

THE ROLE OF DEFENCE DIPLOMACY TO ATTAIN FOREIGN POLICY GOALS: A BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

Sourav Ghosh*

Abstract

Unlike the general belief that conducting diplomacy is mainly the task of professional diplomats and the ministry concerned, diplomacy in the changed world system is no longer confined to the domains of career diplomats and the foreign ministry only. Military power constitutes an integral component of national power and plays a significant role in implementing state policy. It generates various capacities for foreign policy, making it an essential element of diplomacy. In this regard, defence diplomacy has been a branch of diplomacy that aims to use the armed forces in a non-coercive manner to achieve foreign policy goals through a set of tools such as high-level military official visits, joint military drills, security and defence agreements, participating in peacekeeping missions, and providing assistance to other countries such as aid and relief during humanitarian crises. In recent time, Bangladesh has stepped into the sphere of defence diplomacy on a small scale. Being one of the top contributors to the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, Bangladesh has long been playing a significant role in maintaining peace and stability in conflicting states in the African region. Additionally, the country regularly participates in bilateral as well as multilateral military drills to ramp up its defence diplomacy with other nations. However, despite its immense potential, Bangladesh has not yet been able to efficiently utilise defence diplomacy to attain its foreign policy goals. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyse the developments in Bangladesh's defence diplomacy and offers a bunch of policy recommendations based on the core findings.

Keywords: Defence Diplomacy, Defence Attachés, Tools of Defence Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Defence Cooperation, Peacekeeping Mission

* Sourav Ghosh, Research Assistant, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA).

INTRODUCTION

Defence diplomacy has been a widely used tool for pursuing diplomatic goals in the past few decades. Since the end of the Second World War, states have emphasised the need to include military personnel in the diplomatic arena. World's major powers, such as the United States, China, Russia and India, have long been applying defence diplomacy as a technique to achieve their foreign policy goals. Consequently, the role of the military is no longer confined to defending the sovereign integrity of the states; it has also started to contribute to diplomatic practices between the states.¹ As for example, a close eye on the diplomatic traditions of the Asian countries reveals that the military has a strong influence on foreign policy making in ASEAN countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.² Although Bangladesh is yet to ramp up its efforts to integrate defence diplomacy with traditional diplomacy in order to pursue its foreign policy goals, its achievements in this sphere are no less significant.

Considering the significance of defence diplomacy, South Asian countries, especially India and Pakistan, have started to integrate defence diplomacy to attain foreign policy goals in the last few decades. Accordingly, Bangladesh has also started to practice defence diplomacy to strengthen its ties with some other countries. Over the years, Bangladesh's armed forces have participated in joint military drills, provided training to other countries' military personnel, and participated in post-disaster relief efforts in some countries, which are all considered as vital components of defence diplomacy. Participating in the United Nations Peacekeeping missions is another form of defence diplomacy that countries see as an opportunity to enhance their importance and influence. In this regard, Bangladesh has been one of the most significant contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping missions over the past few decades. In recent years, the

¹ Kamal Davar, "Military Diplomacy: A Vital Tool for Furthering National Interests," *Indian Defence Review*, Vol.33, No.2, April-June 2018, available at: <<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/military-diplomacy-a-vital-tool-for-furthering-national-interests/>> (accessed on March 15, 2022)

² David Capie, "Structures, Shocks and Norm Change: Explaining the Late Rise of Asia's Defence Diplomacy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.35, No.1, April 2013, pp.1-26.

number has even gone up, indicating the Bangladesh army's growing importance in maintaining peace in different parts of the world.³

However, the concept and appeal of defence diplomacy is still relatively new in the diplomatic arena of Bangladesh. Despite its enormous potential, Bangladesh's defence diplomacy has received a little academic attention. At a time when the geostrategic significance of Bangladesh has gradually been elevating, and the Bangladesh Army has been making an outstanding contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, there is ample scope for research on how Bangladesh can enhance its bilateral ties with states across the world through defence diplomacy. Given this context, while keeping the strategic and policy-making importance of defence diplomacy in mind, the present study aims to understand the significance of defence diplomacy in the overall diplomatic practices of Bangladesh in the context of the twenty-first century.

The study progresses its arguments in different sections. After introduction, it offers the reader with the conceptual understanding of the term 'defence diplomacy.' In the subsequent sections, this article tries to analyse what makes defence diplomacy distinct from traditional diplomacy, and scrutinises the nexus between defence diplomacy and foreign policy, the practice of defence diplomacy around the world, and the past as well as present status of such diplomatic practices in Bangladesh. In the final section, the study comes up with a bunch of recommendations that Bangladesh's policy makers may make to reap the benefits of defence diplomacy as a tool for achieving the country's foreign policy objectives.

DEFENCE DIPLOMACY: A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Defining *defence diplomacy* is a challenging task since the said term is used to describe a multitude of different activities. The term itself is a composite form of two words: *defence* and *diplomacy*. Because of the coexistence of these two contradictory terms, scholars often tend to provide broad and different definitions of defence diplomacy. Matsuda Yasuhiro, for example, defines defence

³ Ilyas Iftekhar Rasul, "Bangladesh in peacekeeping: 30 years of service and sacrifice," *The Daily Star*, May 29, 2018, available at: <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/bangladesh-peacekeeping-30-years-service-and-sacrifice-1582756>> (accessed on January 24, 2022)