force in 2009.<sup>19</sup> The LTTE's development of

<sup>15</sup> "PM's website targeted by hackers". *The Morning*. 2021-06-03. Retrieved 2021-06-03.

<sup>16</sup> “Health Ministry website under cyber-attack”. *Daily Mirror Online*. 2022-04-24, [https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking\\_news/Health-Ministry-website-under-cyber-attack/108-235591](https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/Health-Ministry-website-under-cyber-attack/108-235591)

<sup>17</sup> Tamil Guardian, ‘Another Sri Lankan Government Website Hacked by “Tamil Eelam Cyber-Force”’, 26 April 2022 <<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/another-sri-lankan-government-website-hacked-tamil-eelam-cyber-force>>.

<sup>18</sup> Pavani Hapuarachchi, ‘Number of Sri Lankan websites come under a Cyberattack’, *News 1<sup>st</sup>* (Online), 18 May 2020, <<https://www.newsfirst.lk/2020/05/18/number-of-sri-lankan-websites-come-under-a-cyber-attack/>>

<sup>19</sup> Samarakoon, A. K., ‘Ethnic Wars on Cyberspace: Case of Tamil Tigers and the Majoritarian Sinhalese State in Sri Lanka’ (Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, 2011), Pg. 4-5.

virtual Eelam was more powerful and dangerous than guerilla activities in the Wannu jungles. The websites played a pivotal role in quickly reporting the attacks on the LTTE to the globe. It was first founded in 1997, one of the most well-known websites supporting a distinct Eelam ‘tamilnet.com’.

The LTTE of Sri Lanka is consistently rated as Asia’s most ruthless – and one of the world’s deadliest – terror group by terrorism experts and international security organizations. In an examination of the LTTE’s military operations against the Sri Lankan State, we see that the LTTE has used cyber-attacks in addition to the use of cyber-space for amassing funds, support and ideological propaganda. The LTTE has attempted to deface and hack the government of Sri Lanka’s websites several times. The main reason behind these attacks is to show the superiority of the LTTE. When considering the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka cyber-attack, there was one message displayed that said “We never Forget! We never Forgive!”. This message seems to be a threat from the LTTE which attempts to show their superiority.

Another reason behind a terrorist organization hacking a website or a system is for revenge and to show that they are still in operation at least virtually or in publicity. This seems to be particularly so in the case of the LTTE since it has now been militarily defeated at the battleground by the Sri Lankan Government. Nonetheless, many technical issues such as the existing security vulnerabilities in Sri Lankan Government websites and applications, and the lack of a proper website security mechanism in place to prevent cyber-attacks have made it easier for the LTTE to execute many cyber-attacks.

### ***c. Laws Related to Cyber-Hacking***

The hacking of websites is a computer-related crime (cyber-crime) acknowledged at the international level and in the domestic laws of many countries. The Council of Europe’s *Convention on Cyber-crime 2001* which ‘has become accepted as the leading international instrument in the field’ sets out the parameters of the offence ‘illegal access’ which encapsulates hacking into websites.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ian J Lloyd, *Information Technology Law* (8<sup>th</sup>ed, Oxford University Press, 2017) 216.



In the United Kingdom, the *Computer Misuse Act 1990* was primarily introduced as a result of the ineffectiveness of the existing law dealing with hacking and unauthorized access.<sup>21</sup> This Act created three new offences namely, unauthorized access to computer material, unauthorized access with intent to commit or facilitate the commission of further offences, and unauthorized modification of computer material.<sup>22</sup> The Register, a technology publication, reports that between 2008 – 2018, 422 cases were prosecuted under the Act. A ‘guilty’ decision was reached in 76% of these instances, which is a high conviction rate. This suggests that the law is an effective tool against cyber-crimes.

While hacking is an offence under the Indian *Information Technology Act 2000*, in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the Government of India has introduced specific provisions to this Act to deal with cyber-terrorism. Among other things, these provisions have enlarged the scope of the offence of hacking into websites in the context of cyber-terrorism.<sup>23</sup> The legislation was passed in order to promote e-governance, to give legal backing to electronic transactions, and to prevent against cyber-crimes.

GoSL enacted the *Computer Crime Act No.24 of 2007* to provide for the identification of computer crime and to provide for the procedure for the investigation and prevention of such crimes. Several provisions in this Act become relevant in the context of hacking into government websites. Section 3 of the Act has made hacking websites an offence. Accordingly, any person who intentionally does any act to secure for himself or for any other person, access to any computer or any information held in any computer, knowing or having reason to believe that he has no lawful authority to secure such access, is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred thousand rupees, or to imprisonment of either description for a term which

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<sup>21</sup> *R v. Gold and Schifreen CACD* [1987] QB 1116.

<sup>22</sup> E Day with R Bryant, ‘Law and Digital Crime’ in R Bryant and S Bryant (eds), *Policing Digital Crime* (Routledge, 2014) 92.

<sup>23</sup> D Halder, ‘Information Technology Act and Cyber-Terrorism: A Critical Review’ in PMS Sundaram and S Umarhathab (eds), *Cyber-Crime and Digital Disorder* (Manomaniam Sundaranar University, 2011) 81.

may extend to five years, or both such fine and imprisonment. Apart from that, section 6 of the Act states that any person who intentionally causes a computer to perform any function, knowing or having reason to believe that such function will result in danger or imminent danger to national security, the national economy, or public order, is guilty of an offence and on conviction is punishable with imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding five years. It is possible that hacking into the websites of the GoSL, particularly by terrorist organizations such as the LTTE, could attract sanctions under the provisions of this section too.<sup>24</sup>

#### ***d. Are the Existing Laws sufficient to Mitigate Cyber-Hacking?***

There is no one specific legislation dealing with cyber-hacking in particular. As observed before, cyber-hacking has to be dealt with under the unauthorised access provisions in the *Computer Crime Act No.24 of 2007*. Apart from that Sri Lanka has taken several measures for cyber-security based on ISO 27000, data sharing policy and legislation such as *Electronic Transactions Act No. 19 of 2006*, and the *Payment Device Frauds Act. No. 30 of 2006* and the *Intellectual Property Act No.36 of 2003*. While all these are piecemeal measures, a more comprehensive legal framework for cyber-security is proposed in the draft Cyber-Security Bill prepared by Sri Lanka CERT.

#### ***e. Draft Cyber-Security Bill***

The objective of the Draft Cyber-Security Bill is to ensure the effective implementation of the National Cyber-Security Strategy in Sri Lanka; prevent, mitigate and respond to cyber-security threats and incidents effectively and efficiently; set up the Cyber-Security Agency of Sri Lanka and to empower the institutional framework to provide a safe and secure cyber-security environment, and protect the critical information infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> According to the Economy

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<sup>24</sup> S Abeyaratne, *Introduction to Information and Communication Technology Law* (Privately Published, 2008) 93-99.

<sup>25</sup> “*Cyber-Security Act awaits Cabinet approval*”, Sunday Observer (E Paper), 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019,

<https://www.sundayobserver.lk/2019/11/17/business/cyber-security-act-awaits-cabinet-approval>

next, the Sri Lankan Cabinet of Ministers approved a proposal by former President Gotabaya Rajapaksha to draft a ‘Defence Cyber-Commands’ (DCC) Bill and a separate bill of cyber-security law outside the defence purview.<sup>26</sup> These two bills proposed by former President Gotabaya Rajapaksha in his capacity as Minister of Defence and Minister of Technology, are expected to keep criminal and terrorism activities online in check.

As the Government Information Agency noted in a statement: ‘Electronic communication throughout cyber-space has been recognized as a vital aspect that can directly damage national security.’<sup>27</sup> A stated need for new laws to reinforce the individual cyber-security units now run by Sri Lanka's security forces, police, and other agencies were also mentioned in the statement. The draft Bill proposes to establish a legal framework for "national information" and a national cyber-security plan. Additionally, this bill proposes to establish a Sri Lanka Cyber-Protection Agency that will collaborate with other agencies.<sup>28</sup> Though many discussions have taken place in this connection, the draft Bill has not been enacted by the Parliament of Sri Lanka as an Act nor has it been introduced to the Parliament.

#### ***f. Why Sri Lanka is vulnerable to website hacking?***

The modern world is undergoing a fundamental transformation as the industrial society of the twentieth century rapidly gives way to the information society of the twenty-first century. Sri Lanka is still a developing country and still has many things to achieve in every

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<sup>26</sup> “Sri Lanka to draft new cyber-security legislation; two separate bills proposed”, economy next (online), 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021, <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-to-draft-new-cyber-security-legislation-two-separate-bills-proposed-86936/>

<sup>27</sup> F. Zulfrick, “Cabinet approves proposals for Cyber-Security Law”, News 1<sup>st</sup> (Online), 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021, <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/10/12/cabinet-approves-proposals-for-cyber-security-laws/>

<sup>28</sup> “Sri Lanka to draft new cyber-security legislation; two separate bills proposed”, economy next (online), 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021, <https://economynext.com/sri-lanka-to-draft-new-cyber-security-legislation-two-separate-bills-proposed-86936/>

sector including technology. When it comes to cyber-hacking, Sri Lanka is known as a soft target. There are some specific reasons for it. As a former Information Security Analyst of SLCERT stated, there are several vulnerabilities that Sri Lankan websites are facing regarding hacking. One of these is that there is no proper mechanism in place for cyber-security in most government organizations since they do not get their websites or applications tested before launching. Government organizations' websites can be checked before they launch with the help of TechCERT (Computer Readiness Emergency Team). TechCERT is Sri Lanka's first and largest Computer Emergency Readiness Team which provides comprehensive cyber-security solutions for large and small organizations. Most of the banks in Sri Lanka currently get their support to secure their system. Furthermore, the GoSL can get support from Ethical Hackers. Ethical hackers use their knowledge to secure and improve the technology of organizations. They provide an essential service to these organizations by looking for vulnerabilities that can lead to a security breach. According to the data obtained from the CCID, Sri Lanka Police, around forty websites of the GoSL websites are monitored by Sri Lankan Air Force which is an effective thing.

Another issue in the Sri Lankan cyber-security field is the knowledge gap. Most government organizations do not have responsible personnel or teams for cyber-security-related issues. Because of that most of these institutions face various issues related to cyber-security. As the former Information Security Analyst stated, most government institutions/organizations consider security as an after thought. Even though Sri Lanka CERT regularly help government organizations/institutions with security assessments to identify the vulnerabilities in their systems and application, only a few organizations/institutions do fix them.

The lack of resources in government organizations to remediate the identified security issues is another contributing factor that makes websites in Sri Lanka vulnerable to hacking. Especially there are no cyber-security professionals in most of Sri Lankan organizations. Most of the time the IT Manager who is overlooking the IT work tries to manage the cyber-security as well. However, it needs to be understood that IT and Cyber-Security are completely two different

fields. Furthermore, the impact of the salary scales that the government sector could offer to the employees in the cyber-security field remains another issue. In the job industry, cyber-security jobs are high in demand and well-paid. Most of the employees who are already working in the cyber-security field have higher education qualifications and experience too. Because of this, no one likes to get a minimum salary wage of Rs. 70,000 – Rs. 80,000 which the government sector can offer. The human resources related to the cyber-security field will be less in Sri Lanka because of these causes.

Most government websites are tested on an ad-hoc basis when there is an issue. Testing is not scheduled or pre-planned. Apart from that since the websites are handled by individual employees, when such employees resign or leave the organization, the website becomes inaccessible to others. The absence of a proper mechanism to monitor government websites and the absence of a formal procedure, guidelines, cyber-laws, or a policy for cyber-security in websites and web applications are other issues faced by Sri Lanka.

Moreover, according to the interview held with Cyber-Crime Investigation Department, Sri Lanka Police, most of the government websites of Sri Lanka do not use firewalls to secure their websites. Even the firewalls used by very few websites are not strong enough. As a result, the websites could easily become prey for hacking. The best example is the hacking of the website of the former President Maitripala Sirisena by a 16-year-old kid.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

As a developing country Sri Lanka, the consideration about the matters related to cyber-security is relatively low. According to this study it is clear that existing legal framework on cyber-crimes in Sri Lanka is inadequate to effectively deal with the hacking of government websites by terrorists' groups. Because there is no one specific legislation dealing with cyber-hacking in particular. Even though there are a set of rules and regulations to manage them, their influencing capacity is questionable. While Sri Lanka does not have a specific an all embracing legislation to deal with cyber-hacking, there are also certain practical problems that make the government websites unsafe and vulnerable for hacking. On the other hand the

general public comprehension of this issue is also not at a satisfactory level. The best ICT specialists who are having both theoretical and practical knowledge should be gathered and a sound set of laws and acts should be implemented by updating the existing cyber-laws and acts.

Controlling cyber-crimes is difficult without a transactional jurisdiction. These types of crimes cannot be countered by a single person or state. It is possible to prevent cyber-crime by banding together as nations. International cooperation is essential to mitigate cyber-crimes. Sri Lanka's current legal system must be modified to deal with the identified issues in this paper on a transnational level with the assistance of other countries.

An organization's human resources should be trained regularly to raise awareness about the most recent attacking procedure. Conducting risk assessments regularly to identify vulnerabilities is essential. Organizations must be aware of information security and to that end, they should develop and implement appropriate security controls based on the results of their internal risk and vulnerability assessments. Moreover, according to the expertise point of view there should be a periodically assessment program for the websites. It should be responsibility of that particular government organization to do this.

The Computer Crime Act of 2007 does not envisage a comprehensive framework to deal with website hacking. It has not been updated. When compared to other countries such as United Kingdom which has Computer Misuse Act 1990, India which has Information Technology Act 2000 we are still on a ground level. A comprehensive legal framework should be implemented to deal with website hacking.

The government should have a policy framework dealing with website hacking. Website hackings which have taken place in Sri Lanka are still less complicated. But, there are advanced technologies that most of the people in Sri Lanka are not still aware of like block chain, crypto, etc. The legal framework in Sri Lanka is woefully inadequate to deal with hacking and other incidents which might be caused by such advanced technologies.

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# The Urgency of Common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework

*Asheer Shah*<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper investigates the relation between climate and security in the Bay of Bengal arena and aims to address the climate security issue by implementing an elitist approach. The purpose is to halt climate problems from evolving into security dynamics. Even before such, the role of this research is to highlight the strong correlation between climate and traditional security. Initially, the ontology and epistemology of climate security has been demonstrated. Then the paper moves forward towards addressing the dynamics of climate security as a case study on Bay of Bengal. The research consists of qualitative and quantitative data extracted from secondary (literature review and official websites like EU) and primary (informal interviews) sources. The analysis in this paper suggests an elitist approach in establishing a climate security framework in the Bay of Bengal, adopting from the characteristics of European integration. According to the paper, India, Thailand and Bangladesh are the primary actors (elites) as well as factors in the establishment of the framework. The research contributes by*

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*outlining a pathway in establishing a climate security framework in the Bay, under which a set of policies has been innovated. A distinction has been made between leading states and mediator states in the integration process. The paper concludes by recommending the role of India, Bangladesh and BIMSTEC in the establishment of the climate security framework, eventually a step forward to Asian integration in a supranational nature.*

**Keywords:** Climate Security, Elitism, Supranationalism, Asian Union, Bay of Bengal, BIMSTEC, Indo-Pacific.

## 1. Introduction

The effects of climate change made the Global South the most vulnerable, even though the states of this region are minimal contributors to carbon emissions.<sup>2</sup> Climate change is a global phenomenon, and the effects of this phenomenon do not consider any borderlines. It does not matter which states are contributing to the environmental catastrophe, the effects are experienced by all, and in this case, the states of the Global South are the victims. The boundless character of climate change makes it a global issue; thus, an integrated approach is required to mitigate this global issue. Considering the Global South, this article focuses on a segmented portion of vital interest and importance, historically and, at present, the Bay of Bengal. This article will evade the basic parameters of the Bay, such as the number of livelihoods dependent on the Bay and similar; rather, it will focus on a way forward to govern this aqua space in multiple dimensions. In this aquatic paradigm, the instrument being deployed to govern the global issue of climate change and security will be regional integration or collaboration, whichever is preferable through the pragmatic lenses of a rational policymaker. As a result, the heading of this article includes the word “common”.

This article will initially explore the understanding of climate security and its implications. Following the overview, the article will highlight the common climate issues faced by the states surrounding the Bay of Bengal, which will eventually provide the rationale, significance, and importance for developing a common climate security framework. Once a rationale has been established, the article will foster certain common climate security policy frameworks addressing multiple arenas where there is a need for integration or at least collaboration. The article will further produce routes (*elite actor-centric approach*) for implementing the common policy frameworks. In simple terms, this article aims to produce a complete pathway starting from the common policy framework formulation and developing the pragmatic implementation procedure.

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<sup>2</sup> Brock, H. 2012. “Climate change: Drivers of insecurity and the global South.” *Oxford Research Group*.

## 2. Methodology

This is a comparative analytical study, and the Scopus database has been utilised to conduct the literature review. A systematic approach has been followed, noted as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Figure 1). The flow chart has been demonstrated below to provide a detailed understanding of the meta-analysis. The paper aimed to review the top-cited pioneering pieces of literature on climate security and the top-cited latest kinds of literature on climate security governance.

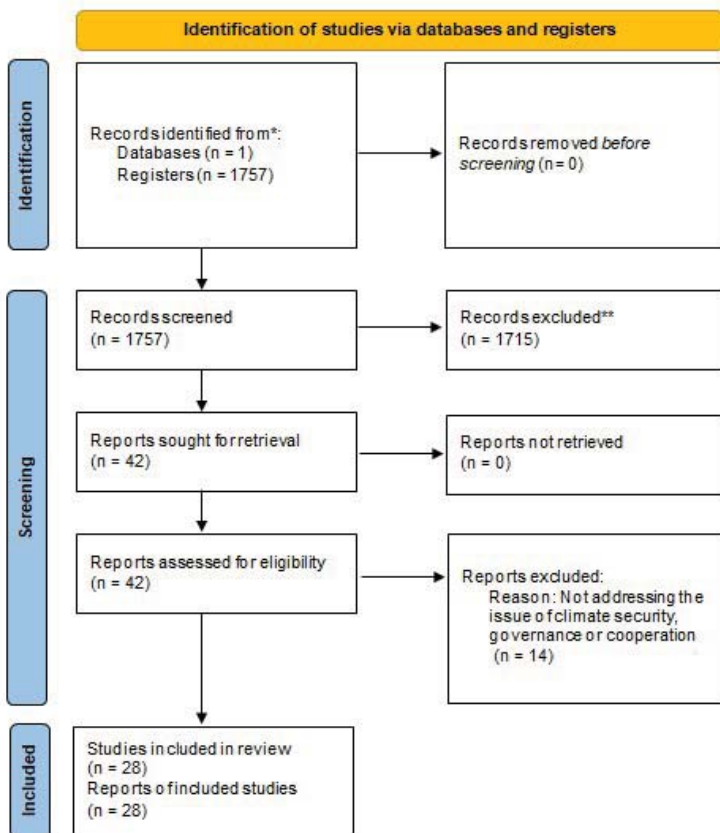


Chart 1: PRISMA Flow Chart

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit <http://www.prisma-statement.org/http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

All the relevant and focused citations on climate security in the Scopus database were screened, reviewed, and utilised. The literature review has been heavily reliant on the Scopus database. However, several articles were also reviewed from other online sources. Data used in this research paper is collected from the official BIMSTEC and European Union (EU) databases and informal interviews. As a result, the data are workable and noteworthy. The tables and figures generated in this paper include and portray the qualitative and quantitative data presented on the EU's official websites. Newspapers and commentaries were also studied for specific cases of cyber-crimes.

The initial search included 1757 documents. Documents were selected based on citations and the date of publishing. Documents with the preferred title were selected and screened. After the final screening, skimming, and studying, 28 documents were included in the systematic literature review.

### 3. Existing thoughts in Literature

#### *Systematic Review*

The security aspects have always affected the policymakers' mindset. Thoughts of water security, food security or even territorial security have been dwelling among the experts in the field. Lobell et al. analysed agricultural risks associated with the climate and stated South Asia and Southern African regions as vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Wheeler, Von Braun, Schmidhuber, and Tubiello highlighted that climate change would adversely affect the availability, stability, utilisation, and access to food.<sup>4 5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lobell, D. B., M. B. Burke, C. Tebaldi, M. D. Mastrandrea, W. P. Falcon, and R. L. Naylor. 2008. "Prioritizing Climate Change Adaptation Needs for Food Security in 2030." *Science* 319 (5863): 607-610. doi:10.1126/science.1152339. www.scopus.com.

<sup>4</sup> Wheeler, T. and J. Von Braun. 2013. "Climate Change Impacts on Global Food Security." *Science* 341 (6145): 508-513. doi:10.1126/science.1239402. www.scopus.com.

<sup>5</sup> Schmidhuber, J. and F. N. Tubiello. 2007. "Global Food Security Under Climate Change." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104 (50): 19703-19708. doi:10.1073/pnas.0701976104. www.scopus.com.

Hanjra and Qureshi addressed the connection between water supply and food production, arguing the need to restructure food policy.<sup>6</sup> Parry et al. analysed the situation in Africa during the 1990s and demonstrated how climate change could affect the population in the future.<sup>7</sup> Odeyemi and Sekiyama argued the emergence of climate security in Japan at the policy and elitist levels from 2020.<sup>8</sup> Corner et al. differing from others, argued the role of nuclear energy in addressing climate change and energy security in the case of the United Kingdom (UK).<sup>9</sup> Unlike Corner et al., Clastres recommended installing smart grids to combat climate change.<sup>10</sup>

Multiple authors mentioned the idea of conflicts and climate interrelations. Trombetta portrayed new functions for security stakeholders and varied means to provide security, addressing climate security discourse directly.<sup>11</sup> Edwards is one of the earliest experts to explore the climate security dynamics and their relation with violent conflicts relating to the loss of lands.<sup>12</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>6</sup> Hanjra, M. A. and M. E. Qureshi. 2010. "Global Water Crisis and Future Food Security in an Era of Climate Change." *Food Policy* 35 (5): 365-377. doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2010.05.006. www.scopus.com.

<sup>7</sup> Parry, M., C. Rosenzweig, A. Iglesias, G. Fischer, and M. Livermore. 1999. "Climate Change and World Food Security: A New Assessment." *Global Environmental Change* 9 (SUPPL.): S51-S67. doi:10.1016/S0959-3780(99)00018-7. www.scopus.com.

<sup>8</sup> Odeyemi, C. and T. Sekiyama. 2022. "A Review of Climate Security Discussions in Japan." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19 (14). doi:10.3390/ijerph19148253. www.scopus.com.

<sup>9</sup> Corner, A., D. Venables, A. Spence, W. Poortinga, C. Demski, and N. Pidgeon. 2011. "Nuclear Power, Climate Change and Energy Security: Exploring British Public Attitudes." *Energy Policy* 39 (9): 4823-4833. doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2011.06.037. www.scopus.com.

<sup>10</sup> Clastres, C. 2011. "Smart Grids: Another Step Towards Competition, Energy Security and Climate Change Objectives." *Energy Policy* 39 (9): 5399-5408. doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2011.05.024. www.scopus.com.

<sup>11</sup> Trombetta, M. J. 2008. "Environmental Security and Climate Change: Analysing the Discourse." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21 (4): 585-602. doi:10.1080/09557570802452920. www.scopus.com.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, M. J. 1999. "Security Implications of a Worst-Case Scenario of Climate Change in the South-West Pacific." *Australian Geographer* 30 (3): 311-330. doi:10.1080/00049189993602. www.scopus.com.

Brown et al. illustrated climate change as a security threat elevating the socioeconomic and political collapse in the case of Africa.<sup>13</sup> Barnett and Adger also argued the escalation of violent conflict due to climate change.<sup>14,15</sup> Birpınar and Tuğaç evaluated the future migration situation of Turkey due to climate change and its location.<sup>16</sup> Söder studied the role of the Swedish Armed Forces in combating climate change and claimed that the climate change agenda is embedded within the organisation.<sup>17</sup>

Many authors also thought about the role and importance of policy making in addressing climate security. Rasul and Sharma argued the importance of formulating integrated policy on the nexus of water, energy and food security since they are interconnected.<sup>18</sup> Gverdtseteli examined the practice of environmentalism under the authoritarian political system, considering the case of Vietnam.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, O., A. Hammill, and R. McLeman. 2007. "Climate Change as the 'New' Security Threat: Implications for Africa." *International Affairs* 83 (6): 1141-1154. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2007.00678.x. www.scopus.com.

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<sup>15</sup> Barnett, J. 2003. "Security and Climate Change." *Global Environmental Change* 13 (1): 7-17. doi:10.1016/S0959-3780(02)00080-8. www.scopus.com.

<sup>16</sup> Birpınar, M. E. and Ç. Tuğaç. 2022. "Climate Security and Migration: An Evaluation for the World and Turkey." *Insight Turkey* 24 (1): 105-133. doi:10.25253/99.2022241.7. www.scopus.com.

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<sup>18</sup> Rasul, G. and B. Sharma. 2016. "The Nexus Approach to water–energy–food Security: An Option for Adaptation to Climate Change." *Climate Policy* 16 (6): 682-702. doi:10.1080/14693062.2015.1029865. www.scopus.com.

<sup>19</sup> Gverdtseteli, G. 2023. "Authoritarian Environmentalism in Vietnam: The Construction of Climate Change as a Security Threat." *Environmental Science and Policy* 140: 163-170. doi:10.1016/j.envsci.2022.12.004. www.scopus.com.

Wang et al. argued for efficient renewable energy policies as core development parameters in China to ensure energy security.<sup>20</sup> The intriguing piece highlights the role of policy as an instrument in the energy security paradigm, eventually leading to climate security. Bandara and Cai also argued the role of policymakers and policy analysts in the South Asian climate change adaptation process to avoid agricultural production losses.<sup>21</sup> Multiple local newspapers in Bangladesh (a South Asian country) portray a rise in vegetable prices. South Asian countries like Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to climate change and disasters. For instance, Islam and Wahab argued about the aftermath of Cyclone Aila hitting Bangladesh's coastal regions.<sup>22</sup> This sort of disaster fuels climate security dynamics. Kirby and Mainuddin argued the long-term demand for urban water and irrigation water in Bangladesh suggested domestic policies as a tool to counter climate change and water demand.<sup>23</sup> Yan and Alvi emphasised fiscal and trade policies to respond to climate change and assessed South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).<sup>24</sup>

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- <sup>20</sup> Wang, B., Q. Wang, Y. -M Wei, and Z. -P Li. 2018. "Role of Renewable Energy in China's Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation: An Index Decomposition Analysis." *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 90: 187-194. doi:10.1016/j.rser.2018.03.012. www.scopus.com.
- <sup>21</sup> Bandara, J. S. and Y. Cai. 2014. "The Impact of Climate Change on Food Crop Productivity, Food Prices and Food Security in South Asia." *Economic Analysis and Policy* 44 (4): 451-465. doi:10.1016/j.eap.2014.09.005. www.scopus.com.
- <sup>22</sup> Islam, E. and H. B. A. Wahab. 2020. "The Impact of a Cyclonic Disaster on Coastal Communities in Bangladesh: Possible Community-Led Interventions Towards Sustainable Disaster Recovery." *Global Social Welfare* 7 (4): 339-352. doi:10.1007/s40609-020-00181-5. www.scopus.com.
- <sup>23</sup> Kirby, M. and M. Mainuddin. 2022. "The Impact of Climate Change, Population Growth and Development on Sustainable Water Security in Bangladesh to 2100." *Scientific Reports* 12 (1). doi:10.1038/s41598-022-26807-6. www.scopus.com.
- <sup>24</sup> Yan, S. and S. Alvi. 2022. "Food Security in South Asia Under Climate Change and Economic Policies." *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* 14 (3): 237-251. doi:10.1108/IJCCSM-10-2021-0113. www.scopus.com.



According to both, SAFTA had no significant impact on ensuring food security in South Asia. On the other hand, Fialko and Tymchenko argued the European Union energy policy and suggested full electrification of heat supply systems.<sup>25</sup> What complicates the system is how the electricity is being produced. Simply shifting to electrification does not ensure clean energy; rather needs to ensure clean energy sources.

The authors have also discussed response approaches to climate change and security. Detraz and Betsill mentioned an effective global response to climate change originating from an environmental conflict perspective.<sup>26</sup> The authors lightly embraced the idea of cooperation in combating climate change, which aligns with the hypothesis of this research piece. On the other hand, McDonald criticised the discourses on climate security expanding to national, human, international and ecological security discourses and claimed that understanding them all can barely produce a progressive response mechanism to climate change.<sup>27</sup> Martin technically critiques J. Benton Heath's typology, which argues that climate security should be positioned in terms of global security.<sup>28</sup> Heath's thinking astounds and intrigues the author as if a duplicate consciousness has been discovered in the vast ocean of galaxies since this research is also directed to an integrated approach to climate security. Bremberg et al. even developed a framework to undertake a comparative analysis of International Organisations, setting three parameters: discursive framing, institutional design,

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<sup>25</sup> Fialko, N. and M. Tymchenko. 2023. Energy Climate Security and Energy Supply Systems of the Building Stock. Lecture Notes in Civil Engineering. Vol. 290 LNCE. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-14141-6\_8. www.scopus.com.

<sup>26</sup> Detraz, N. and M. M. Betsill. 2009. "Climate Change and Environmental Security: For Whom the Discourse Shifts." *International Studies Perspectives* 10 (3): 303-320. doi:10.1111/j.1528-3585.2009.00378.x. www.scopus.com.

<sup>27</sup> McDonald, M. 2013. "Discourses of Climate Security." *Political Geography* 33 (1): 42-51. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2013.01.002. www.scopus.com.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, C. 2022. "Climate Change and Global Security: Framing an Existential Threat." *AJIL Unbound* 116: 248-253. doi:10.1017/aju.2022.39. www.scopus.com.

and policy actions.<sup>29</sup> Neupane et al. argued the importance of integrated planning, policy coherence, and institutional harmonisation to utilise the renewable energy potentials of South Asia, mostly focusing on the untapped hydropower of the region.

#### 4. Climate security and its implications

Understanding climate security is complex since it will vary how an individual perceives the two words. Traditionally, climate security refers to the tangible, economic, or societal impacts caused by climate change that significantly affects politics, budgets, livelihoods, infrastructure, food production and so forth.<sup>30</sup> Vulnerable countries are expected to experience an increase in conflicts due to the effects of climate change.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Mearns and Norton demonstrated how climate change could lead to conflict.<sup>32</sup> The demonstration by Mearns and Norton was summarised and presented as a framework by Behnassi, which is presented below.<sup>33</sup> Figure 1 illustrates how conflict occurs from adverse climate change.

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<sup>29</sup> Bremberg, N., M. Mobjörk, and F. Krampe. 2022. "Global Responses to Climate Security: Discourses, Institutions and Actions." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 17 (3): 341-356. doi:10.1177/15423166221128180. www.scopus.com.

<sup>30</sup> Climate Security | PNNL

<sup>31</sup> Mabey, N., J. Gullidge, B. Finel, and K. Silverthorne. 2011. "Degrees of risk – Defining a risk management framework for climate security." [http://www.c2es.org/docUploads/Degrees-ofRisk\\_Defining%20a%20Risk%20Management-Framework-for-Climate-Security\\_Full-- Report.pdf](http://www.c2es.org/docUploads/Degrees-ofRisk_Defining%20a%20Risk%20Management-Framework-for-Climate-Security_Full--Report.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Mearns, R. and A. Norton. 2010. "Social dimensions of climate change: Equity and vulnerability in a warming world." *World Bank*, at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2689>

<sup>33</sup> Behnassi, M. 2017. "Climate Security as a Framework for Climate Policy and Governance." *In Environmental Change and Human Security in Africa and the Middle East*, 3-24. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-45648-5\_1. [https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85028827584&doi=10.1007%2F978-3-319-45648-5\\_1&partnerID=40&md5=b3d06c16a09d7c57389fdc09cbe1cbc9](https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85028827584&doi=10.1007%2F978-3-319-45648-5_1&partnerID=40&md5=b3d06c16a09d7c57389fdc09cbe1cbc9).

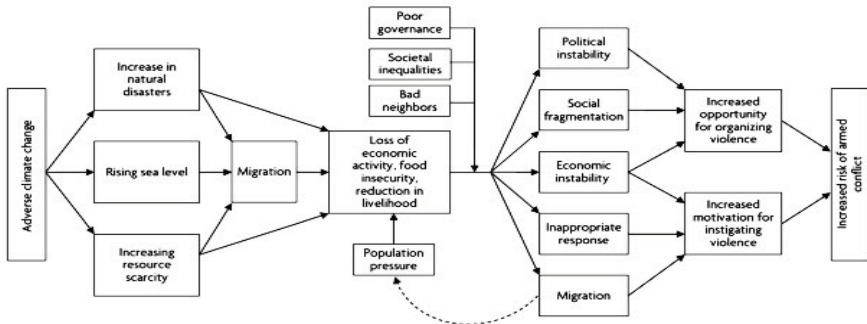


Fig 1: Climate change to conflict

Source: Figure utilised from the works of Behnassi<sup>34</sup>

The consequences of climate change have transformed into a security agenda (as demonstrated in Fig 1). Climate change is no more just hurting the planet Earth but also the individuals inhabiting the planet.

## 5. Common Climate Security Issues in the Bay of Bengal

Tapping the aspects of climate security involves the complex relations shared by neighbouring states. For instance, the problems of flooding faced by Bangladesh due to the waters released by India. It is not simply a climate security issue but also a water management issue involving geographical borders. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, once stated that she could not show sympathy to the people of Bangladesh and not her own West Bengal. As a result, creating a common framework for climate security is complex since it will require the consensus of all the parties involved. Through critical research and analysis, this article discovers the issues of plastic pollution, mangrove deforestation and damaged coral reefs are common apolitical aspects of climate security; thus, the emphasis is being invested in the mentioned aspects.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

*Indonesia is a significant plastic polluter to the Southern Indian Ocean.*<sup>35</sup> The funnel shape of the Bay of Bengal and the wind patterns heavily contribute towards the accumulation of plastic waste in the Bay of Bengal. According to multiple scholars, plastic soup already exists in the Bay of Bengal. The evidence of such can be found in the beaches of Bangladesh, where 60% of the waste collected was plastic, according to a study conducted by Dhaka Tribune.<sup>36</sup> The concept of recycling and reusing is not a pragmatic route to deal with plastic since it only leads to higher dissemination of nano plastics. For instance, Bangladesh exports PET flakes to Dubai, Taiwan, Europe, and many other regions for producing finished products. The containers leave Chittagong port through the Bay of Bengal, thus, transporting scraps feed the waters. These plastics have formed the dead zone in the Bay of Bengal, which is now the talk of the globe.

*The mangrove ecoregion of Myanmar is now history.* The mangrove forests are the pride of Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The mangrove forests are not simply a matter of pride, biodiversity, and aesthetics; it is the first line of defence for the Bay of Bengal states from oceanic natural disasters. The mangrove forests are a natural protection for these states. However, due to the increased commercialisation of these zones, the mangrove forests are now facing threats of extinction. For instance, the Rampal Power Plant is only 17 kilometres from the Sundarbans of Bangladesh. The case of Myanmar should have been sufficient enough as a threat to the policymakers governing the mangroves. However, the current policy makers seem to lack analytic knowledge of history.

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<sup>35</sup> Mheen, M. et al. 2019. "There's No 'Garbage Patch' in the Southern Indian Ocean, So Where Does All the Rubbish Go? Conversation." [There's no 'garbage patch' in the Southern Indian Ocean, so where does all the rubbish go? \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/there-s-no-garbage-patch-in-the-southern-indian-ocean-so-where-does-all-the-rubbish-go/)

<sup>36</sup> Amin, M. 2018. "Reckless Plastic Waste Dumping Greatly Endangering Bay of Bengal. Dhaka Tribune." [Reckless plastic waste dumping greatly endangering Bay of Bengal | Dhaka Tribune](#)

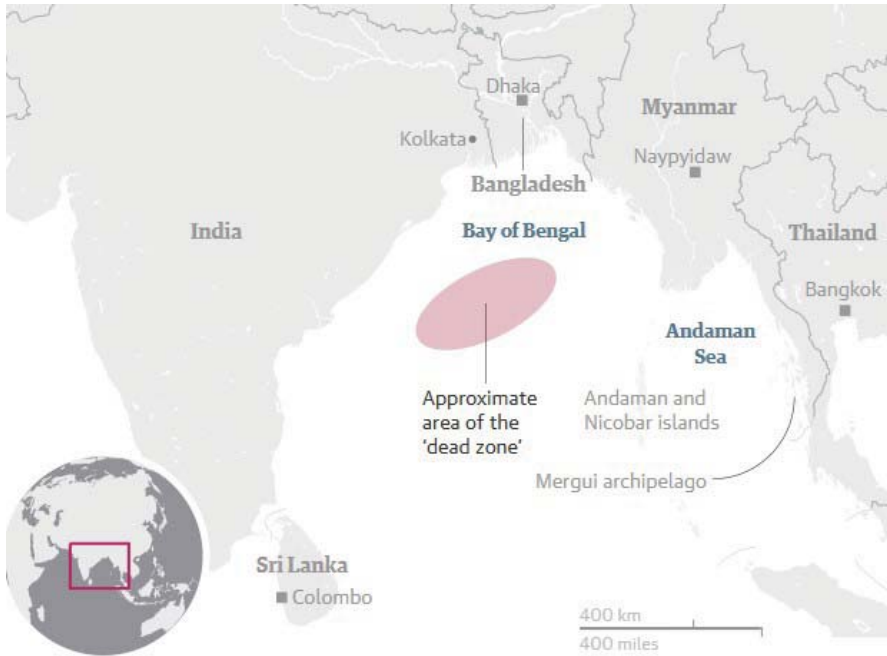


Fig 2: Dead zone location

Source: [Bay of Bengal: depleted fish stocks and huge dead zone signal tipping point | Fishing | The Guardian](#)

*The Bay of Bengal hosts a 60,000 sq. km dead zone where the oxygen content is significantly low.<sup>37</sup> A dead zone means the aquatic space is unsuitable for fostering marine life since the coral reefs are non-existent and cannot sustain fish stocks. Suppose the population surrounding the Bay of Bengal cannot sustain itself on the Bay. In that case, they will migrate, leading to a refugee and migration issue on the already volatile borders of South Asia.*

*Illegal fishing by neighbouring state fishermen, intentional and unintentional, is a marine security challenge. If one floats on the Bay of Bengal on a ship or speedboat, it is not simply hardship but almost impossible to distinguish the marine borders. It is because the marine borders only exist in documents, and only a set of navy*

<sup>37</sup> Ghosh, A. and Aaron S.L. 2017. "Bay of Bengal: depleted fish stocks and huge dead zone signal tipping point." *The Guardian*. [Bay of Bengal: depleted fish stocks and huge dead zone signal tipping point | Fishing | The Guardian](#)

personnel know them. In discussion with navy personnel, they mentioned that Bangladesh's navy tries to send the neighbouring state fishermen back to their maritime borders using torch signals and so forth.<sup>38</sup>

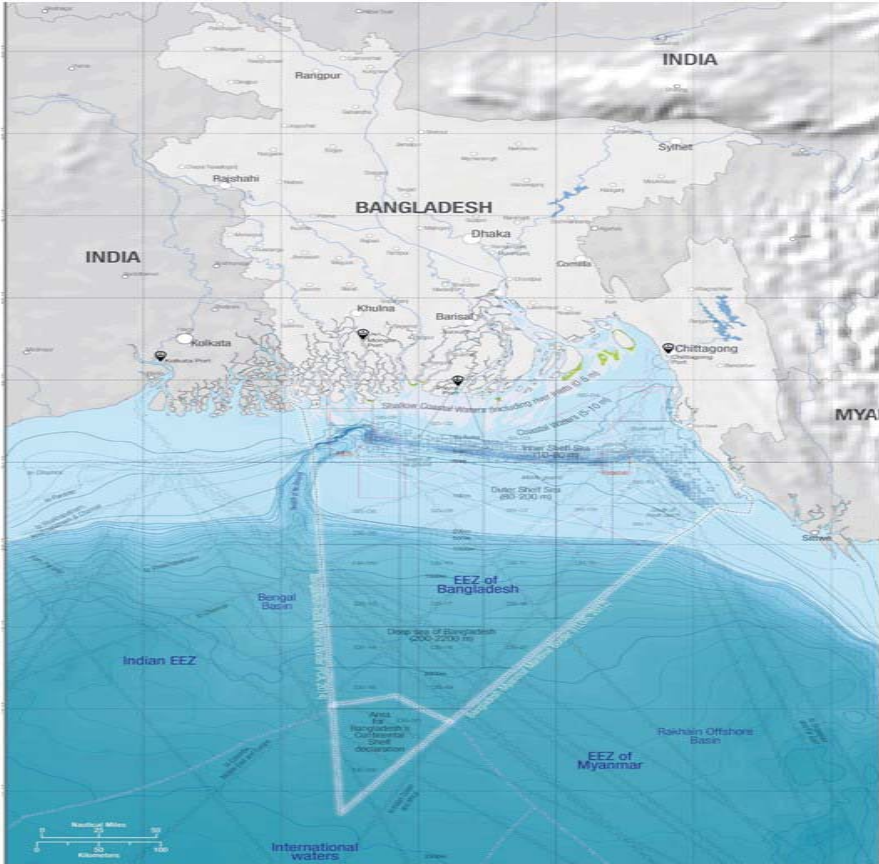


Fig 3: Bay of Bengal Maritime borders

Source: Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission 2019.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Insight acquired by the author in an informal discussion at Saint Martin's Island (Bay of Bengal) with a navy lieutenant deployed in the Bay of Bengal waters.

<sup>39</sup> Khasru, S.M. and Noor, R. 2019. "MARITIME SECURITY IN BAY OF BENGAL: POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES." *Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance (IPAG)*. MARITIME SECURITY IN BAY OF BENGAL: POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES – The Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance ([ipag.org](http://ipag.org))

Intriguingly, maritime borders become relevant and are studied when there is an existence of a geographical location, and the states are in a bargain to claim territory. When it comes to a fisherman, are the circumstances, knowledge, and borderlines applicable to them? Furthermore, how will the marine border formulators educate the fishes and plankton on the maritime borders they have so scholarly enacted? The paradigm is arbitrary and abstract. Traditional policymaking and practice will not foster a pragmatic governance mechanism for the Bay. Collaboration, coordination, and exchange of expertise are mandatory for the climate security of the Bay of Bengal.

## 6. Common Climate Security Policy Framework

The word common is aimed at the countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal. The Bay of Bengal, in terms of economics, is a public good for the surrounding states. In a particular state, national public goods are managed by the state or local government. Complexities arise when the public good is not national but international or regional. Can any single state govern and manage all the aspects of the Bay of Bengal? Can they govern and manage the climate security aspects of the Bay by dividing and managing their share of the Bay? Is it even possible to share the Bay following the division theory? It is only possible to share the Bay following the addition theory. Add the divided parts of the Bay and govern as a whole region.

*Establishing a Common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework can be one of the instruments to be deployed in the marine governance paradigm.* The framework should address the factors of plastic wastage, mangrove conservation, dead zone restoration and fishing dilemma. Under the framework, two research centres addressing plastic and mangrove issues and one restoration committee must be initiated to secure the Bay.

***Bay of Bengal Zero-Plastic Policy*** must be enacted by Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The ***goal*** of this policy is to ensure zero entrance of plastics into the Bay of Bengal from the surrounding states. Achieving the zero-plastic goal will require banning the usage of plastics and also innovating alternatives to plastics. A ban on plastic bags exists in

Bangladesh; however, policy implementation needs to be evident. The implementation process can be partially blamed since no other *'fit for purpose'* alternative to plastic exists. Innovating alternatives to plastic will require the collaboration and exchange of expertise by marine scientists, marine governance experts, water waste management specialists and researchers from every surrounding state. As a result, it can be comprehended that a *centre for plastic reduction & innovation* can be initiated by the stakeholder states of the Bay, which will initially aim for zero-plastic at the Bay and later the whole globe by producing pragmatic data, innovations, and policies.

Like the zero-plastic policy, the stakeholder states must enact the *mangrove conservation policy* under the Common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework. The research centre on mangrove conservation will function by learning the status quo, producing prosperity plans, monitoring the reserves, and providing future mangrove policy recommendations.

*Revival of the dead zone will need a restoration team of experts.* Reviving the dead zone is almost impossible by a single state, but that does not mean that the dead zone will not stretch to a single or multiple state's marine territories. The dead zone is closest to India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. On account of such, the dead zone must be studied further in terms of reviving the coral reefs and marine livelihood. The restoration team of experts will be required to research the characteristics and biochemistry of the Bay of Bengal waters.

## **7. Required Actor behind the Leadership Steering Wheel**

### ***Playing the French Role***

In order to place the climate security framework in position, strong leadership and elitist collaboration is required. This heading will initially highlight the case of elitism in the European integration scheme and, later, relate its learnings to the Asian case. The European Union was initially established as the European Coal and Steel Company (ECSC). The French Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister) Robert Schumann proposed uniting the Western European



coal and steel industries under one umbrella organisation.<sup>40</sup> The proposal mainly targeted supervising the German coal and steel industry and its development because, if one studies the two World Wars, it can be depicted that steel development and innovation in Germany was one of the root causes. It is exclusively important to mention that the mastermind behind the Schuman Plan was Jean Monnet.<sup>41</sup> Jean Monnet's personal desire and expertise led to the establishment of what we see today as the European Union (EU). A blend of bureaucratic and political mindsets gave birth to the greatest union of all time. Two significant influencing factors can be derived from the European case.

***Leading state or states*** are always required to ensure the success of intergovernmental or supranational organisations. Several states supported the idea of European integration. For instance, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg explicitly supported and pushed the idea of integration between France and Germany to avoid any future wars. Integration enthusiasts sometimes even suggest sub-regionalism as a core motivator for regionalism and later full-fledged integration.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, France was directly behind the European integration steering wheel. Though France was functioning for its own national interest (selfishness, in general words), it led to a collaborative benefit since it created a scheme beyond its sole authority. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that the compromises done by the Francois Mitterrand administration led to the Single European Act (SEA), which has been the most concrete base for the European Union (EU).

***An Elitist thrust*** is mandatory to mark a leading state and support the idea of integration. How does a state become the leader of an

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<sup>40</sup> “History of the European Union – 1945-59.” European Union. Accessed April 4, 2023. [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59_en).

<sup>41</sup> Monnet, J. “Jean Monnet – Eu Pioneer.” European Union. Accessed April 4, 2023. [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers/jean-monnet\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers/jean-monnet_en).

<sup>42</sup> Shah, M. A. “Strengthening the Role of Bimstec: Route to Asian Union.” *JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS* 24, no. 1 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.58710/jiav24n1y2022a01>.

initiative? It is when the elites of that state support, push and develop frameworks of the initiative. In the case of Europe, the French elites, Jean Monnet, and Robert Schumann, were the elites providing the thrust towards a greater united European front. Elites from BENELUX and Italy were also functioning in the scheme. Table 1 provides a detailed list of elites who operated in the European integration scheme.

Table 1 provides a brief idea about the territory of influence of the European elites. It can be derived from the table that foreign ministers can explicitly shape and formulate the functionality of an integration scheme. Five of the eleven elites mentioned in Table 1 served as the foreign minister of their state at some point. Another interesting aspect that can be drawn from the table is the contributions of the scholars, academics, researchers, and businesspeople. Elites like Monnet, Beyen, Hallstein and Spinelli fall in the scholarly and corporate sectors. This supports my claim under this heading that it is not just politicians or bureaucrats, but rather elites from all sectors, which can flourish an integration scheme, given it is their personal interest. The common mindset and thought process of these European elites led to the success of the ECSC and the ultimate establishment of the EU.

<b>Elites</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Role</b>
Jean Monnet	France	Reputable Businessman Deputy Secretary General of the League of Nations (1919) President of High Authority (1955)
Robert Schuman	France	Finance Minister and Prime Minister Foreign Minister (1948-1952) President of the European Parliament (1958-1960)
Sicco Mansholt	Netherlands	Minister of Agriculture in the post-war Dutch government Commissioner for Agriculture in the first European Commission in 1958

<b>Elites</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Role</b>
		Formulator of common agricultural policy in supranational structure
Walter Hallstein	West Germany	Reputable Scholar and Academician State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office (1951) First President of the Commission of the European Economic Community (1958)
Alcide De Gasperi	Italy	Prime Minister and Foreign Minister President of the ECSC Parliamentary Assembly (1954)
Winston Churchill	United Kingdom	Army officer, War reporter and British Prime Minister
Johan Beyen	Netherlands	International banker, businessperson, and politician Minister of Foreign Affairs
Joseph Bech	Luxembourg	Prime Minister, Agriculture Minister, and Foreign Minister
Konrad Adenauer	West Germany	Mayor of Cologne (1917) First Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany).
Altiero Spinelli	Italy	One of the authors of the Ventotene Manifesto and established the Federalist Movement in Italy Government adviser and researcher Member of the European Commission (1970-76) Member of the European Parliament (1979) Spinelli Plan Formulator

Elites	Country	Role
Paul-Henri Spaak	Belgium	Belgian Foreign Minister (formulator of BENELUX) during World War 2  President of the United Nations (1946) Secretary General of NATO (1957-61) President of the working committee on the Treaty of Rome

Table 1: Role of Elitists in European Integration

Source: European Union<sup>43</sup>

In case of the Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework, there needs to be *France (a leading state)*, *BENELUX (compromising states)* and a *Bay of Bengal elitist network*. An old quote has always roamed around in the author's country of origin (Bangladesh), "Tree, your identity lies in the quality of your fruits". Similar to a tree, a state is the representation of its citizens (though citizenship today is complex), experts and, most importantly, elites. In order to establish a common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework, the elites of the adjacent countries must raise ideas and intentions of the framework during meetings and conferences.

According to epistemology, foreign ministers are the key actors in the integration domain. According to the author's analysis, which the author believes most scholars will relate to, the Indian and Thai Foreign Ministers can act as the driving force to establish the Bay of Bengal Framework. H.E. Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and H.E. Don Pramudwinai are the two significant process mechanisms<sup>44</sup> in the Bay of Bengal integration scheme. These two elites can make India and Thailand play the *French Role*. H.E. Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar holds the maximum capacity to act since he inherits both bureaucratic and political expertise. Considering India playing the *French Role* can only be rational and pragmatic.

<sup>43</sup> "Pioneers of the European Union." European Union. Accessed April 8, 2023. [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers_en).

<sup>44</sup> Borrowing the revised neo-functional theory of Joseph Nye.

Given India plays the *French Role* in the Bay of Bengal integration process, there needs to be a state or states playing the *BENELUX Role*. The author explicitly takes the opportunity of placing Bangladesh in the position of *BENELUX*. The core principle of Bangladesh's foreign policy is focused on friendship. Hence, hammering that very principle of Bangladesh, this state must discover and connect integration enthusiasts. Table 1 portrays that the elites who were involved in European integration held some sort of passion or at least fondness towards union. When time and space complemented each other, the elites launched their interests in full capacity. With its innovative diplomatic approach, Bangladesh can establish the base of an elitist network in the Bay of Bengal region.

The aspects of collaboration already exist in the region with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). This formation already includes states like Bangladesh, India, and Thailand. Given its name, the cooperation is incomplete since Malaysia and Indonesia have yet to be members. A BIMSTEC *plus* solution has been previously recommended by the veteran diplomat, ambassador, and political analyst Tariq A. Karim.<sup>45</sup> The recommendation is rational when assessed in terms of the balance of power and the location of the Bay. It is a challenge in itself to initiate a regional collaboration. Hence, utilising BIMSTEC can be one of the pragmatic routes in establishing a Common Bay of Bengal Climate Security Framework. Even if BIMSTEC *plus* does not occur, the framework can be easily initiated jointly by BIMSTEC, Indonesia and Malaysia. The framework will be a step ahead towards Asian integration.

## 8. Conclusion

The sole purpose of this article is to view and look into the implications of climate change as a security aspect. In reality, climate change and climate security are intertwined. It is simply that the general lenses, even now, fail to perceive climate change as a security issue. As a result, this article initially demonstrated the

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<sup>45</sup> Karim, T.A. 2020. "Bangladesh's Role in Forging a Bay of Bengal Community." *The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR)*. [Bangladesh's Role in Forging a Bay of Bengal Community - The National Bureau of Asian Research \(NBR\)](#)

rationale of climate change leading to traditional security aspects like armed conflict. It is devastating that the human mind rarely understands the problems that can and do evolve from climate change, whereas all the basic human needs depend on nature and whatever we receive from it. For instance, cotton, food, and shelter comes from nature. Climate change does and will inevitably affect the production and existence of cotton, food, and shelter. The recent (2023) earthquake in Turkey and Syria has displayed it all. As a result, the common mind must perceive that a shortage in any single basic need will eventually end in armed conflicts. This world has evolved significantly and so has our basic needs. Basic needs are no more just the tri-matters. Governance has become a core segment of a society's survival. We must govern the survival of the human race in a conscious manner.

The Bay of Bengal region is a hub of climate change, and the *pragmatic mindset of mine* could only innovate a collaborative framework in addressing the issue. Much of the approach relies heavily on European integration strategies, models, and theories. It is simply because the most successful integration in the world today that upholds the characteristics of supranationalism is the EU (The author mentions that the EU holds his exclusive interest and fascination).

The study analysis suggests that India and Thailand are the two factors that can push the collaborative climate security framework forward in the Bay of Bengal. When relating to the EU, India is considered the finest to play the *French Role*. Considering the contributions of BENELUX, Bangladesh can single-handedly play the negotiating role, a force that combines everyone.

Lastly, the role of BIMSTEC is brought into the limelight. Interestingly, India, Thailand and Bangladesh meet under the same umbrella in BIMSTEC. The organisation is focused on the Bay and aims for integration. Some failings in the potential of the integration scheme are there, which must be addressed, but, given the mentioned actors and factors in this article functions, the lacking can be easily overruled. The foundation is there, the nail is in place, and all that is required is the enthusiasm to hammer that nail.

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# Suffering of the Stateless: The Securitisation of the Rohingya and Spill Over Security Implications for South Asia

Sean McCafferty<sup>1</sup>

“In countries marked by post-colonial societies, torn apart by the delineation or re-lineation of borders and boundaries, the Rohingya are among the excluded”<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The Rohingya are an ethnic group that lived in Rakhine state in modern day Myanmar.<sup>3</sup> They have faced persecution and violence in Myanmar with rising Buddhist nationalism emanating from politicians, the military and extremist Buddhist groups. Attacked with racist sentiment they are often framed as Muslim invaders or illegal Bengali migrants. The narrative emanating from the political and military leadership in Myanmar denies the diverse ethnic landscape of regions like Rakhine. As part of the militant Buddhist

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<sup>2</sup> Chaudhury, R. and Raṇabīra Samāddāra (2018). *The Rohingya in South Asia: people without a state*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, Ny: Routledge, An Imprint Of The Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

nationalist project in Myanmar the Rohingyas have been denied access to citizenship. The violence coordinated by Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, holds all the hallmarks of genocide.<sup>4</sup> Today the Rohingyas are largely a stateless people having fled their homes in Rakhine. They are spread as a refugee community across South Asia with the highest concentration of over 1.4 million in camps in Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup> There have been several periods of significant Rohingya influx to Bangladesh beginning in 1978-79 followed by the 1990's and 2017. The most significant border crossings occurred in 2017 as hundreds of thousands fled genocide in Myanmar crossing the Naf River to safety in the southeast of Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup>

The various flows of Rohingya into Bangladesh have created a mixed picture often overshadowed by recent developments. There are many camps and temporary settlements that host Rohingya in Bangladesh and a complex layering of internal dynamics within the Rohingya community. Across the entire region the Rohingyas have often been marginalised and never fully integrated when seeking a haven. Bangladesh is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol as such the Rohingya are not classified as refugees by the government of Bangladesh and have no claim to citizenship in their own country or refugee or asylum rights in Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup> Bangladesh classifies them as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" (FDMN) restricting their access to work and freedom of movement.<sup>8</sup> The bottom line is that the Rohingyas are left stateless, suspended in camps and unwanted across the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim, A. (2018). *The Rohingyas: inside Myanmar's hidden genocide*. London: Hurst & Company.

<sup>5</sup> Chaudhury, R. and Raṇabīra Samāddāra (2018).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Rahman, M.S. and Sakib, N.H. (2021). Statelessness forced migration and the security dilemma along borders: an investigation of the foreign policy stance of Bangladesh on the Rohingya influx.

<sup>8</sup> Dempster, H. and Sakib, N.H. (2021). *Few Rights and Little Progress: The Rohingya in Bangladesh*. [online] Center For Global Development.

The most recent influx was met with sympathy and support by Bangladesh as regional and international attention fixed on the crisis as a tragedy of targeted violence by the Tatmadaw against the ethnic minority. Bangladesh was supported by the UN and a variety of international NGOs to coordinate a response to the evolving humanitarian crisis as a result of the influx of more than 742,000 Rohingyas.<sup>9</sup> Bangladesh has been appreciated for its action in this devastating moment to stem the pain of the Rohingya.

Yet the public discourse has soured recently and frustration at the lack of a solution to the crisis has added to leaking sympathy in Bangladesh. Much of the recent discourse has turned away from sympathy towards treating the Rohingya as purely a security threat or as a community with little agency which have become a burden for Bangladesh. This article seeks to analyse the securitisation process of the Rohingya in Bangladesh looking at the spill over security implications for Bangladesh and the wider region. A focus will be placed on the conditions that the Rohingya are contained in. This article will address the physical security measures being implemented in the camps and the growing narrative and policy environment which is catalysing security threats.

This article will first address the literature on the Rohingya crisis, securitisation in Bangladesh and the security threats that the situation forms. Second the theoretical underpinnings of securitisation and the role of the camp will be looked at with a focus on the role of physical security measures and the interplay with discourse. Third, the current discourse of the Rohingyas as a security threat and the measures being taken by the Bangladeshi government and the international community will be analysed with a focus on the ways in which the conditions in the camps are catalysing security issues. Fourth, the implications of this situation will be discussed with a focus on the wider region. Lastly a conclusion will consider the role of securitisation and physical measures taken in the camps in perpetuating security issues in what is becoming an unsustainable situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Taufiq-e-Faruque (2020). Bangladesh's Policy on Rohingya Refugees: Securitization or What? *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*.

## 2. Literature review

The Rohingya crisis has drawn academic attention, particularly after the large influx in 2017, however, international and academic attention has waned in recent years. Most studies focus on the Rohingyas either as an example of human rights abuse (Riley et al., 2020), a security threat (Hossain et al., 2021), or as an unsolved humanitarian crisis. There is also significant research on the links between the Rohingya crisis and terrorism. Singh and Haziq (2016) highlight concerns about the links between Rohingya and insurgency in Rakhine state providing an opportunity for regional Islamist terrorism. Further Bashar (2017) analyses the domestic security implications of radicalisation, propaganda and recruitment exploited by Jihadist groups because of the Rohingya crisis. Bangladesh is often cited as a success story in counterterrorism. Its heavy-handed counter terrorism operations have seen a lull in terrorist activity after the 2016 holey artisan bakery attack, yet this betrays underlying concerns. The Rohingya crisis was therefore feared to bring instability that may have emboldened terror groups to act again. The Rohingya issue plays an important role in extremist narratives and is highly emotive for many Bangladeshis.<sup>10</sup> The current situation is also proliferating a variety of criminal activity that breeds instability. Taking a broader view Halim (2021) highlights the global security implications of the ongoing crisis.

Yet few studies cut across securitisation and its links to the root causes of insecurity which are feeding the growing list of security threats. A limited number of studies have analysed the process of securitisation that the Rohingyas face in Bangladesh. Rana and Riaz (2022) provide an excellent contribution tracing the securitisation process. They highlighted that within Bangladesh the Rohingyas have been securitised since the influx during the 1990's.<sup>11</sup> Research by Taufiq-e-Faruque (2020) suggests that in immediate response to the Rohingya crisis in 2017-2018 the government of Bangladesh

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<sup>10</sup> Bashar, I. (2017). Exploitation of the Rohingya Crisis by Jihadist Groups: Implications for Bangladesh's Internal Security. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*.

<sup>11</sup> Rana, Md.S. and Riaz, A. (2022). Securitization of the Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*.

pursued a human security approach. However, the security discourse has shifted with the Rohingyas increasingly viewed as a threat and Bangladesh restricting their movement, communication, and access to work.<sup>12</sup> Further, they argue that the process of securitisation has occurred through multiple paths within Bangladesh with speech acts and non-discursive securitisation shaping the narrative and policies in response to the growing humanitarian crisis.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Critical Security Studies, Securitisation and the Rohingya**

Securitisation theory is a product of the critical turn in security studies which began to widen and deepen conceptualisations of security. This turn challenged the state centric and military focused discipline. A key driver of this critical turn the Aberystwyth School advocated a non-state centric focus with emancipation and a shift of the referent object of security towards the individual rather than the state.<sup>14</sup> This opened a debate that has led to a change in the understanding and practice of security with concepts such as human security taking on broader academic and practical considerations. This is important to consider when looking at the Rohingya crisis as the insecurity of this community is often overshadowed by national and international security priorities. Recentring the debate around the insecurities faced by the Rohingya is important as the securitisation of the issue since 2017 has driven us far from the initial attempts at a human security approach.

Securitisation as a result is a key process that has changed the discourse and policy options in response to the Rohingya crisis. Securitisation theory comprises of different schools centrally the Paris, and Copenhagen approaches. The Copenhagen school led by Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan focuses on the discursive processes that inform and shape security policy. A central mechanism of this process is identified as the ‘speech act’ often performed through media. This is a contribution to public discourse by an actor identifying an issue as an existential threat and therefore claiming

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<sup>12</sup> Taufiq-e-Faruque (2020).

<sup>13</sup> Rana, Md.S. and Riaz, A. (2022).

<sup>14</sup> Booth, K. (1991). Security and emancipation. *Review of International Studies*, 17(4), pp.313–326.

the necessity of extraordinary measures.<sup>15</sup> Importantly this process rests on the audience accepting the claim that the issue is a security threat and therefore giving tacit consent to treating the issue with the security apparatus of the state.<sup>16</sup> The Copenhagen school treats this securitisation process as a negative development symptomatic of the failure of politics.<sup>17</sup> Therefore this approach advocated for de-securitisation of issues which is of increasing relevance in the ongoing Rohingya crisis.

The Paris School led by the work of Didier Bigo argues that security policy is always about sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> This approach challenges the conception that security is a common good and suggests that it always comes with negative consequences. For instance, security for one actor renders another insecure.<sup>19</sup> The Paris school aims to incorporate the epistemic and theoretical contributions of sociology, criminology, and psychology into the field of security studies.<sup>20</sup> As such the Paris school focuses on the wider social and political consequences of security policies with a large focus on the implementation and practice of security.<sup>21</sup> This is critical to analysing the current implementation of security measures in the Rohingya camps as the broader social and political implications of practice must be weighed when considering the development of security threats and the interplay between the reality on the ground and the securitisation process in Bangladesh.

Rana and Riaz (2022) advocate for a blending of the Paris School and Copenhagen School approaches to analysing the process of

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<sup>15</sup> Buzan, B., Wæver, O. and Wilde, J. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London, Lynne Rienner, 1998)

<sup>16</sup> Balzacq (2011). *Securitization theory: how security problems emerge and dissolve*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

<sup>17</sup> Wæver in Lipschutz, R.D. (1995). *On Security*. Chapter 3. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

<sup>18</sup> Vaughan-Williams, N. (2020). *Critical security studies: an introduction 3rd Edition*. Abingdon, New York, Ny: Routledge.

<sup>19</sup> Bigo, D. (2008). *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9 11*. London: Routledge.

<sup>20</sup> Bigo, D. (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Vaughan-Williams, N. (2020).

securitisation of the Rohingya. This combined focus on discursive ‘speech acts’ and non-discursive securitisation practices allows a comprehensive understanding of the process of securitisation. Further, I will argue that a renewed focus must be placed on the physical security measures implemented in the camp by drawing on the Paris School’s approach. The implementation of new security measures is often framed in the language of exception, and are deeply entwined with the securitisation of the Rohingyas. It will be argued that the physical realities in the camps are catalysing security threats.

#### 4. The Camp

The situation of the Rohingyas who have sought refuge in Bangladesh is tied to the infrastructure of the camps and temporary settlements built to house them by Bangladesh and the international community. With huge flows of international aid money and NGO efforts the basic needs of the Rohingya are claimed to be met in the network of camps. Camps have become a central global response to refugee flows and take on many forms.<sup>22</sup> They are contradictory spaces of care and control, empathy, and oppression.<sup>23</sup> The meanings attributed to the camps are reflective of the changing nature of politics and the state. The discourse and practices of each camp as a result reflects the political feelings towards the people they are constructed for.<sup>24</sup>

The camp takes on a particular place in the thought and practice of security, it is a measure of exceptional circumstance that perpetuates the development of security policy and practice outside of the normal part of a subaltern global infrastructure for the unwanted and stateless.<sup>25</sup> Focus has been drawn on the refugee camp as a means of dealing with the refugee crisis in Europe. However, the camp has a long history and many diverse examples. Camps established to regulate and deal with refugee flows can be conceptualised as

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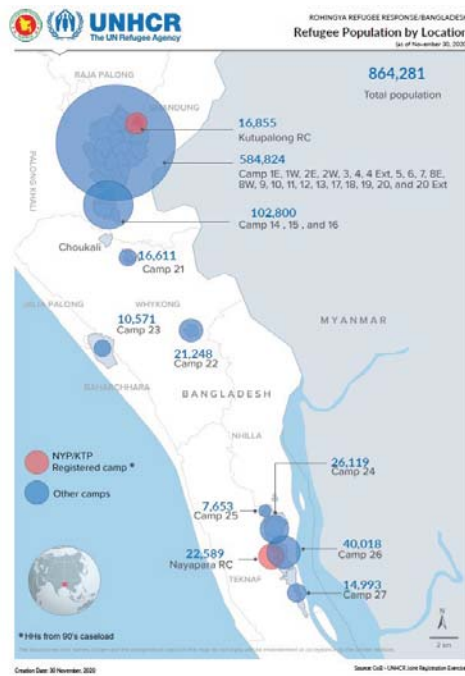
<sup>22</sup> McConnachie, K. (2016). Camps of Containment: A Genealogy of the Refugee Camp. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*.

<sup>23</sup> Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the Undesirables*. Polity Press.

<sup>24</sup> McConnachie, K. (2016).

<sup>25</sup> Mbembe, A. (2019). *Necropolitics*.

carceral junctions both confining spaces yet ones in which mobility and a great deal of interaction with the outside world establish networks as well as future hopes and dreams of life beyond the camp.<sup>26</sup> These temporary structures function as a physical manifestation of the politics of containment.<sup>27</sup> The physical reality of the camp as an material assemblage of confinement, security and governance shapes the practice of security.<sup>28</sup> This physical reality interacts with the securitisation discourse shaping perceptions and realities of security threats. As a result, it is an important focus of studies which seek to understand the links between the conditions of a refugee camp, the securitisation process and spill-over security consequences.



Source: (Dempster and Sakib, 2021) UNHCR, Created November 30, 2020, retrieved December 17, 2020.

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/83489>

<sup>26</sup> Turner, S. and Whyte, Z. (2022). Introduction: Refugee camps as carceral junctions.

<sup>27</sup> McConnachie, K. (2016).

<sup>28</sup> Meiches, B. (2015). A political ecology of the camp. *Security Dialogue*.



## 5. Current context

Bangladesh maintains a policy that disregards settling the Rohingyas in Bangladesh as an option and places an overwhelming focus on repatriation.<sup>29</sup> As a result of bilateral negotiations two attempts at repatriating the Rohingyas have been made yet both failed due to unwillingness of the Rohingya to return without citizenship and guarantees over their security.<sup>30</sup> In the context of the February 2021 coup in Myanmar repatriation is even less likely. Myanmar is tensely balanced with many armed groups on the edge of civil war. The continued violence in Rakhine state makes it to displaced Rohingyas that returning home risks a repeat of genocidal violence.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2021 in Kutupalong Camp Mohammed Mohib Ullah, a leader of the Rohingya community and human rights activist was murdered by an unidentified group of men.<sup>31</sup> Mohib Ullah was an unofficial figurehead of the Rohingya as and an individual around which to galvanise support and engage in dialogue. His death has further added to the fracturing of the Rohingya community and left the marginalised group without any clear leadership.

The current levels of criminal activity within the camps are hard to estimate however, drugs, human trafficking, small arms trade, and petty crime are prevalent. Residents of the camp have highlighted their feelings of insecurity due to the situation within the camps.<sup>32</sup> Violence is common in the camps with rival gangs competing over territory and control of the drugs trade.<sup>33</sup> Arson, kidnapping, trafficking, drugs, and fights are the most common crimes

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<sup>29</sup> Dempster, H. and Sakib, N.H. (2021).

<sup>30</sup> Banka, N. (2019). *Failed Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar: A status check*. [online] The Indian Express.

<sup>31</sup> Islam, A. (2021). *Bangladesh: Who killed Rohingya leader Mohibullah?* | DW | 05.10.2021. [online] DW.COM.

<sup>32</sup> Burma Human Rights Network (2022). *We also have dreams*. [online] Burma Human Rights Network - BHRN. Available at: <https://www.bhrn.org.uk/en/report/1191-we-also-have->

<sup>33</sup> Hossain, I. (2020). *After Humanitarianism: Bangladesh's Evolving Rohingya Policy*.

contributing to insecurity within the camps.<sup>34</sup> Further, there are fears of radicalisation and links to terrorism in the camp which are equally hard to estimate.

Since 2017 there has been a consistent presence of insurgent groups within the Rohingya camps. In particular Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and recently Arakan Army (AA) have become powerful insurgent groups within Rakhine state and have developed links with elements of the Rohingya community in Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> The presence of Arakan Army and ARSA has sparked fears over Rohingya links to insurgency with the security risks in Bangladesh and potential conflict with Myanmar contributing to the securitisation of the Rohingya in discourse and practice.<sup>36</sup> Arakan Army has grown significantly in power over the last two years consolidating their hold of central and northern Rakhine.<sup>37</sup> This development offers a new actor with possible dialogue between Dhaka, Naypyidaw, the Rohingyas, and the Arakan Army on solutions to the crisis. The conflict between Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw is currently in a lull but a return to violence will have security implications for the Rohingya and the border security of Bangladesh.<sup>38</sup>

In response the government of Bangladesh has continued to securitise the Rohingya with a distinct development of the discourse towards viewing the Rohingya as a security threat.<sup>39</sup> This process of securitisation has been followed by changing physical security measures in and around the camps. Bangladesh has built an extensive security infrastructure of barbed wire, watchtowers, and checkpoints to control movement.<sup>40</sup> Economic activity had been

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<sup>34</sup> Burma Human Rights Network (2022).

<sup>35</sup> International Crisis Group (2022). *Avoiding a Return to War in Myanmar's Rakhine State*.

<sup>36</sup> Burma Human Rights Network (2022).

<sup>37</sup> International Crisis Group (2022).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Rana, Md.S. and Riaz, A. (2022).

<sup>40</sup> Sakib, N. (2021). *Bangladesh heightens security at Rohingya camps*. [online] [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr).

significantly restricted and arbitrary stop and search is used to identify Rohingya outside of the camps and send them back.<sup>41</sup> Further, in recent months surveillance around the camps and across the Naf river has been strengthened.<sup>42</sup> Internet access is periodically cut and Rohingya have had their phones and sim cards confiscated, due to fears that they might facilitate criminal activity.<sup>43</sup> This sporadic restriction of communication has been criticised by aid organisations which argue that it complicates responses to emergencies. Overall, there is a creeping militarisation of the physical security measures implemented in and around the camps.

Further, the government of Bangladesh planned a mass relocation of Rohingya refugees to the island of Bhasan Char, a step that remove many Rohingya from Cox's Bazaar and would effectively isolate the Rohingya with natural confinement on the flood prone island.<sup>44</sup> 19,000 Rohingyas currently reside on Bhasan Char.<sup>45</sup> However, this move was resisted by many Rohingyas as conditions on Bhasan Char were worse than the camp networks in Cox's Bazaar. This attempted relocation was framed as an improvement of the situation by Bangladesh. However, it is a move in line with the securitisation of the Rohingya which would have further isolated them reflecting offshore detention centres for migrants.<sup>46</sup> Mass relocation to Bhasan Char would have increased the levels of control by separating the Rohingyas from the geographical links to the ungoverned spaces across the Bangladesh and Myanmar border which facilitate criminal activity.<sup>47</sup> Yet these attempts at population control are

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<sup>41</sup> Rana, Md.S. and Riaz, A. (2022).

<sup>42</sup> Sakib, N. (2021).

<sup>43</sup> Rashid, M. (2019). *12,000 SIMs seized in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh*. [online]

<sup>44</sup> Hossain, I. (2020)

<sup>45</sup> Nguyen, H. and Lewis, T. (2022). *Bhasan Char and Refugee 'Warehousing'*. [online] [thediplomat.com](http://thediplomat.com).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Human (2021). *'An island jail in the middle of the sea': Bangladesh's relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char*. New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch.

coercive and made little practical sense in terms of improving the living conditions of the Rohingyas. The move stretches the significant logistics required to meet the basic needs of the Rohingya and damaged the relationship between the Rohingyas and the authorities.

It appears that the government of Bangladesh is responding to fears that the Rohingya are becoming a security threat by doubling down on repatriation, increasing control within the camps, and expanding measures that make the Rohingyas uncomfortable, potentially to incentivise return. These measures are also reflective of the powerful process of securitisation across the last five years proliferating the growing sense that the Rohingya represent a security threat to Bangladesh and the wider region. Some attempts have been made to return international attention to the issue and draft a joint Bangladesh and UN response.<sup>48</sup> This potentially represents a return to the human security approach favoured during 2017 yet little progress has been made with securitising moves holding prominence. With little visible solution and repatriation highly unlikely there are fears that the Rohingya children born today will face the same fate as many of those who travelled to Bangladesh in the 1990's never seeing life outside of a camp.<sup>49</sup>

## 6. Situation as a Catalyst

This section will break down why the current conditions that the Rohingyas are suspended in is contributing to the creation of security threats. As highlighted the Rohingyas have been securitised and are treated as a threat in policy and discourse. Yet, little focus is given to the root causes of the criminality and links to violent groups that are cited to support securitising the Rohingyas. Globally there is little evidence to suggest that refugee settlements are linked to higher rates of crime.<sup>50</sup> However, highlighting criminal activity has

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<sup>48</sup> 2022 Joint Response Plan Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis. (2022). The Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations.

<sup>49</sup> Burma Human Rights Network (2022).

<sup>50</sup> Amuedo-Dorantes, C., Bansak, C. and Pozo, S. (2020). Refugee Admissions and Public Safety: Are Refugee Settlement Areas More Prone to Crime? *International Migration Review*.

been at the core of both the discursive and non-discursive securitisation process of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.<sup>51</sup> Further, criminal activity within the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh does appear to be significant contradicting the global trend. This draws focus to the specific context and daily reality of the Rohingya camps within Bangladesh as the current situation may be a catalyst for possible security threats.

The Rohingyas themselves live in insecurity within the camps that only meet their bare needs. Primarily the Rohingyas in Bangladesh suffer from a lack of meaningful access to livelihood, they face a dearth of opportunities and as a result their ontological security is damaged. They are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>52</sup> Facing the confinement and lack of opportunities in the camps is contributing to criminal and violent activity. Poverty and desperation can lead to various forms of exploitation and a lack of trust for authorities which catalyses a higher frequency of criminal behaviour.<sup>53</sup> With the poverty present in the camps many women have been driven towards prostitution and human trafficking is prevalent. Further, many young men are becoming involved in the drugs trade as a necessity to find a livelihood.<sup>54</sup> Thus criminal elements have at their disposal a wealth of vulnerable people in the camps.

The security forces responsible for implementing security within the camps are not trusted by the Rohingyas and several high-profile incidents such as young Rohingyas being beaten by the police highlight this divide.<sup>55</sup> The current restrictive measures being put in place dates to a shift in policy following the 2017-2018 human

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<sup>51</sup> Rana, Md.S. and Riaz, A. (2022).

<sup>52</sup> Burma Human Rights Network (2022).

<sup>53</sup> De Courson, B. and Nettle, D. (2021). Why do inequality and deprivation produce high crime and low trust? *Scientific Reports*, 11(1).

<sup>54</sup> Alsaafin, L. (2018). *'I carry yaba to survive': Rohingya and Bangladesh's meth trade*.

<sup>55</sup> Fortifyrights (2022). *Bangladesh: Investigate Refugee-Beatings by Police, Lift Restrictions on Movement*. [online] Fortify Rights. Available at: <https://www.fortifyrights.org/bgd-inv-2022-05-26/> [Accessed 3 Jul. 2022].

security approach. This shift represents more physically restrictive measures, the shutting down of movement and communications as well as limiting access to economic activity which appear counterproductive.<sup>56</sup>

Most security threats emanate from criminal activity and the nexus with violence and radicalisation. These are significant threats both to Bangladesh and the wider region, however the securitisation discourse and implementation of harsher security measures in the camps are upholding poor conditions of living and insecurity which are the root cause of participation in criminal activity, violence, and vulnerability to radicalisation. These measures are applying pressure to the Rohingyas which only serves as a catalyst to more criminal activity and associated violence. As such a return to the human security focus and a de-securitisation of the Rohingya may be a more beneficial path. The young Rohingya generation aspire for a life beyond the camps and are increasingly taking risks to escape at any cost with many crossing in small boats towards India and even Malaysia.<sup>57</sup> Despite the largest concentration of Rohingya residing in Bangladesh it is a regional issue and as such any response needs to be coordinated at the regional level.

## 7. Spill Over Security Concerns

The insecurity endemic in the camps housing the Rohingyas must be viewed as a concern not only for Bangladesh and Myanmar but also for the wider region and the international community. Many Rohingyas have sought refuge across South Asia and maintain links to the large portion of their community sheltered in Bangladesh. The insecurity in the camps will therefore impact Rohingyas across the region.

Organised crime and the burgeoning illicit drug trade through the porous Myanmar-Bangladesh border and the camps impacts the Rohingya community and Bangladesh while facilitating the flow of illicit money that may fund a variety of criminal and potentially politically violent groups across South Asia.

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<sup>56</sup> Taufiq-e-Faruque (2020).

<sup>57</sup> Chaudhury, R. and Raṇabīra Samāddāra (2018).

The vulnerability of communities in the camps provides a weak point that may develop into a ground for radicalisation. The worst fears of the securitisation discourse of the Rohingyas are yet to be realised. However, there remains a threat of escalating violence particularly the facilitation of insurgency and terrorism from the camps.<sup>58</sup> The camps represent a weak point of governance, and such vacuums filled with vulnerable people often create opportunities for violent groups. This must be considered in terms of South Asia's long history with transnational terrorism as such addressing the insecurity within the camps must be viewed as a regional priority.

The current situation also compounds a series of non-traditional and human security threats. The infrastructure and mass migration of people has devastated the environment around the Cox's Bazaar area adding to an already complex socio-environmental crisis that has created grievances with the host community.<sup>59</sup> This holds significant long-term implications for the region which once held aspirations of a tourism industry.<sup>60</sup> The huge population within the camps and the poor conditions also creates an environment vulnerable to disease and viruses with Covid-19 tearing through the community.<sup>61</sup> The cramped conditions have also left the Rohingya vulnerable to fires and floods which have struck the community with alarming frequency displaying the inadequacy of their current living conditions and adding to the insecurity which drives other threats.<sup>62</sup>

In the coming decades South Asia as a region will be impacted by the worst consequences of climate change. Extreme weather, rising sea levels and a lack of economic opportunity will spark mass

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<sup>58</sup> Halim, A. (2021). The Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Exploring Global Security Implications. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3896637.

<sup>59</sup> Sadat al Sajib, S.M., Islam, S.A.M.Z. and Sohad, M.K.N. (2022). Rohingya Influx and Socio-environmental Crisis in Southeastern Bangladesh. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Yeasmine, I. (2021). *Flooding, fires and COVID bring fresh challenges for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh*. [online] UNHCR.

<sup>62</sup> Yeasmine, I. (2021).

movement and displacement across the continent. The Rohingyas as an already vulnerable group will face unprecedented challenges if their current situation is not improved. The treatment of the Rohingya community has far reaching consequences as a precedent for the region's treatment of displaced people. The current intractable nature of the crisis should be high on the regional agenda as its colossal impact on over a million people is likely foreshadows the displacement to come. Greater regional dialogue, cooperation, mechanisms, and practicality is therefore a necessity.

Dealing with the Rohingya crisis in a meaningful way appears to require de-securitisation alongside better semi-permanent living conditions, access to livelihood and greater guarantees of non-coercive security within the camps. This would re-establish a human security approach that was set out in good faith in 2017.

## **8. Conclusion**

This article sought to display that the securitisation of the displaced Rohingya across discourse and physical security measures is catalysing insecurity within the camps and contributing to established and nascent threats. The Rohingyas are unlikely to return to Myanmar as the Tatmadaw continues to threaten violence in Rakhine state. As such, the current temporary arrangement for hosting the Rohingyas in Bangladesh is unsustainable as it creates the conditions for insecurity among the Rohingya population that proliferates security threats. As such the de-securitisation of the Rohingya issue is required to counteract the recent turn towards viewing the Rohingyas in the language of security threat and exception.

The onus then lies on creating better long-term facilities, raising living conditions, education, and routes to meaningful work. This is a complex task and has significant political optics. The Bangladeshi communities in Cox's Bazaar have already lost their goodwill for the Rohingyas and significant investment as well as paths to employment may fester hatred in the host community. Further, a sense of permanently re-settling the Rohingyas in Bangladesh would legitimise the genocidal actions of the Tatmadaw.



The responsibility lies with Bangladesh and the international community to engage in a dialogue that returns the crisis to the human security focus that was present in 2017 establishing the will to provide better long-term conditions for the Rohingyas providing routes to meaningful work, education, and opportunities. The improvement of the physical conditions and practice of security in the camps will in turn mitigate the security threats that proliferate in the camps. Further, securitisation and harsher treatment will only catalyse the insecurity that is driving security threats from criminal activity to radicalisation and violence.

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# The Geopolitical Implications of Rekindled Japan-ROK Relations

Raisha Jesmin<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Neighbors on the map, mighty Asian tigers in the economic realm, and middle powers on the world stage, Japan and Korea (ROK) have a complex yet special relationship. Time does not heal all wounds, and Japan and Korea have exemplified this like no other as historical disputes remain the primary obstacle in deepening ties. Relations reached a nadir under the administrations of President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, impeding cooperation in the security and economic spheres and stalling dialogue and communication. However, under the new leadership of Yoon Suk Yeol in Korea and Fumio Kishida in Japan, the winds of reconciliation have never been stronger. Yoon has alluded to mending relations with Japan since the onset of his presidential campaign, and his determination became evident when he met Prime Minister Kishida in Tokyo in mid-March of 2023 in what marked the first high-level meeting of a Korean president to Japan in twelve years. The turbulent security landscape, with an ascending China on one side and a restive North Korea (DPRK) on the other, has fortified prospects for greater synergies between the two, which*

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*can have broader geopolitical reverberations. Against this backdrop, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the security implications of reviving Japan-ROK relations under the new administrations. With historical grievances frequently resurfacing, it is recommended that both leaders tread with caution for sustained relations.*



## 1. Introduction

The geographical proximity between Japan and Korea once sparked assumptions that the two would be natural partners, but the phrase ‘close in geography, distant in mind’ has come to encapsulate their relations more accurately.<sup>2</sup> Korea was under Japan’s sphere of influence between 1910 and 1945, during which Imperial Japan ruled with an iron-fist, having engaged in labor exploitation and sexual slavery. Japan also annexed the resource-rich Dokdo/Takeshima islands located between Japan and Korea, which Korea presently wields de facto authority over. Much time has passed but Korea continues to seek justice for its victims of Japanese colonialism, in addition to being entrapped in a territorial rights battle with Japan over Dokdo/Takeshima. The historical memory of colonialism is yet to recede in the minds of ordinary Koreans, many of whom prefer transitional justice to settle historical disputes, while the Japanese place emphasis on state-centered international law.<sup>3</sup> This discrepancy in approaches adopted by Japanese and Koreans to resolve historical tensions contributes to negative perceptions of each other's actions.

Since normalizing diplomatic ties in 1965, Japan-ROK relations have been marked by sporadic bursts of conflict and cooperation, creating anomalous dynamics that cannot be captured through a single theoretical lens. At the turn of the new century, successive Korean administrations aimed to maintain amicability with Japan at the outset of their administrations, only for things to become unstable in the middle or end of the administrations.<sup>4</sup> Relations suffered a major blow between 2017 and 2019 with implications on diplomatic, economic, and security ties. Under the governments of President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the wounds

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<sup>2</sup> Yoon, Tae Ryong. "Searching for a new paradigm for Korea-Japan relations." *International Relations Research* (2007), 177.

<sup>3</sup> “Politics The Steep Challenge of Mending Japan-South Korea Relations,” Minseon Ku, accessed June 15, 2022,

<https://www.tokyoreview.net/2022/05/the-steep-challenge-of-mending-japan-south-korea-relations/>.

<sup>4</sup> Park, CheolHee. "Cooperation coupled with conflicts: Korea–Japan relations in the post-Cold War era." *Asia-Pacific Review* 15, no. 2 (2008), 29.

of history were sharply split open after Moon scrapped a bilateral agreement that was intended to “finally and irreversibly resolve the comfort women issue” and when a Korean court in 2018 ruled that Korean victims of forced labor could sue Japanese companies for damages incurred during the colonial period. Claiming the 1965 agreement had already addressed claims over its colonial past, Japan removed Korea from its trade ‘white list’ in 2019 and imposed restrictions on exports of vital chemicals for Korea’s high-tech industries. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, fresh faces have emerged on the leadership podiums in both countries and the expectation of rekindling relations is once again brought to the fore. But, divided by history, how would these two countries converge? Vibrant democracies linked by strong economic and cultural ties, Japan and Korea have much to cooperate on, particularly in the context of the North’s mounting nuclear arsenal and the strategic confrontations between the US and China. These have been the key motivations behind Yoon’s visit to Tokyo, where he met Kishida and the two geared for a ‘future-oriented relationship’.

The first half of this paper traces the historical development of Japan-ROK relations, outlining the period of Japanese colonialism to explain the birth of lasting historical friction. The second half opens with a description of the incumbent governments before shifting to the geopolitical implications of rapprochement, underscoring the security concerns emerging from North Korea and China. The concluding half offers recommendations for the two leaders as they march forward, valorizing the need to redress historical scars through determination and pragmatism for durable relations.

## **2. Scars of the Past**

The conventional wisdom on Japan-ROK relations stems from a historical approach that locates historical animosity owing to the legacy of Japanese colonialism and Wartime Empire as the source of longstanding friction.<sup>5</sup> Korea endured over three decades under Japanese colonialism, during which its populace was subject to labor exploitation and sexual slavery, among other atrocities. Five years

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<sup>5</sup> Cheol Hee, 15.

before the colonialization of Korea, Japan also annexed the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands, which have been claimed by both Korea and Japan. These events have fueled the deep resentment that many Koreans harbor towards Japan today, and have come to characterize diplomatic relations between the two nation-states. The historical approach helps us grapple with the conflictual aspect of ROK-Japan relations, but it perhaps fails to account for their amicability. Since normalizing diplomatic ties in the 1960s, the two have sought to transcend historical barriers, as shown by economic and cultural exchanges as well as political and military contact.

### ***2.1 Empire of the Sun***

Japan annexed Korea in 1910 following years of war, coercion, and political ploys. It was not only Korean land that the Japanese seized control of; Korean labor, culture, and society all came under the shackles of Japanese colonialism for 35 years. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese relocated to land that belonged to Korea, and more than 700,000 Korean laborers were forced to serve Japanese economic interests.<sup>6</sup> When many Japanese were conscripted during World War II, Japan used Korean laborers to work in coal mines and construction sites under brutal conditions. Korean women, known as the ‘comfort women’ were also kidnapped and coerced into sexual slavery, and they served in military brothels where they were subjected to inhumane conditions and human rights violations. These military brothels had existed since the early 1930s, but they multiplied following Japan's incursions into China and neighboring Asian states, and they lasted until 1946.<sup>7</sup> Records documenting the system of comfort women were destroyed by the Japanese after the second world war, making it difficult to estimate the number of comfort women. Cultural genocide manifested in the suppression of the Korean language and the destruction of Korean cultural symbols.<sup>8</sup> Japanese quickly replaced Korean in educational

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<sup>6</sup> “How Japan Took Control of Korea,” History, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/japan-colonization-korea>.

<sup>7</sup> “The Brutal History of Japan’s ‘Comfort Women,’” History, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/comfort-women-japan-military-brothels-korea>.

<sup>8</sup> “How Japan Took Control of Korea,” History, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.history.com/news/japan-colonization-korea>.

institutions, public spaces, and films, and Korean historical records were burned. Korean cultural symbols, such as the royal palace Gyeongbokgung established during the Joseon Dynasty, were torn down or repurposed.

## ***2.2 Sparring over Territory***

Two small rock islets in the Sea of Japan/ East Sea have two different names for Koreans and the Japanese. For Korea, the islands are known as Dokdo, and for Japan, they are known as Takeshima. For international observers, these islets are known as the Liancourt Rocks, a name given by the French in the 1800s.

Japan's and Korea's claims to the islands are based on historical records, formal treaties, and international law. Korea holds that the islands have originally been part of Korean territory since 512 AD and were some of the early territories taken by Japan when it spread its colonial tentacles over the peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Japan claims it gained lawful possession of the territory under several agreements made during 1905 and 1910, which granted Japan access to the Korean peninsula.<sup>10</sup> The San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, which stipulated that Japan would recognize Korea's independence, did little to clarify who owned the islands, as it did not name Dokdo/Takeshima as Japanese or Korean territory. The island grouping has been administered by the Korea Coast Guard since 1954, but Japan continues to assert its claim over them. The islands have become a symbol of national identity and pride for Korea, as many Koreans associate the territory with traumatic memories of Japanese colonialism, and losing the islands would mark another 'national humiliation'.<sup>11</sup> On substantive levels, the islands are valuable economically and strategically. To exemplify, formal ownership of the islets would bring economic rewards in the form of a 12-nautical mile Territorial Sea and 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic

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<sup>9</sup> "Factbox: Disputed isles at center of feud between Japan, South Korea," Reuters, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan-islands-factbox-idUSKBN1WG2RX>.

<sup>10</sup> Fern, Sean. "Tokdo or Takeshima? The international law of territorial acquisition in the Japan-ROK island dispute." *Fordham Int'l LJ* 1606 (1998): 80.

<sup>11</sup> Jinman et al., 371.

Zone due to the introduction of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>12</sup> From a military perspective, the islands accord a strategic advantage to its owner as they can be used for surveillance purposes through observation facilities or radar systems, as is presently used by Korea to surveil the activities of Russia, China, and North Korea.<sup>13</sup> Japan has been particularly vocal about its territorial rights since the 1990s, causing numerous diplomatic spats. Some prominent cases of retaliation came in 2012 when Japan recalled its ambassador to Seoul after President Lee Myung-Bak became the first Korean president to visit the islands.<sup>14</sup> Despite Japan's long-standing proposal to resolve the dispute through the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Korea remains adamant in its refusal.

Because there are competing interpretations of history, determining the sovereignty of the islands is indeed a rigorous mission. Furthermore, bilateral and multilateral treaties facilitated by third parties, such as the 1951 Treaty, have only created ambiguities that are thorny for the two to resolve.



Image: *A Map Illustrating the Disputed Dokdo/Takeshima Islands Located Between Korea and Japan (VOA News).*

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<sup>12</sup> Fern, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Jinman et al., 372.

<sup>14</sup> “South Korean’s Visit to Disputed Islets Angers Japan,” *New York Times*, accessed June 3, 2023,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/11/world/asia/south-koreans-visit-to-disputed-islets-angers-japan.html>.

### 3. Normalization of Relations

#### *3.1 Joint Declaration: A New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-first Century states*

Japan and Korea normalized diplomatic relations under a 1965 bilateral agreement signed in Tokyo, with the US participating as an interlocutor. The agreement regulated issues related to wartime property claims, but did not settle personal claims against Japan for war crimes and human rights violations (such as the issue of comfort women). Some provisions of the agreement were also equivocal and subject to competing interpretations, such as regarding the Liancourt issue, as it made no special mention of the Dokdo/Takeshima islands.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the agreement signaled a hopeful moment in history as the two states moved towards a state of bonhomie and began engaging in economic and security cooperation. The 1990s was perhaps the apotheosis of Japan-ROK bilateral relations, as a Joint Declaration by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo established a ‘future-oriented’ relationship.<sup>16</sup> An excerpt from the Joint Declaration states that:

The two leaders shared the view that it was extremely important to advance the partnership between the two countries, not only in the bilateral dimension but also for the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the international community as a whole, and in exploring in various ways to achieve a society in which individual human rights are better respected, and a more comfortable global environment.

#### *3.2 Oscillating Between Enmity and Comity*

Since the Joint Declaration, Japan and Korea have formed an intimate economic bond, with Korea becoming one of Japan’s top trading partners and vice versa; cooperation in the economic sphere had remained largely insulated from historical squabbles until 2019.

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<sup>15</sup> Fern, 80.

<sup>16</sup> “MOFA: Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration a New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-First Century.” MOFA Japan, accessed June 1, 2023,

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/korea/joint9810.html>.

Tourism and other people-to-people exchange have also exploded, with hundreds of thousands of tourists and businesspeople visiting each other's countries annually. The allure of soft power has been particularly effective in bringing Japanese and Koreans closer together, as their populations have become fascinated with each other's cultural exports; Japanese anime productions like 'Slam Dunk,' pop music releases by Korean group BTS, and Nintendo video games, among others, have been widely embraced by ordinary Japanese and Koreans. These developments have shifted the structure of Japan-ROK relations from a vertical to a more horizontal character, narrowing the power and economic gap between them.<sup>17</sup> Much of Japan-ROK relations has also comprised a defense aspect, with the North as a common security threat and the US as a binding force for security cooperation. Following the end of the Cold War, the North's burgeoning nuclear capabilities alarmed the US and demanded joint efforts from its East Asian allies for regional peace and security. Security concerns about China, on the other hand, materialized much later in Japan and Korea, after China began exhibiting hegemonic tendencies and soared to become an economic and military powerhouse under Xi Jinping, instigating a seismic shift in the world order.

It has not been all rosy, however, as historical antagonisms have remained a large blot on Japan-ROK relations. Despite initiatives from Japanese and Korean leaders to uphold healthy ties, it has been observed that relations particularly deteriorate in the middle or end of a Korean administration when historical issues flare up, stifling progress. This was the case under President Roh Mo-hyun, who agreed to pursue 'future-oriented relations' with Japan, conclude a bilateral free-trade agreement, and cooperate in dealing with the North, yet historical and territorial disputes were a stumbling block. Former President Lee Myung-bak also entered office in the hopes of developing a 'future-oriented relationship' with Japan, but this hope was dashed near the end of his term when historical issues concerning the comfort women and the territorial dispute over Liancourt erupted. The wounds of history were most visibly

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<sup>17</sup> Deog, Lee Won. "The Inauguration of the Yoon Suk-yeol Government and Prospects for South Korea-Japan Relations." *Asia-Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (2022): 151-174.

scratched and bled out during Moon's presidency, with severe repercussions as aforementioned. To recapitulate, three key historical disputes continue to prickle relations between the two states and will need to be addressed by any incoming leaders, as detailed in the table below.

<b>Historical/ Territorial Issue</b>	<b>Japanese Position</b>	<b>Korean Position</b>
Comfort Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1965 treaty and a 2015 bilateral agreement settled the comfort women issue. The 2015 agreement specified that Korea would establish a foundation that Japan would fund for the care of the few comfort women who were still alive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 1965 agreement did not cover sexual slavery.</li> <li>Survivors were not consulted in the 2015 agreement.</li> <li>Japan needs to be held legally accountable under international law.</li> </ul>
Wartime Forced Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The normalization treaty of 1965 included reparations to forced laborers, hence Japanese companies are no longer entitled to make compensation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Japanese private companies should compensate victims of forced labor.</li> </ul>
Liancourt Rocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The islands are illegally occupied by Korea and the issue should be resolved through the ICJ.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Korean historical and national identity are associated with the islands.</li> <li>The islands were 'rightly' returned to Korea following the conclusion of the second World War.</li> </ul>

Table: *Summary of Key Historical Disputes between Japan and Korea.*

Japan-ROK relations can be best understood as fragile. The trend of improved relations across various spheres shows that the two have been willing to leave behind the past to establish a constructive relationship. However, a divisive history frequently generates tensions that have spread from the diplomatic realm to the economic and security realms.



## 4. A New Chapter

### 4.1 *The Rise of Yoon Suk Yeol*

Conservative Yoon Suk Yeol entered the Blue House in 2022 after one of Korea's most tightly fought elections in recent memory. Despite being a political novice, the prosecutor-turned-president gained a considerable supporter base by promising to stabilize the country's housing market, increase monthly pay for soldiers, and dissolve the Gender Equality Ministry.<sup>18</sup> His presidential campaign was also based on his determination to respond more aggressively to China and the North, assume a new foreign policy approach that would seek a 'comprehensive strategic alliance' with the US<sup>19</sup>, sustain the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, and upscale Korea's contribution in facilitating economic progress and democratization in other Asian countries. At the center of such objectives has been Japan, with whom Yoon seeks to reboot ties and introduce a Joint Declaration 2.0. In his first Liberation Day speech to commemorate Korea's independence from Japanese colonial rule, Yoon stated, "In the past, we had to unshackle ourselves from the political control imposed upon us by imperial Japan so that we could regain and defend our freedom. Today, Japan is our partner as we face common threats that challenge the freedom of global citizens".<sup>20</sup>

### 4.2 *Japanese Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida*

Prime Minister Kishida of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was appointed as Japan's Prime Minister just a year before Yoon. In

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<sup>18</sup> "South Korea's embattled Yoon spurned by young antifeminists over failed pledges, scandals," South China Morning Post, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3190530/south-koreas-embattled-yoon-spurned-young-antifeminists-over>.

<sup>19</sup> "Rising Anti-China Sentiment in South Korea Offers Opportunities To Strengthen US-ROK Relations - Center for American Progress," Center for American Progress, accessed June 5, 2023, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rising-anti-china-sentiment-in-south-korea-offers-opportunities-to-strengthen-us-rok-relations/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Yoon pledges to improve ties with Japan, offers economic aid in exchange for N.K. denuclearization," Yonhap News Agency, accessed May 29, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220815001500315>.

contrast to his Korean counterpart, Kishida is no stranger to politics, having served as Japan's foreign minister from 2012 to 2017. In addition to domestic economic reforms, Kishida has sought closer Japan-US ties and cooperation with other Asian democracies, citing concerns about China and North Korea. Much like Yoon, Kishida has been an advocate for repairing Japan-ROK relations, mainly to safeguard the country's national interests.<sup>21</sup>

### ***4.3 Diplomatic Thawing***

As overtures to their first high-level meeting in Tokyo, Yoon and Kishida had several 'informal' exchanges to steer towards a common future. These exchanges improved bilateral relations and trilateral cooperation with the US, as well as prompted Japan to lift export controls on Korea. Since relations froze between the two under the previous administrations, Yoon's visit to Tokyo signified a watershed in Japan-ROK relations. The visit came 10 days after the two leaders reached an agreement to remedy the dispute over the forced labor court ruling of 2018, which will now compensate South Korean victims of forced labor through Korean-backed funds rather than payments from responsible Japanese companies.<sup>22</sup> Following the summit, Japanese and Korean security and defense officials also convened in Seoul to conduct working-level security talks for the first time in five years.

These developments could herald a new dawn of security cooperation between Japan and Korea largely driven by escalating concerns of their neighbors, North Korea and China. Worries about North Korea and China have permeated policy circles, as reflected by Korea's first Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP), as well as its revised National Security Strategy. As allies of the US, conviviality between Japan

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<sup>21</sup> "Fumio Kishida wins vote to become Japanese ruling party leader, PM," Reuters, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fumio-kishida-wins-vote-become-japanese-ruling-party-leader-pm-2021-09-29/>.

<sup>22</sup> "South Korea-Japan rapprochement creates new opportunities in the Indo-Pacific," Andrew Yeoo, accessed June 8, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/03/17/korea-japan-rapprochement-creates-new-opportunities-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

and Korea would strengthen trilateral cooperation that is imperative to counter the North's increasingly sophisticated nuclear and missile threats and contain a rising China. While the threat perception of North Korea is apparent, the China question is more convoluted, as Japan and Korea have been maintaining a delicate balancing act between their top economic partner and security guarantor.

Yoon and Kishida recognize the deteriorating geopolitical climate and the need for stabilizing relations for peace and security. The strategic interests of the two seem to align at this juncture, but the leaders should keep in mind that as much as rebuilding relations entail enhancing interstate ties via economic and security cooperation, it also entails overcoming major historical hostilities in order to achieve true normalization of relations.

## 5. Geopolitical Implications

### 5.1 *The Bellicose North*

Perceptions of North Korea as a military threat have been long evident in Korea and Japan. The North makes several appearances in the defense and diplomatic White Papers of both states, which assign top priority to counter its growing missile and nuclear capabilities.<sup>23</sup> Its escalating provocations, including nuclear and missile tests as well as a failed military satellite launch, have provided fertile ground for Japan and Korea to deepen security ties.

Japan and Korea do share symmetrical threat perceptions of the DPRK, but they may prioritize different strategies which makes security cooperation difficult.<sup>24</sup>

This was notably the case during the administrations of Moon and Abe. After North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test, Moon and Abe pledged to adopt 'much tougher and more substantive measures', leading to the extension of the General Security of

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<sup>23</sup> Wiegand, Krista E. "The South Korean–Japanese security relationship and the Dokdo/Takeshima islets dispute." *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 3 (2015): 353.

<sup>24</sup> Nakato, S., 2020. Security Cooperation Between Japan and South Korea on the North Korean Nuclear Threat: Strategic Priorities and Historical Issues. *Pacific Focus*, 35(2), pp.307-333.

Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), an intelligence-sharing pact on the North's weapon activities.<sup>25</sup> The leaders also managed to keep historical disputes at bay until 2017 by employing a 'dual track approach' of addressing historical issues while also bolstering diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation. However, Moon considered strengthening inter-Korean ties through dialogue and negotiation as a significant step towards the North's denuclearization, whereas Abe remained suspicious of the North's intentions, resulting in divergent strategic priorities and weakened Japan-ROK security cooperation.<sup>26</sup> Unlike his predecessor, Yoon has chosen to be less accommodating in response to North Korean provocations and has emphasized cooperation with Japan as critical to countering it. Yoon has expressed that he would restore GSOMIA, which was at risk of being scrapped in 2019 amid tensions between the two states. Normalization of the GSOMIA would enable the seamless sharing of classified military information on the North's missile launches and nuclear tests. Korea does not own nuclear weapons, nor does it have the capacity to detect the North's missile launches and counter them on its own; it would require the support of Japan and its Western ally to balance against the threat. As the US occupies itself with other urgent interests, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, it would rely on Korea and Japan to cooperate closely to better address the belligerent DPRK.

There appears to be a strategic overlap between Korea and Japan because of the DPRK, but it remains to be seen if this can increase long-term security cooperation levels. Experts have warned against making unilateral decisions without prior consultation, as this can stymie cooperation. This is particularly noteworthy given that Japan's revised National Security Strategy includes the advancement of counter-strike capabilities, allowing it to conduct strikes at missile launch sites within North Korea in an emergency; if Japan were to execute this, it would have to do so with Korea's permission because the South Korean Constitution identifies the North as part of the South Korean territory, and attacking it without consent

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<sup>25</sup> Nakato, p. 328.

<sup>26</sup> Nakato, p. 329.

would be an infringement on its sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether strategic priorities will diverge again in the future, considering that many Koreans still believe in the possibility of denuclearization and reunification, whereas Japanese are skeptical of both denuclearization and stability of the peninsula.<sup>28</sup> For Yoon and Kishida, the challenge will be to coordinate defense and security policies without jeopardizing national interests or losing the trust of the other. This could be accomplished with frequent strategic dialogue and consultation.

## ***5.2 The China Conundrum***

Much like Japan-ROK relations, the China-Japan-ROK triad relationship is complicated, upheld by economic exchanges and common cultural heritage, but weighed down by historical baggage and grave mistrust. Japan's colonial tentacles enveloped China in the early twentieth century and its failure to show penitence for its past actions has fostered rancor in China, echoing the scenario in Korea. South Korea and China were also involved in direct military clashes during the Korean War when China offered military assistance to the DPRK. Nearly a century later, China's thirst to become a global hegemon, which has entailed military expansion in the Indo-Pacific, has fostered suspicions in Japan and Korea despite China's claims to a 'peaceful rise'; there are growing fears that China and the US are embroiled in a Thucydides trap that could have devastating global consequences. In addition to being a potential military threat, China's authoritarian roots are indubitably a source of concern to Korea and Japan, which are two of the most robust democracies in the Indo-Pacific. As major regional powers, cordial Japan-ROK relations would be necessary to balance China and sustain the regional order. However, Japan and Korea cannot simply antagonize their neighbor and completely decouple from China, considering how intertwined their economies are with the Chinese economy.

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<sup>27</sup> "Korea needs preemptive measures against Japan's new security strategy," Kang Seung-woo, accessed June 15, 2023, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/12/113\\_342092.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/12/113_342092.html).

<sup>28</sup> "The Japan-South Korea Joint Opinion Poll on North Korean's Denuclearization and the future of the Korean peninsula," The Genron NPO, accessed June 15, 2023, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5436.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5436.html).

China-Korea relations soured following the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) crisis in 2017, which invited retaliation from China as it imposed sanctions on Korea and discouraged the consumption of Korean exports. Korean public domain became saturated with anti-China sentiments after the crisis, with the favorability of the public towards China plunging to 26.4 out of 100 in 2021 from 60 in 2016. Japan's relations with China also hit rockbottom four years earlier, following a territorial dispute over the Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands. A public opinion survey by Genron NPO revealed that nearly 91 percent of Japanese respondents held a poor impression of China in 2021, a figure not observed since the survey was launched in 2005.<sup>29</sup> Although endeavors to trilateral cooperation have been limited due to such bilateral friction, economic linkages convey a story of harmony among the three. The Japanese and Korean economies lean heavily on the Chinese economy, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2; bilateral trade encompasses a diverse range of products, including electronics, chemicals, automobiles, and more. Nevertheless, with increasing Chinese aggression, its ability to enamor its East Asian neighbors with its economic muscles will likely become constrained. More so as there are increasing concerns that China will become an economic competitor to Japan and Korea in key strategic industries, such as the automotive industry, where rising demand for Chinese automobiles is outstripping that of Japan and Korea.

Yoon has accused predecessor Moon of appeasing Chinese interests at the expense of Korean national security, but has also called for 'high-level strategic dialogue'<sup>30</sup> with China and has suggested that improved Japan-ROK cooperation in the economic field would facilitate "advancing economic relations with China in a stable manner".<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Korea's first IPS incorporates China as a 'key

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<sup>29</sup> "Public opinion of Japan drastically falls among Chinese people in the previous year," The Genron NPO, accessed June 8, 2023, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5587.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5587.html).

<sup>30</sup> Center for American Progress.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, Josh. 2023. "Analysis: China, North Korea Loom Large as South Korea and Japan Try to Make Amends." Reuters, accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-north-korea-loom-large-south-korea-japan-try-make-amends-2023-03-15/>.

partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region’, and Korea ‘will nurture a sounder and more mature relationship as we pursue shared interests based on mutual respect and reciprocity, guided by international norms and rules’.<sup>32</sup> It can be broadly inferred that Korea will continue to cooperate with China, but only if China conforms to existing international norms and rules. Compared to Korea’s rather ambiguous position on China, Japan’s approach can be perceived to be more hawkish. Kishida has not shied away from criticizing China, urging it to “act responsibly on the world stage”, mainly in response to its military activities near the Taiwan Strait.<sup>33</sup> In Japan’s National Security Strategy, it uses aggressive strokes to paint China as the ‘greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan and the peace and stability of the international community’.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Japan’s \$75 billion FOIP plan is set to sail to curb China’s mounting regional assertiveness. Yet, Tokyo continues to value business and economic linkages with Beijing, as well as people-to-people exchanges; Japanese businesses have pushed for stronger ties with China, particularly since Japan’s decision to join the US in imposing export restrictions on semiconductor equipment.

Yoon and Kishida have found themselves in an uneasy environment and may have to adopt a harder posture towards Beijing to convey that they will not allow Beijing to dictate the terms of their bilateral ties or their respective foreign policies. Neither Japan nor Korea is likely to fully compromise their security for economic interests and may seek to buffer against an ambitious China by boosting economic and security ties with each other, and with their Western ally.

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<sup>32</sup> “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed June 13, 2022, [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5676/view.do?seq=322133](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322133).

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-has-no-plan-tweak-sales-tax-fund-childcare-measures-2023-04-20/>

<sup>34</sup> “National Security Strategy of Japan,” Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

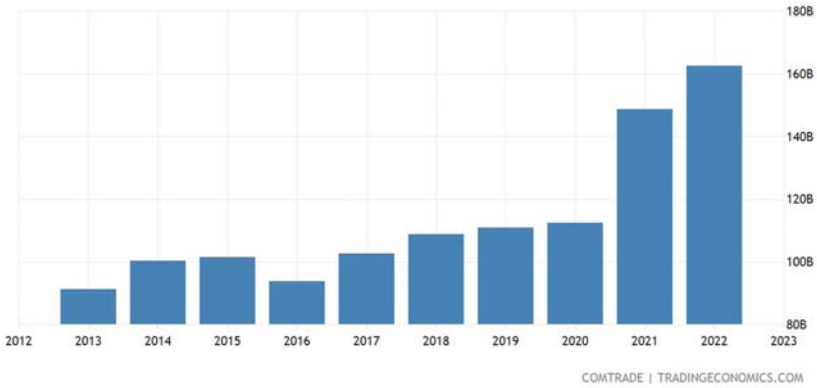


Figure 1: *China Exports to South Korea totaled US\$162.62 Billion during 2022, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade (Trading Economics).*

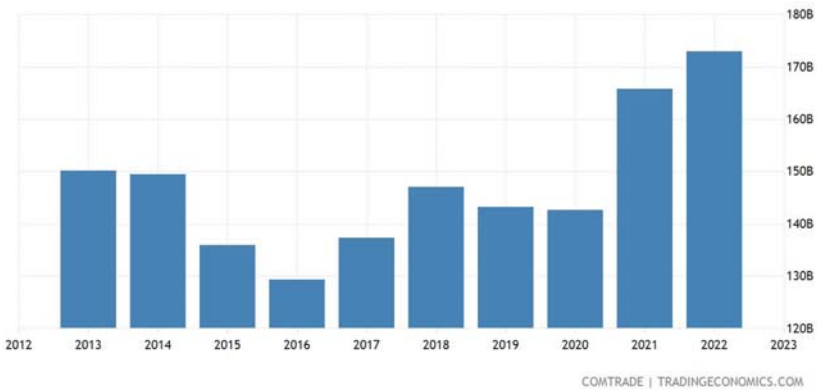


Figure 2: *China Exports to Japan totaled US\$172.93 Billion during 2022, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade (Trading Economics).*

### 5.3 Under the American Security Umbrella

The dire need for trilateral security cooperation has long been high on Washington’s agenda, particularly in the context of its renewed IPS, owing to the North’s nuclear threat and the Chinese ascendancy. Its IPS explicitly states that ‘Nearly every major Indo-Pacific challenge requires close cooperation among the United States’ allies and partners, particularly Japan and the ROK’.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> “INDO- PACIFIC STRATEGY,” The White House, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.



Warmer relations between Japan and Korea would make it possible for the three states to forge a stronger trilateral alliance, bolstering the US hub-and-spokes system and allowing it to position itself more comfortably in the Indo-Pacific.

Trilateral cooperation has already been greatly enhanced as evinced by the signing of a trilateral joint agreement between the three states in Phnom Penh in 2022. The joint agreement stated that the three leaders will align their ‘collective efforts in pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific, that is inclusive, resilient, and secure’.<sup>36</sup> Concerning North Korea, the leaders have affirmed their commitment to nuclear deterrence and denuclearization. In the past, ROK would have looked towards China, the North’s economic lifeline to advocate negotiations with the DPRK as it did in the now discontinued Six-Party Talks, but the North’s heightened belligerence and prolonged Chinese inaction over the matter have cast doubt over such negotiations, pushing the South closer to Japan and the US. Despite claiming that diplomatic channels and negotiations remain open, the three states would collaborate to assess impending threats through data sharing, allowing for improved deterrence against North Korea’s saber-rattling. The three have already been conducting joint military exercises and taking other offensive measures to send reminders to the North that its provocations will not be tolerated. However, the mounting tensions in the Korean peninsula represent a traditional example of the security dilemma, whereby a state’s security build-up only serves to make other states insecure due to mutual suspicion. In this case, what the three states would consider rational defensive responses to the North’s security threat, would aggravate the North’s security fears, sparking a vicious cycle of power competition that would fan the flames of a full-fledged war. Escaping the security dilemma and ameliorating the perpetual hostility defining the Korean peninsula would require confidence-building measures, like partial sanctions

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<sup>36</sup> “Phnom Penh Statement on US – Japan – Republic of Korea Trilateral Partnership for the Indo-Pacific.” The White House. The United States Government, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/13/phnom-penh-statement-on-trilateral-partnership-for-the-indo-pacific>.

and pausing joint exercises.<sup>37</sup> Although the present geopolitical and security climate may not be conducive to a formal peace treaty (to replace the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement), it would be the ideal solution for the stability of the peninsula.

Japan-ROK-US cooperation has largely revolved around the North, but trilateral cooperation vis-à-vis China has proven to be more challenging due to diverging strategic stances. In the US view, China's expanded footprint in the Indo-Pacific necessitates deepened security ties between Korea and Japan, which would reinforce trilateral cooperation. Japan has tilted more towards the anti-China camp in recent years, as made clear by its condemnation of China's assertive behavior in the East and South China Seas and Taiwan. However, Japan will likely attempt to improve relations with China, creating a warm atmosphere for economic cooperation and public diplomacy, but pursue containment strategies with the US simultaneously. How Yoon will respond to China and what it would mean for bilateral ties and trilateral cooperation are difficult to prognosticate. An initial glance at Korea's first IPS suggests that it is attempting to synchronize with the US vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific by committing to sustaining the rules-based order. Yoon has also equated the Taiwan issue to the North Korean issue, a remark that sparked Beijing's ire and prompted a formal complaint by the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, but one that would bode well with its Western ally.<sup>38</sup> It remains to be seen if Yoon can hold his ground regarding Taiwan in the event China's economic muscles threaten to deliver damaging blows at the Korean economy; how Korea responds to the Taiwan issue will be a litmus test for its first IPS. To complement trilateral cooperation, the US could incorporate Korea into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), but formal membership will be contingent on the health of Japan-ROK relations and the extent of Chinese backlash. Korea could be an active actor in some subsidiary programs of the QUAD encompassing climate

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<sup>37</sup> "South Korea's Enduring Security Dilemma," Suryakiran Nallapati, accessed June 13, 2023, <https://inkstickmedia.com/south-koreas-enduring-security-dilemma/>.

<sup>38</sup> "China lodges complaint over S Korean president's Taiwan comments," Al Jazeera, accessed June 16, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/23/china-lodges-complaint-over-s-korean-presidents-taiwan-comments>.

change, emerging technologies, and maritime and health-related activities. Whiffs of its addition in the 'QUAD Plus' framework, a minilateral arrangement of like-minded states committed to preserving the rules-based order, have also been floating around, as has its inclusion in novel security frameworks such as Canada's proposed quadrilateral security grouping.<sup>39</sup>

Although Japan-ROK-US have accelerated trilateral cooperation and share a similar outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the two East Asian neighbors cannot blindly follow their Western brother. US support is not unconditional, as proved by the Trump administration and its 'America First' approach, and a power transition in the US could alter trilateral dynamics once more. Japan and Korea are sovereign nation-states with their own autonomy, and they should be mindful about becoming over dependent on an external security guarantor.

## 6. Treading with Caution

Since the '98 Joint Declaration, the phrase 'future-oriented relationship' has been consistently used by Japanese and Korean leaders, and it perhaps has come to ring hollow. Despite Yoon's commitment to restoring relations with Japan, political leadership alone is insufficient to achieve this in the long run. History may remain a lingering wound among the public, affecting political outcomes and any rapprochement between the two. Disputes emanating from history become heavily politicized in both countries, sensitized by media, and exploited by political actors for their own agendas, which only serve to erect political and social barriers to long-term bilateral relations.

In democracies that have been committed to globalization, public perception and domestic interests may emerge as key variables in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies.<sup>40</sup> According to a joint survey conducted by the Genron NPO, public perceptions of each other in Japan and Korea have improved the most in ten

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<sup>39</sup> "Don't call it a Quint, but South Korea does have a future with the Quad," The Atlantic Council, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/dont-call-it-a-quint-but-south-korea-does-have-a-future-with-the-quad/>.

<sup>40</sup> Saxer, Carl J. "Democratization, globalization and the linkage of domestic and foreign policy in South Korea." *The Pacific Review* 26, no. 2 (2013): 177-198.

years since the poll launched in 2013.<sup>41</sup> This improvement was mainly credited to growing anxieties about China and awareness that both Japan and Korea are democracies with a common Western ally. Although many Koreans desire improved bilateral ties with Japan, they are unwilling to yield their stance on historical disputes. Survey data across different periods indicate an unwavering mistrust towards Japanese leaders among Koreans, owing to controversies stemming from Japanese colonial rule and the Liancourt issue. Recent poll data following Yoon's new compensation plan in response to the 2018 court ruling show that nearly 60 percent opposed the resolution.<sup>42</sup>

The same poll revealed that 64 percent thought that there was no rush to mend Japan-ROK relations unless the former colonial power shifts its attitude about the past, with only 8% believing that the Japanese government has been atoning for inflicting historical scars on Korea. Some experts have also linked Yoon's plunging approval rate with his rapprochement efforts with Japan, but others suggest that multiple forces are at play (including economic woes and personal scandals) that have ignited criticism toward the incumbent president.

No single leadership possesses the power to resolve deeply rooted historical disputes, which demand consistent and comprehensive efforts. Yoon is to occupy the Blue House for four more years, so it is too early to tell if his administration will walk in the trajectory of previous administrations and succumb to historical wounds. Yoon's acts of statesmanship with Japan in dealing with pressing security challenges are commendable, but he should avoid what experts call 'diplomacy of surrender', in which making too many concessions to the Japanese may be perceived as surrendering its national interests and values for foreign policy objectives.

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<sup>41</sup> "Will improved public sentiment in Japan and South Korea lead to better relations between the two countries?," The Genron NPO, accessed June 22, 2023, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5605.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5605.html).

<sup>42</sup> "Reimbursement Plan for Third Parties to Japan's Compulsory Mobilization, Direction of Korea-Japan Relations, and Recognition of the Japanese Government's Past," Gallup Korea, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=1371>.

## 7. Recommendations

*Tend to Past Wounds:* The burden of history may never become lighter, and this must be acknowledged by both sides for sustained bilateral relations. Warped historical narratives can propagate extreme nationalism and irrational resentment between nation-states; before ultranationalist forces propel any further, Yoon and Kishida should engage in measures that give victims proper compensation, settle diverging interpretations of the past, and offer appropriate memorials and education for coming generations.<sup>43</sup> This would assuage the public and cushion against possible domestic political challenges that could undermine bilateral progress.

*Need for Japanese Reciprocity:* While the Yoon administration has already openly expressed and taken tangible steps to repair relations with Japan, intentions and efforts for reconciliation must be reciprocated by his Japanese counterpart. Japan's intensifying nationalist fervor, combined with the hardline faction within the LDP, may impede progress in relations. However, holding more high-level strategic dialogues and meetings with Yoon will be effective in conveying Japan's sincerity and reciprocity.

*Resume Multilateral Negotiations:* Although prospects have dimmed for China to resolve the DPRK's nuclear issue, it can still act as a mediator between the two Koreas to address the North's mounting nuclear arsenal and possibly bring about denuclearization through negotiation. Upholding peace and stability in the Korean peninsula would necessitate resuming the stalled six-party talks or engaging in similar diplomatic dialogue. As long as the Dragon and the Eagle continue wrangling over power, this may be a grandiose plan, but potentially feasible through high-level communication.

*Maintain Strategic Autonomy:* Caught between two great powers, Japan and Korea frequently have scant space for strategic maneuvering. As middle powers, it is necessary to ensure national security while pursuing strategic autonomy through thorough

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<sup>43</sup> "What's Behind Japan and South Korea's Latest Attempt to Mend Ties?", United States Institute of Peace, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/whats-behind-japan-and-south-koreas-latest-attempt-mend-ties>.

calculations of strategic interests. Japan and Korea have demonstrated ambitions to assume greater responsibility and become influential regional powers through their Indo-Pacific visions. Therefore, it will not be about ‘picking a side’ between China and the US, but rather navigating their foreign policies, which ought to involve keeping constructive relations with both without compromising national and global interests.

## **8. Conclusion**

Hopes of much-needed reconciliation between Korea and Japan have never been riper, as both Yoon and Kishida have expressed a strong will to rejuvenate strained relations. The impetus has largely come from the North’s nuclear threats and China’s growing influence, coupled with a sea of pressing global challenges that require the two to join hands. Historical antagonisms will remain a perennial feature of Japan-ROK relations, having the effect of determining the degree of cooperation and conflict between the two, which consequently shape levels of security cooperation. As the winds of change blow once again, it will be up to Yoon and Kishida to decide if they want to build walls or windmills. They will have to exercise caution to not follow in the footsteps of previous administrations and be cognizant of the societal and political barriers to durable rapport. It would be worthwhile to engage in pragmatic initiatives that seek to redress past scars while constructively enhancing cooperation in the security and economic spheres for prosperous relations.

# MNCs' Strategies to Face COVID Shocks in the Era of Post-Covid Competitiveness

**Showkat Ara Khanam<sup>1</sup>**  
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**Sumaya Binta Junnat<sup>3</sup>**

## Abstract

*COVID-19 gripped the whole world for nearly two years, and the economic activities of developing countries including Bangladesh have undergone a drastic shift. Now, the global economic scenario is recovering very fast. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how Multinational Corporations (MNCs) have managed economic empowerment in their value chain response and recovery efforts from COVID-19 and what strategic directions would help them fine-tune strategies in order to build a better competitive environment. This article is a by product of a counter review of available literature and a small number of interviews with multinational companies. The majority of the evidence for this query comes from the selected MNCs that have operations in Bangladesh. The paper*

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*responds to a number of questions, such as: (i) Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, what have MNCs done to protect their profitability (ii) What lessons have these companies learned about how to get people back into work, and adapt to new forms of work and new working practices post-COVID (iii) What strategies will these companies be using in the future that will likely enable supply chains to better withstand the impact of COVID-19 as well as future crises, and to contribute to improving outcomes<sup>4</sup> Although most companies found it more difficult to adopt new technologies to strengthen the position of the business, companies should redesign their business model as they return to full momentum. This research also highlights some of the initiatives that are taken by the selected MNCs, especially their strategic impact on the macro effect of covid-19 on international trade.*

**Key Words:** International Trade, Multi-national companies, Intended and Emergent Strategies, Value Chain, Recovery Strategies, Competitive Advantage.

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Eastham and Priyanka Kanani, Covid-19 response of multinational companies working in highly 'feminised' sectors, WOW Helpdesk Query No. 66, London, UK, 2021.



## 1. Introduction

Multinational companies are achieving competence and becoming competitive in the global business economy. Cost leadership strategic movements have been indispensable for them to split into international markets. Several factors such as government support, best practices in manufacturing, and economies of scale have also been instrumental to the expansion of multinational companies. Some MNCs have tailored to hard-hitting business conditions at home and shaped emergent strategies in other promising economies with similar market conditions. By choosing some selected MNCs working in Bangladesh, this work analyzed what kind of strategies these typical companies have developed to become successful in the world market and thus become strong competitors against their rivals. Due to supply chain disruptions, lots of uncertainties are underlined around the business world and in many economies, including Bangladesh, most industry participants found lower revenues in 2020 and 2021. Despite many challenges in the post-Covid business environment, opportunities exist. The emergence of more efficient business model and the concepts of unique products and services help to get ahead in the business landscape. MNCs are now competing through leveraging technology and maintaining the right balance of managing employees and clients. The paper ends with an empirical analysis of the chosen strategies by the MNCs through case studies of some leading companies in Bangladesh. The authors believe that the present research may help the business organizations as well as the practitioners within both the private and public arenas to review and fine-tune their ongoing strategies and enter into an innovative era of adopting the emergent knowledge strategy, and, in that way, they can take their companies to the edge of increasing return to scale.

The present study is divided into seven sections. Section one is an introduction which includes a problem statement, the objectives of the study, research methodology, and hypothesis build-up. Sections two and three detail the conceptual frame work of international trade and global business and the nexus between multinational corporations and global business. Section four specifies conceiving strategic effect of Covid shocks on global business and economy. Section five offers emergent strategies following Covid shocks.

Section six generates chosen strategic directions in the post-Covid era. The research concludes with a few recommendations for future action by multinational corporations in section seven.

### **1.1. Hypothesis**

The present research is based on the hypothesis that the realization of vulnerabilities of Covid shocks and formulation of a viable business model by combining specific strategies can improve MNCs' position in achieving above average profitability through efficiency in the value chain. In order to refute the null hypothesis, the researchers attempt to strategize towards emergent knowledge strategies, and devise a viable business model that might affect the MNCs' overall performance on a large scale and thereby increase their productivity.

By defining deliberate and emergent strategies of various MNCs working in Bangladesh, critically evaluating their strategic performances, and objectively measuring the level of their competitive advantages, authors attempt to verify the hypothesis, and show how their adopted strategies help to face the challenges of Covid shocks and thus elevate their competitiveness.

### **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

Broad objective of this research is to familiarize both academics and practitioners with the strong linkage between emergent knowledge strategies and competitive advantage and to explain how the emergent strategies contribute more to the achievement of organizational success.

#### **The specific objectives are to:**

- a) describe international trade and its approaches
- b) describe the efficacy of changing trends of strategies
- c) demonstrate strategic effect of Covid shocks on global business and economy
- d) portray macro and micro analysis of Covid on global MNCs
- e) analyze reasons behind the chosen strategies of MNCs

- f) outline the basic tenets of deliberate and emergent strategic
- g) critically evaluate the emergent strategies following Covid shocks

### **1.3. Research Methodology and Analytical Roadmap**

The research methodology for this study involves both primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources include interviews with academics and practitioners in the field of strategic leadership and management, as well as surveys and focus groups with employees and stakeholders of multinational companies operating in Bangladesh. Secondary sources of information include books, journals, archives, leaflets, advertisement materials, brochures, and other relevant documents of companies. The analytical roadmap for this study will involve several steps. The first step will be to conduct a comprehensive literature review of relevant academic and industry publications to gain a thorough understanding of the current state of knowledge on strategic leadership in multinational companies. The next step will be to collect data from primary and secondary sources using a variety of methods, including interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The data collected will be both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Once the data has been collected, it will be analyzed using a variety of techniques, including content analysis, thematic analysis, and statistical analysis. The analysis will be used to identify key themes and patterns in the data. Based on the results of the data analysis, the study will draw conclusions about the strategic leadership practices of multinational companies operating in Bangladesh in the post-COVID era. The findings of the study will be presented in a clear and concise manner, with a focus on recommendations for companies looking to improve their strategic leadership capabilities.

## **2. International Trade and Global Business**

The rules and regulation related to international trade and business must be accepted by the countries who want to expand their businesses. This is the highest priority to follow some basic principles of international law of trade and business for conducting the trade with other countries. All states seek the opportunity to

enjoy economic liberalization from other countries whereas they try to practice protectionist policies for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Early attempts to regulate trade were designed to facilitate trade by providing the basic code of conduct for those engaged in international trade. This code of conduct was developed in due course under both public and private international law to cater to the growth in trade and business activities. Accordingly, one of the visions of the new world order conceived towards the end of World War II was the liberalization of international trade to stimulate economic growth through the establishment of an International Trade Organization (ITO).

### **3. MNCs and Global Business: The Nexus**

There is a strong distinction between the practice of horizontal and vertical MNCs with regard to avoid trade cost and decrease in coordination / transportation cost of production across borders. MNCs are engaged in both vertical and horizontal investments. Vertical investment focuses on efficiency by undertaking different phases of production in different countries to produce where it is less expensive whereas horizontal investment emphasizes on desire to place production close to customers and avoid trade costs.

### **4. Strategic effect of COVID Shocks on Global Business and Economy**

The COVID-19 pandemic has a strong negative impact on the global economy, including Bangladesh. The decrease in investment flow is a major concern for any developing country. The report by UNCTAD highlights the significant fall in FDI across the world, and it is important to note that developing economies in Asia are not immune to these challenges. It is encouraging to hear that China and India have seen positive FDI inflows in high-tech sectors, but the decline in FDI flows in other developing nations in Asia, including ASEAN and South-Asian economies, is a concern. As the report suggests, much of the FDI in these economies is linked to the export-oriented apparel sectors, which have been hit hard by the

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Dr Surya P. Subedi DPhil (Oxford), International Trade and Business Law, the People's Public Security Publishing House Hanoi, 2012

global demand slump.<sup>6</sup> It is important for Bangladesh and other developing economies to diversify their investments to avoid relying solely on one sector for FDI. Additionally, governments and policymakers can create a more conducive investment climate by implementing policies that promote investment, such as reducing bureaucratic red tape, providing incentives, and ensuring political stability.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.1. Macro Effects of COVID 19 on Global Business**

It is true that the global economy is currently experiencing a significant slowdown due to various factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and tightening financial conditions. According to the forecast, the growth rate is expected to decline from 6.0 percent in 2021 to 3.2 percent in 2022 and 2.7 percent in 2023. This growth rate is the lowest since 2001, except for the global financial crisis and the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inflation is also expected to remain high, with a forecasted rise from 4.7 percent in 2021 to 8.8 percent in 2022. However, it is expected to decline to 6.5 percent in 2023 and 4.1 percent by 2024. These forecasts indicate a challenging economic environment for businesses and individuals alike, with rising costs of living and decreased economic growth. To mitigate the impact of these economic conditions, governments and central banks may implement various policies, such as monetary and fiscal policies, to stimulate growth and manage inflation. It is crucial to monitor and adapt to the changing economic landscape to ensure a stable and sustainable global economy.<sup>8</sup> To prepare for the challenges that lie ahead, it is important to draw on experiences to date. The estimates suggest a median output loss of about 6.5% in 2020, which has

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<sup>6</sup> R. Baldwin, & B. Weder di Mauro (Eds.), *Mitigating the COVID economic crisis: Act fast and do whatever it takes*. London, UK: CEPR Press, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Md. Sayful Islam, Sabbir Hussain, *The impact of COVID-19 on Global FDI and Bangladesh Economy*, <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/the-impact-covid-19-global-fdi-and-bangladesh-economy-2102717>, 1 June 2021.

<sup>8</sup> International Monetary Fund *World Economic Outlook: Countering the cost-of-Living crisis*, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>, 11 October, 2022.

narrowed to around 4% of the pre-pandemic trend by the end of 2021. The losses are highly dispersed across economies due to varying economic structures and society's responses. To quantify the economic impact of various pandemic scenarios, an economic-epidemiological model can be used. This model can help policymakers understand the potential impact of different pandemic scenarios on the economy and prepare appropriate policy responses. It is crucial to continue monitoring the situation and adapt policies as necessary to ensure a sustainable and stable global economy.<sup>9</sup>

## 4.2 Micro Analysis of Covid on Global MNCs

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global MNCs (Multinational Corporations) at the micro level. Some of the key areas of impact include:

***Supply Chain Disruptions:*** The pandemic has disrupted global supply chains, causing delays and shortages of raw materials, components, and finished goods. MNCs with complex and globalized supply chains have been particularly affected.

***Shift to Remote Work:*** To ensure business continuity, MNCs have shifted to remote work arrangements, requiring significant investments in technology and infrastructure to support remote work. However, remote work has also presented challenges in managing productivity, communication, and collaboration.

***Financial Impact:*** MNCs have been impacted by the pandemic's financial fallout, including decreased revenues, increased costs, and decreased demand. These financial impacts have led to cost-cutting measures, including layoffs, furloughs, and wage cuts.

***Regulatory Challenges:*** The pandemic has brought about new regulatory challenges for MNCs, including travel restrictions, quarantine requirements, and health and safety regulations.

***Innovation Opportunities:*** MNCs have also found opportunities for innovation during the pandemic, including new products and services, digital transformation, and supply chain optimization.

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<sup>9</sup> Phurichai Rungcharoenkitkul Macroeconomic effects of Covid-19: a mid-term review, <https://www.bis.org/publ/work959.htm>, 11 August 2021.

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global MNCs at the micro level, with supply chain disruptions, a shift to remote work, financial impacts, regulatory challenges, and innovation opportunities. MNCs must continue to adapt and evolve to meet these challenges and thrive in the new normal.

## **5. Emergent Strategies following Covid Shocks**

MNCs have faced challenges in mapping emergent strategies to navigate the Covid shocks. The pandemic has disrupted global markets and supply chains, causing uncertainty and volatility in many industries. As a result, many companies have had to rapidly adapt to the the strategies to respond to changing market conditions and customer preferences. However, it is important to note that some MNCs have been more successful than others in navigating the Covid shocks. This may be due to differences in strategic knowledge and agility, as well as the ability to quickly pivot and innovate in response to changing circumstances. To effectively navigate the Covid shocks, MNCs may need to reassess their strategic priorities, invest in digital transformation and innovation, and develop a more agile approach to strategic planning. This may involve leveraging data analytics and other advanced technologies to better understand customer preferences and market trends, as well as collaborating with partners and stakeholders to identify new opportunities and mitigate risks.

### **5.1. Conceptualizing Emergent Strategies**

Conceptualizing emergent strategies involves a deep understanding of time perception and future dynamics, as well as the impact of uncertainty on strategic decision-making. Emergent strategies are characterized by their adaptive and flexible nature, which allows companies to quickly respond to changing circumstances and take advantage of new opportunities. In order to develop effective emergent knowledge strategies, companies must first have a clear understanding of the evolving market landscape and the challenges and opportunities presented by the Covid shocks. This requires a probabilistic approach to strategic thinking, in which companies must be willing to accept a degree of uncertainty and adjust their strategies as new information becomes available. Ultimately,

conceptualizing emergent strategies requires a willingness to experiment, take risks, and learn from failure. This requires a culture of innovation and openness to new ideas, as well as the ability to quickly pivot and adapt to changing circumstances. Companies that are able to develop effective emergent knowledge strategies will be better equipped to navigate the uncertainties and challenges of the post-Covid world.

## **5.2. Efficacy of Changing Trends of Strategies**

The efficacy of changing trends of strategies will depend on how well businesses are able to adapt to the new reality of the post-COVID world. Those that are able to be flexible, agile, and responsive to changing trends will be better positioned to succeed in the long term. However, it will also be important for companies to strike a balance between short-term adjustments and long-term strategic planning, in order to ensure that they are able to remain competitive and meet the evolving needs of their customers. Deliberate knowledge strategies involve leveraging existing knowledge and capabilities to achieve predetermined goals, whereas emergent knowledge strategies involve exploring new knowledge and capabilities to respond to unforeseen events and opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Both types of strategies have their place in business, and it is important for companies to have a balance between the two. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for companies to be more adaptable and open to emergent knowledge strategies to navigate through unprecedented disruptions.

## **5.3. Competitive Advantage through the Emergent Strategy: Case Studies on Selected MNCs in Bangladesh**

Several multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Bangladesh have faced a range of COVID-19 shocks, which have affected their operations, revenues, and profitability. Some examples of such MNCs are:

### ***5.3.1. Unilever Bangladesh Limited***

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<sup>10</sup> Bolisani, E., & Bratianu, C. Emergent knowledge strategies: Strategic thinking in knowledge management. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018.



Unilever is a multinational consumer goods company that was established in 1929 by the merger of Margarine Unie and Lever Brothers. The company operates in over 190 countries and sells around 400 brands, including well-known products such as Dove, Knorr, Lipton, Lux, Rexona, Sunsilk, and many others. Unilever Bangladesh Limited is a subsidiary of Unilever. Unilever Bangladesh was established in 1964 as Lever Brothers Bangladesh Limited and later changed its name to Unilever Bangladesh Limited in 2004.

The company operates in several categories, including personal care, home care, and foods. Some of the well-known brands marketed by Unilever Bangladesh include Lux, Lifebuoy, Sunsilk, Dove, Surf Excel, Closeup, Pepsodent, and Lipton. The company has set ambitious targets to reduce its environmental impact, improve the livelihood of people in its value chain, and promote responsible sourcing practices.

It is difficult to determine which strategy, emergent or deliberate, is more prominent in the strategic focus of Unilever Bangladesh Limited as both approaches are given equal importance by the company. Deliberate strategies are crucial for Unilever Bangladesh to achieve its long-term objectives and align its operations with the global Unilever group. These strategies include expanding the company's market presence, investing in product innovation, and leveraging the strength of its brands. However, Unilever Bangladesh also places great emphasis on emergent strategies that allows the company to quickly adapt to changing market conditions and customer preferences.

This emergent strategy is reflected in the company's emphasis on research and development and its focus on sustainability and social responsibility. For example, Unilever Bangladesh has invested in research and development to develop products that are tailored to local preferences and needs, such as its line of Fair & Lovely skin lightening products. Additionally, the company's sustainability initiatives, such as its Sustainable Living Plan, reflect its commitment to emerging trends related to environmental and social responsibility.

### ***5.3.2 Nestle Bangladesh Limited***

The company is based in Switzerland and is one of the largest food brands in the world. Nestle is spread out across 186 countries and has approximately 2000 brands. Nestle Bangladesh commercially began its operations in 1994. Nestle has also faced a decline in sales due to the closure of restaurants and food-service establishments. However, the company has continued to invest in product innovation and marketing to maintain its market position.

Based on the information provided, Nestle Bangladesh's strategic focus seems to be more deliberate than emergent. The company appears to have a clear and established focus on creating shared value, assimilating local flavors, enhancing quality of life, and maximizing profitability while being virtuous. These strategies suggest a deliberate approach, where the company has a well-defined plan and is working to achieve specific goals. However, the emphasis on minimizing unnecessary costs and improving operational efficiency through standardized processes and automation could suggest an emergent approach, where the company is adapting to changing circumstances and seeking new ways to improve efficiency. Overall, it seems that Nestle Bangladesh's strategic focus is primarily deliberate with some emergent elements.

### ***5.3.3. GSK Bangladesh Limited***

GSK Bangladesh Limited is a subsidiary of the global pharmaceutical and consumer goods company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). The company operates in the pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh and provides a range of products in areas such as respiratory, vaccines, and dermatology, among others. GSK Bangladesh is committed to improving the health of people in Bangladesh through innovative solutions and partnerships with local stakeholders. The company has a strong focus on quality and compliance and is dedicated to upholding the highest ethical standards in its operations.

It is difficult to determine whether the strategic focus of GSK Bangladesh Limited is predominantly emergent or deliberate based on the limited information provided. However, the fact that the company has been able to maintain its operations and meet the

demand for essential medicines despite the challenges posed by the pandemic suggests that it may have had some deliberate strategies in place to ensure business continuity. At the same time, the company may also have had to adopt emergent strategies in response to the evolving situation, such as finding new ways to manage its supply chain and transportation challenges.

#### ***5.3.4. British American Tobacco Bangladesh***

British American Tobacco (BAT) Bangladesh is a subsidiary of British American Tobacco, a British multinational company that produces and sells tobacco products. BAT Bangladesh was established in 1910 and operates in Bangladesh with a mission to provide high-quality tobacco products to its consumers while operating responsibly and sustainably. The company produces and markets well-known cigarette brands such as Benson & Hedges, John Player Gold Leaf, Capstan, and Star. BAT Bangladesh also has a significant presence in the leaf tobacco sector in Bangladesh, working closely with local farmers to ensure a sustainable supply chain. The pandemic has impacted the sales of British American Tobacco Bangladesh, as the closure of retail shops and restaurants reduced the demand for tobacco products. The company has responded by increasing its focus on the e-commerce channel and launching new products to cater to changing consumer preferences. Like most MNCs, they may have a pre-existing deliberate strategy that they may need to adapt to the emergent challenges posed by the pandemic. It is possible that they are exploring new opportunities to meet the changing consumer demands, while also focusing on maintaining their existing market share and profitability.

#### ***5.3.5. Grameenphone Ltd.***

Grameenphone is the largest mobile phone operator in Bangladesh and was established in 1997 with the aim of empowering the rural population of the country. It is a joint venture between Telenor Group of Norway and Grameen Telecom Corporation of Bangladesh. In 2020, Grameenphone recorded the highest profit among all MNCs in Bangladesh, amounting to Tk 3,718 crore.

Grameenphone's strategic focus is on providing high-quality telecommunication services that are accessible to people from all walks of life. The company aims to build strong relationships with its stakeholders and differentiate itself from its competitors by providing the best services, even in the most remote areas of the country. It appears that Grameenphone's strategic focus is deliberate. This means that the company has intentionally identified its strategic priorities and has designed its business operations and resources to align with these priorities. The strategic focus areas mentioned - coverage of both urban and rural areas, maintaining quality network, building connections and relationships, and conformance to specification- indicate a clear intention on the part of Grameenphone to prioritize these areas as part of its overall strategy. Deliberate strategy is often contrasted with emergent strategy, which arises through a more organic or adaptive process based on evolving circumstances or opportunities. However, it's worth noting that elements of both deliberate and emergent strategy can coexist within a company's overall strategic approach.

In the light of the above discussion, we see that MNCs operating in Bangladesh have faced a range of COVID-19 shocks, including supply chain disruptions, decreased sales, and transportation challenges. However, companies that have been able to adapt and innovate have been able to mitigate the impact and maintain their operations in the face of these challenge. In such situations, emergent knowledge strategies can be valuable in helping companies adapt to changing circumstances and respond to new challenges. Emergent knowledge strategies involve leveraging the expertise, skills, and knowledge of employees and stakeholders to develop new approaches to business challenges. This can involve processes like brainstorming, experimentation, and collaboration to generate new ideas and identify innovative solutions. By embracing emergent knowledge strategies, companies can be more flexible and responsive to emerging trends and challenges. This approach allows companies to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and seize new opportunities that arise, helping them stay ahead of the curve and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving business landscape.

One important aspect of emergent knowledge strategies is the need to recognize the impact of uncertainty on the way we think about the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that the future is more uncertain than we previously thought, and this has implications for how we approach knowledge management and strategy design. Specifically, it requires a shift from deterministic thinking to probabilistic thinking, which acknowledges the role of chance and uncertainty in shaping the future.

In addition, organizations must be prepared to create new knowledge structures, knowledge capital, and critical knowledge capabilities to adapt to changing circumstances. This requires a deep understanding of the theory of knowledge fields and the learning-unlearning process's new dynamics. Specifically, companies must be able to identify and leverage knowledge assets across the organization, create new knowledge assets where needed, and continually assess and refine their knowledge management and strategy design processes.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, emergent knowledge strategies are critical for organizations to navigate the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. By embracing a probabilistic approach to thinking about the future, creating new knowledge structures and capabilities, and continually assessing and refining their knowledge management processes, companies can be better positioned to adapt to changing circumstances and thrive in an uncertain and rapidly evolving business landscape.

## **6. Chosen Strategic Directions in the Post Covid Era**

### **6.1. Issues of Strategic Directions**

It is difficult to predict the exact strategic directions that MNCs working in Bangladesh will take in the post-COVID era, as much

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<sup>11</sup> Bratianu, C. Strategies to enhance intergenerational learning in universities. In J. Rooney & Murthy (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Intellectual Capital, Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning*, University of Sydney Business School, Sydney, Australia, 6–7 November 2014, pp. 83–90. Reading, UK: Academic Conferences and Publishing International, 2014.

will depend on how the pandemic continues to evolve and its impact on the global and local economy. However, we may recommend some possible strategic directions that MNCs operating in Bangladesh may pursue:

### ***6.1.1. Digital Transformation***

The pandemic has accelerated the shift towards digital technologies, and MNCs may prioritize investments in digitalization to enable remote work and online transactions. This could include developing digital platforms and solutions for customers and employees, investing in digital infrastructure, and leveraging data analytics to gain insights into customer behavior and market trends.

### ***6.1.2. Supply Chain Resilience***

The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, and MNCs may seek to increase their supply chain resilience by diversifying their supplier base, adopting local sourcing strategies, and investing in technologies like block chain to improve supply chain visibility and traceability.

### ***6.1.3. Sustainability and ESG***

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations are becoming increasingly important for investors and customers, and MNCs may prioritize sustainability initiatives to improve their ESG performance. This could include investments in renewable energy, waste reduction, and social impact programs that benefit local communities.

### ***6.1.4. Collaboration and Partnerships***

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of collaboration and partnerships, and MNCs may seek to develop strategic partnerships with local companies and organizations to share expertise, resources, and knowledge. This could include partnerships to develop new products and services, invest in infrastructure, or support social and environmental initiatives.

### ***6.1.5. Innovation and R&D***

The pandemic has created new challenges and opportunities, and MNCs may prioritize innovation and R&D to develop new products and services that meet changing customer needs. This could include

investments in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, robotics, and biotechnology to improve efficiency and competitiveness.

## **6.2. Future Strategic Directions**

### ***6.2.1. Strategic Leadership***

Strategic leadership refers to the ability of leaders to anticipate, envision, and create a path for their organizations to achieve their long-term goals and objectives. Strategic leaders are responsible for setting the direction of the organization and making decisions that will help the organization achieve its mission and vision. Strategic leaders have a clear and compelling vision for the future of the organization. They are able to communicate this vision to employees, stakeholders, and customers, and inspire them to work towards achieving it. Strategic leaders are able to think critically and creatively about the future of the organization. They are able to analyze data, identify trends, and develop strategic plans that will help the organization achieve its goals. They are not afraid to take risks in order to achieve their objectives. They are able to collaborate effectively with others, including employees, stakeholders, and customers. They are able to build strong relationships and partnerships that will help the organization achieve its goals. Strategic leaders are able to adapt to changing circumstances and adjust their strategies as needed. They are able to be flexible and agile in the face of new challenges and opportunities. In summary, strategic leadership is critical for the success of organizations in today's rapidly changing business environment. Strategic leaders must be able to develop a clear vision for the future, think strategically, take calculated risks, collaborate effectively with others, and be adaptable to changing circumstances.

### **6.2.2. Ensuring Global Justice in Global Business**

Multinational companies are playing a dominant role in the global economy. The growing fragmentation of production is largely driven by MNCs. Although there is a strong distinction between the practice of horizontal and vertical MNCs regarding avoid trade cost and decrease in coordination / transportation cost of production across borders, MNCs are engaged both in vertical and horizontal

investments. Vertical investment focuses on efficiency by undertaking different phases of production in different countries to produce where it is less expensive whereas horizontal investment emphasizes on desire to place production close to customers and avoid trade costs.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between international trade and investment has traditionally been a heavily discussed policy topic and the growing importance of MNEs has only intensified this. Originally, before Global Value Chains, trade and investment were generally regarded as substitutes directly related to the trade-off between proximity and concentration (Brainard, 1997): when trade barriers are high, it is more profitable for firms to directly produce in the consumers' market through FDI. But by doing so, firms lose the advantage of concentration, which is related to lower costs when producing in one location (scale economies) and exporting products to all consuming countries. With the focus shifting from horizontal towards more vertical MNE activities in GVCs, the idea has gained ground that trade and investment have become rather complements instead of substitutes. For example, affiliates created to manufacture or distribute products need to import intermediates or finished products.

### **6.2.3. Rethinking MNCs Global Business Vision**

In the post-Covid era, MNCs need to rethink their global business vision and focus on profitable growth through innovative strategies. They need to identify radical ideas that can create upward momentum and facilitate quantum leaps in the creation of value proposition for their customers. MNCs should focus on innovativeness and think about how they can change their offerings to capture the market they have identified. This may involve eliminating features that are creating low or poor value for their customers. By doing so, they can create more value for their customers and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Rather than focusing on what their competitors are doing, MNCs should focus on value innovation. This involves creating more value

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Cadestin, Koen De Backer, Isabelle Desnoyers-James, Sébastien Miroudot, Ming Ye and Davide Rigo, *Multinational Enterprises and Global Value Chains: New Insights On The Trade–Investment Nexus*, 2018.



for their customers by developing products and services that meet their needs and expectations. This can be achieved by leveraging technology, developing new business models, and collaborating with other companies to create new solutions. Overall, MNCs need to rethink their global business vision and focus on profitable growth through innovative strategies that create more value for their customers. They need to be agile, adaptable, and willing to take risks in order to stay ahead of the competition.

#### **6.2.4. MNCs Strategic Reengineering**

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced multinational companies to reengineer their strategic plans and adopt emergent knowledge strategies in response to the unexpected changes and uncertainties that have arisen. Deliberate business strategies that were developed prior to the pandemic have become obsolete, and new strategies must be developed that are flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.

### **7. In Lieu of Conclusion**

In the forgoing discussion, the present work examined a number of issues with regard to MNCs' strategies following the Covid-hit business operation. It analyzed how MNCs managed to respond to the shocks driven by the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper gave an account of lessons the pandemic had left for MNCs and provide a compressive road-map to face the challenges of Covid-19. Based on the issues and realities arisen during the pandemic, the present work recommended employees of strategic directions that the MNCs may follow in coming days and take their companies to move towards increasing return to scale of their operation. This research recommended a number of strategies that MNCs can adopt in future days and stand with the shocks of the pandemic. The discussion made it clear that there is no empirical evidence that deliberate strategies are more successful than emergent strategies. In fact, high-growth companies are often those that are able to apply strategic thinking to business initiatives and adapt quickly to changing market conditions. MNCs need to be agile and adaptable, and be willing to experiment and take risks in order to remain competitive in the post-Covid era.

The author listed five Bangladeshi MNCs that include Unilever Bangladesh Limited, Nestle Bangladesh Limited, GSK Bangladesh Limited, British American Tobacco Limited, Grameenphone Limited and explained how the pandemic brought disasters in their operation. The paper also directed how these companies can adopt viable strategic and gain effective competitiveness in future days to face the Covid-hit economy of Bangladesh.

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Hrita Nushin

### Cyber Security

The Emerging Threat Landscape

**ISSUE BRIEF**

**Introduction**

During the last seven years, more and more digital products became part of our daily life. We talk to friends over social networks sites, discuss with people from all over the world to increase business and spend less money through digital communication methods. More and more companies and governments use digital products and services and more and more data is stored everywhere on a server. But for some we become dependent on digital products, for example, become vulnerable to digital threats like ransom. Cyber attacks are not only more frequent danger on our personal data, it is found that cyber attacks which target hospitals and power plants or other infrastructure infrastructure of a nation can also cause their damage.

**Security threats from cyber spaces**

It is clear world is connected by internet, cyber attacks are never just a national threat. Computer viruses, worms and botnets usually affect computer networks, but some governments and many companies who is using electronic data processing have to find a way to secure data, to prevent privacy and confidential data against unauthorized access, to control and limit access to internet and to protect information and to find an effective and cost-effective solution. Several countries around the world are introducing law to define what is worthy to protect. A common view that identifies these protective measures to cyber security, threats that try to gain unauthorized access to data, networks or computers are so called cyber attacks. The type of cyber law will be discussed later in this paper.

There is more to cyber security, one of the main questions is that can technological growth still progress to internet networks and services, or do they stop? The answer will probably be to find an effective solution of network to be able to manage of security gaps. These security gaps can exist within the set-up hardware used by the governmental institutions or companies, but the legal security gap is a serious administration that is giving a set of basic system access permissions. Using new systems means some progress in a few years, but the legal system settings, which are not the full of knowledge of the person behind the screen has some serious problems and can easily control, address and change system settings. With the help of the knowledge of the person behind the screen, it can be a serious threat. With the help of the knowledge of the person behind the screen, it can be a serious threat. With the help of the knowledge of the person behind the screen, it can be a serious threat.

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## About BIPSS

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) is a leading institute in Bangladesh for informed analysis on all aspects of broad spectrum of peace and security studies in the region and beyond. It is a non-party, nonprofit organisation and independent think tank which provides significant platform for the leading strategic thinkers, academics, members of civil society, former members of the foreign and armed services and media persons to chalk out a comprehensive framework for peace and security issues. The Institute is headed by the President of BIPSS, Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd). He directs and coordinates all research and administrative activities of the Institute. A team of highly qualified full-time researchers with varied social science background conduct research activities. BIPSS also maintains a pool of affiliated experts whom we engage frequently for different assignments.

BIPSS has also established two specialised centres within its framework named Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research (BCTR) and Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS). BCTR is the first centre of its kind in Bangladesh dedicated to the study and research on terrorism related issues. The Centre is headed by Mr. Shafqat Munir who has been engaged with various specialized centres on terrorism in the Asia Pacific region as well as other parts of the world. BCTR has been working in partnership with a number of international centres on terrorism research in South Asia, South East Asia, Europe and USA. On the other hand, Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS) has been established to understand, study and analyse Chinese Foreign Policy and Chinese strategic and security posture. It also aims to study Chinese economic advancement with a view to advocating greater economic and development cooperation between Bangladesh and China as well as China and the greater South Asian region.

BIPSS maintains an interactive website to inform, share and exchange knowledge and ideas to enrich the people who have a greater stake in peace and security. You are cordially welcome to visit our website at [www.bipss.org.bd](http://www.bipss.org.bd). You can also write to us to express your opinion via email- [info@bipss.org.bd](mailto:info@bipss.org.bd).

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