

PART A

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

General Influences on Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

This chapter identifies the broad, underlying pressures and themes which have become intrinsic to Bangladesh's foreign policy and to the conduct of Bangladesh's relations with India and Pakistan, not only during the period under study, but to the present day. Subsequent chapters interpret the themes in terms of specific regional and domestic events. The general pressures determined as most influential in shaping Bangladesh's foreign policy have been placed in the following categories: Bangladesh's colonial past; its political underdevelopment; the issue of sovereign independence; cultural and religious identity; fear of Indian dominance; Indian security concerns; and Bangladesh's poverty and dependence on foreign aid. Subsequent chapters will show in more depth how these themes apply to specific events associated with Bangladesh's relations with India and Pakistan.

Several ingredients are common to the foreign policies of the states of the South Asian region, but in Bangladesh's case, one element can be singled out as meriting special consideration. The legacy of colonialism is borne by each of these states, but for the inhabitants of Bangladesh, the process of extrication from a colonial relationship not once, but twice, has had an extraordinarily pervasive impact on their state's political structure and foreign policy dealings. Bangladesh was subjected to colonial rule not only under the British Raj, but also from 1947 to 1971, as Pakistan's east wing, subordinate to the whims of the central government located in the west wing.¹

The many problems associated with a colonial past, such as political underdevelopment,² and the ensuing susceptibility to military intervention in

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- 1 For an analysis of east wing subordination see W.H. Morris-Jones, 'Pakistan Post Mortem and the Roots of Bangladesh', in M.M. Khan & H.M. Zafarullah, *Politics and Bureaucracy in a New Nation: Bangladesh*, Dacca, 1980, pp. 26-34.
 - 2 Rounaq Jahan makes the point that once Bangladesh had achieved independence, the establishment of a political structure was even more important for stability than the establishment of an administration. R. Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems*

domestic affairs, indicate the diversity of influences where Bangladesh is concerned. In turn, this complexity is reflected in Bangladesh's foreign policy. The focus on preservation of sovereignty and the development of national identity underlies much of foreign policy decision-making throughout Bangladesh's history.

The slow progress in South Asian regional cooperation is also traceable partly to colonial imposition, impinging in turn on Bangladesh's foreign relations. The hasty and artificial delineation of the Indo-Pakistan border in 1947 resulted in an inevitably lopsided bipolarity in the region, with India far surpassing each of the other states in size and military capability. This imbalance was conducive to ethnic disharmony and unfavourable for regional integration. As a result, there has been a propensity for the individual South Asian states to seek links outside the region, and for the smaller states to be distrustful and wary of a predominant India. Both of these tendencies apply strongly to Bangladesh, despite its intrinsic cultural bond with India.

The imbalance which gave India its pre-eminence in the region and the accompanying lack of rapport between the states can be linked directly to South Asia's colonial past. India saw itself as the natural 'successor' state to the British Raj in the subcontinent,³ or at least that was the way in which the smaller states nervously interpreted India's self-perception, and continue to do so up to the present.

It is a widely held opinion amongst scholars of Bangladesh and other post-colonial states that colonial misrule leads to post-independence problems such as political instability, factionalism and the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of minorities.⁴ The partial borrowing or inheritance of colonial institutions, many of which fostered patronage, frequent state

and Issues, Dhaka, 1980, p. 60. Perhaps the most important ingredient in political development is the establishment of a strong political party system, which, according to political theorist, Samuel Huntington, is the 'prerequisite for political stability in modernising countries'. He considers that a strong party system can divert revolutionary political activity and 'channel the participation of newly formed groups in such a manner as not to disrupt the system'. S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, 1968, p. 412.

3 B. Sen Gupta, *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 1, New Delhi, 1986, p.19.

4 For example: G. Hossain, *General Ziaur Rahman and the BNP: Political Transformation of a Military Regime*, Dhaka, 1988, pp. 4-6, B. Sen Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-9, D.H. McMillen (ed.), *Asian Perspectives on International Security*, London, 1984, p. 164, A. Kazancigil (ed.), *The State in Global Perspective*, Aldershot, Hants., 1986, p. 285.

intervention, repression and authoritarianism, also hampers political stability, making it difficult for the newly independent state to develop strong political parties and a sense of national identity.⁵

The region which became Bangladesh, as part of a former British colony, subsequently as a province under West Pakistani dominance, and finally as an independent state, endured all of these destabilising legacies over a much longer period than did any of the other South Asian states.⁶ It was not until December 1971 that cultural and national concerns were convergent enough to create at least some degree of political stability in the region which became Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the very fact that Bangladesh finally managed to gain independence, despite such an oppressive and turbulent political past, points to the underlying strength and resilience of Bengali cultural unity.

The resultant disparity between Bangladesh's opportunity to develop a stable political structure and that of the other South Asian states therefore must be kept in mind throughout any examination of Bangladesh's relations with India and Pakistan. The quest for internal political stability and cohesion is an aim common to most states, and requires at least a minimum level of development in the political structure to have some chance of attainment. For a comparatively new state like Bangladesh, which also has had to bear an excessive colonial legacy, this quest has been an elusive one, despite the advantage of cultural homogeneity. Problems such as extreme poverty, civil disorder, a politicised military and the existence of elite groups determined to preserve a monopoly of power, have all interfered with the various attempts to implement a democratic political structure in Bangladesh. The relationship between these difficulties and Bangladeshi foreign policy, particularly apparent during the first years of Bangladesh's existence, has been articulated thus:

The fundamental problem was that from 1972 to 1975, Bangladesh was forced to undergo what might fairly be described as a period of political adolescence, and the behaviour of the ruling Awami League exhibited many of the traits associated with adolescence - naivety, petulance, insecurity, idealism, rashness and contradiction. These characteristics were reflected faithfully in foreign policy under Sheikh Mujib's

5 G. Hossain, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5. Ainslee Embree points out that this partial borrowing also can be coloured with admiration for the values and attitudes of the former rulers. A.T. Embree, *Imagining India*, Delhi, 1989, p. 188.

6 In pre-British times, Bengal enjoyed relative autonomy. Although Bengal became part of the Mughal empire in 1576, it was ruled independently of the central government virtually until the death of Aurangzeb (1707), the last significant Mughal ruler. See D.A. Wright, *Bangladesh: Origins and Indian Ocean Relations (1971-1975)*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 17.

administration, and account for much in Bangladesh's attitudes to its Indian Ocean neighbours during the period.⁷

Because Bangladesh's nation building strategies have had less time to develop than those of India and Pakistan, the various attitudes and responses of the successive Bangladeshi governments to regional or global affairs have been moulded often by quite different concerns.⁸ More often than not, these concerns have been dictated by sheer necessity rather than by ideological considerations,⁹ although the latter have played a part. The difficulty of finding the balance between a foreign policy determined by necessity and one which reinforced national identity and sovereignty has beset each of the Bangladeshi governments. Their dilemma of bridging the gap between policy and practice in international relations has been particularly acute.

A state needs political maturity in order to achieve internal stability and prevent external intervention, the assumption being that as a new state eventually matures, the governing elites should be more able to evaluate what is practicable as well as desirable in their foreign policies.¹⁰ Ingredients considered to exemplify the ideal of political maturity in foreign policy dealings include the mutual recognition of and respect for other states as political equals, and the commitment not to interfere in each others' affairs.¹¹ Unfortunately, such an ideal is not easily put into practice, as has been pointed out by Henry Kissinger:

When the domestic structures are based on fundamentally different conceptions of what is just, the conduct of international affairs grows more complex. Then it becomes difficult even to define the nature of disagreement because what seems most obvious to one side appears most problematic to the other...Incompatible domestic structures can passively generate a gulf, simply because of the difficulty of achieving a consensus about the nature of "reasonable" aims and methods.¹²

7 *ibid.*, p. 264.

8 P. Ghosh applies to the South Asian states the notion that differing stages of political development lead to conflicting strategic and diplomatic positions. P.S. Ghosh, *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 3, 14, & 229.

9 D.A. Wright, 'Bangladesh: Foreign Policy For the 1980s', *Bangladesh Bulletin*, vol. 14, 1987, p. 21.

10 C. Clapham, & W. Wallace (eds), *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, Westmead, 1977, p. 174.

11 B. Buzan, 'Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1984, p. 121.

12 H.A. Kissinger, 'Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy', in J.N. Rosenau, *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Reader in Research and Theory*, New York, 1969, pp. 261-2.

Such impediments to harmonious foreign relations have permeated Bangladesh's relations with India and Pakistan.

The complexity of Bangladeshi foreign policy, engendered partly by the unique qualities of the state's colonial heritage, becomes apparent particularly when examining the theme of national security. The term 'security' has been defined as meaning the 'protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity'.¹³ If these values are considered to be minimum necessities, then for Bangladesh, a state weakened and unstable from the outset, the notion of security is of vital importance.

The difficulty of translating formal independence into political reality has not been unique to Bangladesh, but the degree of difficulty has been considerable. Even the initial process of obtaining world-wide recognition of sovereignty was protracted and involved, arousing considerable anger and disillusionment in Bangladesh.¹⁴ Preserving Bangladesh's independence remained a politically emotive issue played upon continually by successive leaders. For example, in consolidating his new regime in 1976, Ziaur Rahman assured the populace that he would do all in his power to protect Bangladesh's hard-won sovereignty and independence:

...I would like to state that the name of this country is Bangladesh. This is an independent country, and it will for ever remain independent. If there is an aggression on us the seven and a half-crore people of this country will rise to one man and resist it and defend the independence.¹⁵

Similar rhetoric pervaded Hussain Muhammad Ershad's inaugural speech following his coup in March 1982:

The Armed Forces had to take over the administration of the country to safeguard [the] nation's sovereignty and independence and to save and rescue the country from administrative, social and economic disaster...We shall continue our efforts to improve our relations with the Big Powers. But I want to declare it categorically that we want friendship with any country of the world but no domination.¹⁶

Both leaders were tapping into popular sensitivities which were inevitable in a newly-created and militarily-weak state.

13 T. Maniruzzaman, *The Security of Small States in the Third World*, Canberra, ANU, 1982, p. 15.

14 The problems associated with diplomatic recognition of Bangladesh were most pronounced in relation to the Islamic states. For a detailed discussion see: D.A. Wright, *Bangladesh: Origins and Indian Ocean Relations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-242.

15 *The Bangladesh Observer*, 22 May 1976.

16 *ibid.*, 25 March 1982.

Like many other weak and politically unstable states, Bangladesh has been vulnerable to external pressures which impinge on its autonomy or greatly reduce its influence in the international arena. The consequent heightened sense of insecurity has helped to shape Bangladeshi foreign policy, an impediment which has been exacerbated by the tendency of the more powerful nations to be unsympathetic towards such fears or desires to exercise sovereign rights.¹⁷

Applying the principle of security to Bangladesh's foreign policy draws attention to the many political problems and weaknesses which have placed the state at a distinct disadvantage in the South Asian region. As already pointed out, these weaknesses are due partly to Bangladesh's colonial past, and they provide an important stimulus in the forging of Bangladesh's interstate relations. Political instability is not unique to Bangladesh, but particular elements have been isolated by analysts as being the cause of an instability which is inherent to the state, rather than a temporary or intermittent problem.

Another important ingredient in forming Bangladesh's foreign policy has been the high degree of factional rivalry, not only within Bangladesh's political parties, civil service and armed forces, but also between each of these groups.¹⁸ The problem of factionalism was particularly convoluted and destabilising during the first decade of Bangladesh's existence,¹⁹ but throughout Bangladesh's history it has fostered state insecurity and restricted the governing elites' opportunities to pursue an assertive or autonomous foreign policy. These domestic weaknesses have played an important part in extending Bangladesh's foreign policy concerns beyond the regional context, causing Bangladesh governments to seek assistance and support where possible from the superpowers (United States, Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China) and the United Nations.

17 C. Thomas, *In Search of Security: The Third World in International Relations*, Boulder, 1987, p. 7. Thomas particularly points to the USA for its lack of understanding in dealing with 'third world' states.

18 The period which epitomises the prevalence of factionalism and rivalry occurred between August 1975, when state leader Sheikh Mujib was assassinated and November 1975, when Ziaur Rahman finally assumed control of the state. Within three months, 3 major military coups attempts had occurred, with Zia having to crush the very faction which had restored him to power in the third coup. See A. Mascarenhas, *A Legacy of Blood*, London, 1986, *passim*, for a detailed study of this period.

19 For a succinct discussion of the basis for this factionalism, see: M. Rashiduzzaman, 'Changing Political Patterns in Bangladesh: Internal Constraints and External Fears', in M.M. Khan, & H.M. Zafarullah, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-195.

Bangladesh's comparative military weakness²⁰ (see Table 1) has also played a part in reducing the negotiating options available to the state's leaders and hence, by necessity, the tendency has been for them to use various methods of diplomacy in conducting foreign affairs. Diplomacy through negotiation has been the only practical option for a state with such internal weaknesses as Bangladesh, but diplomatic acumen on the part of Bangladesh's leaders has been used to greater effect in the extra-regional arena, rather than the regional. The study of Bangladesh's foreign policy is very much a study of diplomatic manoeuvring, focusing upon personalities and their coteries. The absence of a strong, well-established and unified central government, and the prevalence of political instability and factionalism means that, certainly for Bangladesh, much of the diplomatic negotiation is conducted by the state leader, or at least closely adheres to the policies of that leader.

Table 1: Statistical comparison between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan

	Area (sq. km.)	Per Capita GNP mid-1995 (US\$)	Population (millions) 1995	Population Density (per sq. km)	Military Personnel 1995
Bangladesh	143 998	240	120.0	833.3	156 000
India	3 287 263	350	929.4	282.8	1 311 000
Pakistan	796 100	460	129.7	162.9	844 000

Sources: *The Statesman's Year-Book 1996-1997: The Europa World Year Book 1996, Volume 1*, London, 1996, p. 503; *Statistical Outline of India 1994-95* (Tata Services Ltd.); *World Bank Group* (cited 22 January 1997) <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/offrep/sas/>

The notion of 'security' carries strong military and territorial connotations, but there is another aspect of security which has relevance to the study of Bangladeshi foreign policy. There is some controversy over whether or not strategic considerations should have precedence over those of a cultural, economic, ideological or religious nature when looking at the influences upon foreign policy formulation.²¹ Most scholars engaged in the debate appear to be

²⁰ For example, in 1995, the strength of the Bangladesh army, navy and air force personnel was respectively 156,000, 8,000 and 6,500, whereas the Indian equivalent was vastly greater: 1.14 million, 55,000, and 110,000, respectively. Furthermore, compared with India's arsenal in 1995 of 2,600 tanks, Bangladesh had 140. See *The Statesman's Year-Book: A Statistical, Political and Economic Account of the States of the World for the Year 1996-1997*, London, 1996, pp. 182-3, 641-2.

²¹ Those who have debated this question include: H. Wiberg, 'The Security of Small Nations: Challenges and Defences', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1987; R.G.C. Thomas (ed.), *The Great Power Triangle and Asian Security*,

agree that the loss of sovereignty is the greatest fear a state is likely to hold, a fear which will be the most dominant compulsion behind foreign policy-making.²² Others point out that the importance of socio-cultural influences has been underestimated.²³ In Bangladesh's case, both territorial and cultural concerns have been extremely, perhaps equally, influential in moulding Bangladeshi foreign policy.

The defence of cultural identity has special relevance to Bangladesh because even the state's very existence can be attributed, to a large extent, to the ramifications of cultural discrimination. The East Bengali language movement, which gathered momentum soon after Partition in 1947, was provoked by the Pakistan government's insensitivity to east wing aspirations of political equality. The language dispute, in turn, transformed into a powerful, unifying movement demanding regional autonomy, with Bengali language and culture being the focus for regional identity in the east wing. The notion of religious identity was inextricably linked with the language issue, with the estrangement between the two wings interpreted by the Pakistan government as a confrontation between secularism and Islam.

East Bengali political aspirations and cultural pride were perceived therefore to be a threat to the validity of the two-nation theory, the original premise on which Pakistan's creation was based.²⁴ While Bangladesh's relative cultural homogeneity has reduced the potential for multicultural and multilingual problems to impinge on international relations, socio-cultural concerns are nevertheless a vital, underlying component of Bangladeshi foreign policy. The East Bengali language movement had extraordinary repercussions

1983; B. Buzan (et al.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, New York, 1986; M. Rahman Shelley, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multi-Polar World: Bangladesh*, Washington D.C., 1978 and K. Subrahmanyam, 'India and Its Neighbours: A Conceptual Framework of Peaceful Co-existence', in U.S. Bajpai (ed.), *India and Its Neighbourhood*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 109-139.

- 22 For examples of proponents of this view, see: H. Wiberg, 'The Security of Small Nations: Challenges and Defences', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1987, p. 340. However, Wiberg does stress that the military dimension is not the only one. [See p. 354.] See also R.G.C. Thomas (ed.), *The Great Power Triangle and Asian Security*, 1983, p. 71, and B. Buzan (et al.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, New York, 1986, pp. 8-30.
- 23 See M. Rahman Shelley, *Emergence of a New Nation in a Multi-Polar World: Bangladesh*, Washington D.C., 1978, p. 19, and K. Subrahmanyam, 'India and Its Neighbours: A Conceptual Framework of Peaceful Co-existence', in U.S. Bajpai (ed.), *India and Its Neighbourhood*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 109.
- 24 For a discussion of the way in which language and religion have played a part in the development of Bangladeshi national identity, see: M.G. Kabir, 'Religion, Language and Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1987, pp. 473-479.

not only for the east wing inhabitants, but also for the course of South Asian politics as a whole.

This analysis does not attempt to resolve the long standing debate over whether or not the cultural loyalties existing in Bangladesh are based on inherited, 'primordial' attachments or whether they have been created and strengthened largely because of the manipulations of self-seeking political elites.²⁵ Both positions have relevance to Bangladeshi polity, with both ensuring that cultural concerns have remained a vital, integral part of Bangladeshi political life.²⁶ Particular elements can be highlighted as having contributed towards a 'cultural focus' in Bangladeshi politics, or having prompted feelings of cultural insecurity and discrimination: the relative uniformity of language and culture in the region; the tussle between Islamic and regional Bengali cultural loyalties which became prominent with the growth of Muslim separatist politics in the nineteenth century and again after Pakistan came into being;²⁷ the uniqueness and syncretism of Bengali Islam,²⁸ the existence of which ran counter to exhortations of pan-Islamic unity as being the justification for Pakistan's creation; the geographical constraint against Pakistani unity after Partition, whereby culturally homogeneous East Pakistan was separated by a vast distance from the west wing, the centre of government; and the ensuing political and economic exploitation of East Pakistan by the central government. Whatever emphasis may be applied in the 'primordialist/instrumentalist' debate, the cultural perspective cannot be ignored with regard to Bangladesh. According to Paul Brass, one of the most prominent scholars engaged in the debate, it is the strength of the cultural heritage which needs to be assessed:

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- 25 The 'primordialist/instrumentalist' debate became prominent particularly due to the writings of two South Asia specialists, Paul Brass and Francis Robinson. See P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, London, 1974, and F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923*, London, 1974.
- 26 In an analysis of the primordialist/instrumentalist debate and its applicability to Bangladesh, D.A. Wright points out that the state does not fit either category neatly, but the tendency is towards the instrumentalist model. See D.A. Wright, 'Islam and Bangladeshi Polity', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, December 1987, p. 15.
- 27 For a discussion specifically related to the pre-Pakistan period, see A. Roy, 'The Bengal Muslim 'Cultural Mediators' and the Bengal Muslim Identity in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1987, pp. 11-34.
- 28 See D.A. Wright, 'Islam and Bangladeshi Polity', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

...[O]ne possible route towards reconciling the perspectives of primordialists and instrumentalists may lie in simply recognizing that cultural groups differ in the strength and richness of their cultural traditions and even more importantly in the strength of traditional institutions and social structure.²⁹

In Bangladesh's case, that strength is considerable, making the task of political manipulation of cultural loyalties a risky and unpredictable one, where huge political gains might be the reward, or perhaps the reverse: political annihilation. An examination of the influence of security, or more appropriately, insecurity considerations on Bangladesh's foreign policy therefore also requires an appreciation of the degree to which intense indigenous cultural loyalties and fears can direct the state's foreign policy, as pursued by the governing elite.

The interplay between strategic and cultural insecurities and their influence on foreign policy is especially evident when studying the relationship between Bangladesh and India. India's place as the largest and dominant power in South Asia is a geopolitical reality which concerns each of the other regional states; none more so than Bangladesh which is virtually encircled by India. Indian assistance may have helped to bring Bangladesh into existence, but even this indebtedness was not sufficient to offset the fear of Indian, or more subtly, Hindu, domination which had long been a fundamental aspect of East Bengali Muslim politics. In its efforts to foster a separate national identity, the Pakistan central government was able to play on and exacerbate these fears, leaving the east wing with a deep-seated distrust of India's intentions. Being indebted to India soon became regarded in Bangladesh as the equivalent of being subordinated by India's will, especially once the debt quickly acquired a more literal, financial tenor.³⁰ One of the greatest fears engendering insecurity in Bangladesh is that India might intervene directly in curtailing Bangladesh's sovereign rights.³¹

The fear of Indian dominance or interference is a concern shared by each of India's South Asian neighbours, and the extent to which it is justified has little bearing on the reality of this fear. If insecurity can be regarded as an important element in shaping foreign policy-making, then the insecurity invoked by India's comparative strength in the region (see Table 1) would warrant pre-

29 P.R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 74.

30 Financial loans and a vastly unequal trading relationship have made Bangladesh a major debtor to India. See C. Baxter, 'Bangladesh at Ten: An Appraisal of a Decade of Political Development', *The World Today*, vol. 38, no. 2, February 1982, p. 78.

31 M. Franda, *Bangladesh: The First Decade*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 281.

eminence. Such apprehension defines much of the character of Bangladeshi foreign relations, not just with India, but with the regional states generally.

The reasons for the trepidation which India's might has instilled in the smaller states, such as Bangladesh, are intricate and subtle, with inherent cultural as well as territorial bases. The notion of pan-Islamism is one which currently receives much discussion and debate, but the idea of pan-Asianism is also one which has been very influential, even if superseded by movements such as Islamic revivalism in recent decades. The idea of an intrinsic Asian unity, where the 'spiritually and morally superior' east was bound by a common philosophical 'love for the ultimate and the universal', became popular in the nineteenth century, as part of the emerging Asian nationalist response to western imperialism.³² In India the notion of Asianism was propounded by intellectuals such as Keshab Chandra Sen and Swami Vivekananda, gaining momentum in the early twentieth century, largely due to the writings of Rabindranath Tagore.³³ Tagore's belief in Asia's spiritual, as opposed to materialistic, ethos and his universalist desire for nations to transcend their territorial boundaries are typified by the following statements:

... we do not slip into the habit of looking on man as a machine, or as a tool for the furtherance of some interest. There may be a bad as well as a good side to this ; anyhow, it has been the way of our country ; more it has been the way of the East.³⁴

... European civilization puts all emphasis on the progress of this cumulative acquisition, forgetting that the best which each individual can contribute to the progressive life of humanity is in the perfection of his own life. So their end comes in the middle of things ; there is no game, but only the chase.³⁵

How to be free from arrogant nationalism is today the chief lesson to be learnt. Tomorrow's history will begin with a chapter on internationalism, and we shall be unfit for tomorrow if we retain any manners, customs, or habits of thought that are contrary to universalism. There is, I know, such a thing as national pride, but I earnestly wish that it never makes me forget that the best efforts of our Indian sages were directed to the abolition of disunity.³⁶

Tagore's philosophy nevertheless contains a powerful, rallying call for Indian cultural solidarity:

Since India has this genius for unification, we do not have to fear imaginary enemies. We may look forward to our own expansion as the final result of each new struggle. Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim and Christian shall not die fighting on Indian soil ;

32 T.A. Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia: A Troublesome Legacy For Post-Independence Indian Foreign Policy', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1982, p. 210-1.

33 *ibid.*, p. 211.

34 R. Tagore, *Towards Universal Man*, London, 1961, p. 57.

35 *ibid.*, p. 91.

36 *ibid.*, p. 249.

here they will find harmony. That harmony will not be non-Hindu ; on the contrary, it will be peculiarly Hinduistic. And however cosmopolitan the several limbs may be, the heart will still be the heart of India.³⁷

Such sentiments held widespread appeal, particularly in Indian nationalist circles, during the struggle for independence from imperial Britain. With partition in 1947, the ideal of Asian unity received a jolt, but continued to be espoused by the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Like Tagore, Nehru saw India as a cultural and religious focus of the entire South and Southeast Asian region.³⁸ The creation of Muslim Pakistan represented a direct challenge to the assumption of India's destiny to provide the mantle of political and cultural leadership in the South Asian region, a belief which had become embedded in the psyche of many in India and which proved difficult to dispel,³⁹ despite the implications associated with Pakistan's existence. The depth of this sentiment has been explained thus:

Having gained independence after nearly a thousand years of colonial bondage, India's sights are set on becoming a world class power commensurate with its size, population and past glory.⁴⁰

The Indian scholar, Ravinder Kumar, has provided a contemporary voicing of ideas in keeping with the spirit of Nehru and Tagore, sentiments which affirm Indian cultural, as opposed to national, unity and strength as being the basis for Indian political identity:

There is a consensus among historians, that if we look upon India as a 'nation', then we cannot make much sense of what happened to us prior to the 19th century. However, the moment we look upon ourselves as one of the autonomous world civilisations, then we can clearly relate our present condition, through a chain of cause and effect, to happenings in the past...[T]he political experience of the post-freedom decades, when the affairs of the Indian polity have been conducted upon the assumption that it is a nation - rather than a 'civilisational society' - has made it amply clear that our attempt to create a political society within our country on the pattern of a 'nation-state' is doomed to failure...We would be much more at peace with ourselves, politically speaking, if we frankly accepted the fact that we are not a 'nation' but a 'civilisation'.⁴¹

37 *ibid.*, p. 66.

38 T.A. Keenleyside, *op. cit.*, p. 214-5. For some of Nehru's comments on Asian unity and India's role, presented at the Inter-Asian Conference, New Delhi in March 1947, see: S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 2, New Delhi, pp. 501-509.

39 L. Ziring (ed.), *The Subcontinent in World Politics: India, Its Neighbors, and the Great Powers*, N.Y., 1978, p. 85.

40 M.A. Bhatta, 'Strategic Balance In South Asia Including the Adjacent Ocean', *World Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1992, p. 26.

41 R. Kumar, 'India's Political Identity: Nation-State or Civilisation-State', *Indian Ocean Review*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1991, pp. 23, 26. Ravinder Kumar is at present the Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum, New Delhi.

American scholar, Ainslee Embree has also assessed the political significance of India's rich cultural heritage, providing insights concerning the origins of the notion of the fundamental unity of an over-arching 'Indian' civilization.⁴² Embree points out that the underlying unity provided by the extraordinary continuity and pervasiveness of the Brahmanical cultural tradition has been idealised and expanded, particularly by the Indian nationalists, to include the additional connotation of political unity.⁴³ He thoroughly explores the validity of such an assumption, concluding that the vision of historical Indian political unity was an ill-founded one, ironically based partly on the idea of 'India' as it existed in western historical imagination.⁴⁴ Embree explains that western images of India as a political and cultural unity, ranging from those of Herodotus to Kipling, were incorporated into the 'emotional and intellectual inheritance' of the Indian nationalist elites.⁴⁵ These images were all the more appealing because they resembled those expounded in the Sanskritic texts, which also contained universalist notions of political unity.⁴⁶

Adding to this complexity, according to Embree, was the influence of contradictory western imperial assumptions, which in India's case, denied the possibility of effective, unified self-government without British assistance.⁴⁷ In response, the Indian nationalists sought to prove that India, as unified by the British, corresponded with their image of the India of the past, thereby rendering western power and administration unnecessary.⁴⁸ Embree's observations have relevance when considering the reasons behind the Hindu-Muslim rivalry which culminated in the creation of Pakistan. The Indian nationalist emphasis on the intrinsic political unity of India provided little reassurance for the Muslim minority that their particular needs would be met, thereby contributing towards the Muslim League's insistence on the necessity for a separate Muslim nation.

42 A.T. Embree, 'Indian Civilization and Regional Cultures: The Two Realities', in P. Wallace (ed.), *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 19-39.

43 *ibid.*, p. 21. Ravinder Kumar makes the point that the unity and character of Indian society is determined not so much by the Brahmanical 'high culture' as it is determined later by the 'middle' traditions of devotional theism, as embodied in the bhakti movement which became prominent after the first millennium A.D. R. Kumar, 'The Past and the Present: An Indian Dialogue', *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Occasional Papers on Perspectives on Indian Development*, no. 1, New Delhi, March 1989, p. 23. [unpublished].

44 A.T. Embree, 'Indian Civilization and Regional Cultures: The Two Realities', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

45 *ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

46 *ibid.*, p. 24.

47 *ibid.*, p. 34.

48 *ibid.*, p. 35.

The emergence of Bangladesh was therefore a cause for jubilation in India as the occurrence appeared to confirm the non-viability of Pakistan,⁴⁹ no doubt reviving for many the dream of a 'greater India', a hope seemingly thwarted by partition. Their hope was that Bangladesh might subsequently return to India's fold. Such enthusiasm carried the deeper connotation of Indian cultural and territorial designs and expectations which Bangladeshis feared might go so far as to consider that the reabsorption of the new state into India's fold was predestined. These anxieties were suppressed in the euphoria immediately following independence, but soon began to reemerge,⁵⁰ despite, or perhaps because of, Bangladeshi leader Mujibur Rahman's close affiliation with the Indian government. Such fears were easily manipulated and brought to the fore upon Ziaur Rahman's ascendancy, becoming an on-going impediment to the resolution of Indo-Bangladesh conflict. In closely examining the interaction between these two states in later chapters, it will be shown that the legacy of pan-Asianist appeals and associated claims about Indian cultural pre-eminence has been a pervasive and lasting one, considerably exacerbating the labyrinthine and tense character of post-partition South Asian foreign relations.

There are many layers to the idea of Indian hegemonistic designs as a cause of insecurity in the region. The pan-Asianist ideal, as espoused by Indian intellectuals, and the associated notion of Indian cultural leadership, both imply that the territorial and cultural fears held by the smaller South Asian states have due cause to exist. It is not difficult to find examples of Indian preparedness to meddle directly with the internal politics of its neighbours in an almost contradictory attempt to preserve the so-called *status quo*.⁵¹ It has been pointed out that India's superior military strength in South Asia virtually dictates that force rather than diplomacy will be the most likely option chosen

49 P. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

50 Bangladeshi concerns about Indian interference were manifested within months of achieving independence as exemplified by their insistence that Indian troops be withdrawn from Bangladesh. This was despite their much-needed assistance in the wake of the war. For details, see: D.A. Wright, *Bangladesh: Origins and Indian Ocean Relations (1971-1975)*, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-131.

51 C. Bateman points to Indian activities in Sri Lanka, Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal as immediate examples of such meddling. See C. Bateman, 'National Security and Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Asian Survey*, vol. 19, no. 8, August 1979, p. 784. Even India's assistance to Bangladesh in 1971 was, certainly from Pakistan's point of view, a form of meddling. Much is said of India's humble wish simply to preserve the *status quo* in South Asia, but such semantics do not negate, for example, the many repercussions of Indian assistance in Bangladesh's war of independence.

by India to resolve regional disputes.⁵² According to S.P. Cohen, India has gradually increased its influence in the region, particularly since 1971, to the extent that a type of civilian militarism has come to dominate.⁵³ India's strategic concerns are seen to encompass the entire South Asian region, consequently creating an image of India as a nation which has come to expect 'habitual obedience' from its smaller and less powerful neighbours.⁵⁴ Instead of fostering regional security, Indian strength has instilled the opposite, the smaller states' overriding fears being exacerbated, rather than appeased, by Indian protestations of regional beneficence. India's typical perspective is exemplified by the following comment made by Indira Gandhi during the November 1975 coups in Bangladesh. Her assurance of non-interference contains an opposite message:

...[T]hings happening in "our neighbourhood were not entirely good and cause us grave concern." India was very careful not to interfere in the internal affairs of any country and had kept itself scrupulously aloof from them. But it could not help expressing its concern "when stability of the region is disturbed" and could pose a threat to India itself.⁵⁵

India's habitual stance has been to dismiss, rather than acknowledge such fears of Indian domination and interference, and this attitude is sometimes reflected in the writings of Indian scholars, such as P.S. Ghosh:

The smaller nations of South Asia have no grounds for anxiety as far as India's relations with them are concerned. In fact because of a relative authoritarian power structure in our neighbourhood, an artificial fear psychosis has been created in the minds of their peoples by the ruling elites particularly in Islamabad and Dacca.⁵⁶

The dismissive approach is also manifested in the constant attempts by India to minimise the international importance of intractable disputes with its neighbours, the aim being to discourage external interference in what India regards as virtually a domestic preserve.⁵⁷ It has been pointed out that this

52 S. Mansingh, *India's Search For Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy 1966-1982*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 263. See also previous footnote.

53 Stephen Cohen interprets the militarisation of India as a corrosion of its 'political soul', as personified by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. S.P. Cohen, 'Dimensions of Militarism in South Asia', *Defence Journal* (Karachi), no. 7, July 1984, p. 9, cited in, P.S. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

54 P.S. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

55 *Times of India*, (Bombay), 8 November 1975.

56 P.K. Mishra, *South Asia in International Politics*, Delhi, 1984, p.148. See also K. Subrahmanyam, 'India and Its Neighbours: A Conceptual Framework of Peaceful Co-existence', in, U.S. Bajpai (ed.), *India and Its Neighbourhood*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 123-4, where Subrahmanyam states: 'A number of people in this country readily accept the apparently plausible thesis advanced in our neighbouring countries that a large and militarily powerful India constitutes a threat to them and is hegemonistic. Historically this thesis is untenable in terms of India's pattern of behaviour in the last four decades.' See also pp. 125-6.

57 S. Mansingh, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

down-playing tendency by a regionally-dominant state can be an important contributor towards conflictual interstate relations. International harmony is dependent upon the states generating 'a sensitivity to the impact of their own behaviour' on other regional states which is 'at least equal to their sensitivity to the impact of the behaviour of other actors on them'.⁵⁸ Each state therefore needs to be aware of and acknowledge the fears of other states, whether or not those fears are justified. The ever-present tension between a large state such as India and one much less militarily powerful such as Bangladesh can thus be explained partly by such a maxim. While the view that Bangladesh is of no real significance to Indian political considerations⁵⁹ is extreme, there has been little cause for Indian apprehensions to include a serious concern for Bangladeshi territorial designs, and hence there has been no great effort to empathise with or accommodate Bangladeshi insecurities. In matters of national self-interest, for the dominant power, the concerns of smaller states tend to be lost.

The desire for security has provided an important driving force in interstate relationships.⁶⁰ Just as the smaller South Asian states hold various fears and insecurities, so do India and Pakistan, despite their size and military strength. Like the smaller states, both India and Pakistan fear threats to their sovereignty and independence, as exemplified by Indira Gandhi's comment above. Bangladesh's foreign relations in South Asia are subject not only to domestic security concerns, but also to the security concerns of India and Pakistan. For example, by sharing a fear of Indian dominance, the foreign policies of Bangladesh and Pakistan were given a fundamental nudge in a common direction. The sharing of insecurity concerns between these two states has enabled them to suppress historical antagonisms and differences in national outlook.⁶¹

In a fundamental way, Indian security concerns have been at odds with those of Bangladesh. The grand Indian vision of cultural leadership and pan-Asian unity may have been dented somewhat over time, but as explained above, it has been an enduring one and has played an underlying part in fostering Indian expectations of regional pre-eminence. This outlook contrasts sharply with the aspirations generally existing in a state such as Bangladesh, in

58 B. Buzan, 'Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations', *op. cit.*, p. 123.

59 P.S. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

60 B. Buzan, 'Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations', *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

61 See Chapters Seven and Eight.

which, apart from a brief period of post-independence euphoria, there has been little historical cause to entertain such idealistic and expansive ambitions. Indian idealism partly owed its resilience to the reasonably stable and long-term liaison between India and the Soviet Union. This alliance offered a degree of stability which Bangladesh was denied, even during its existence as the colonial wing of Pakistan.⁶²

The emergence of Bangladesh altered the Indo-centrism of the region, but at the same time, it did much to boost Indian influence and status. Its creation symbolically, and pragmatically, weakened India's would-be rival, Pakistan. In defeating Pakistan and in helping in Bangladesh's creation, India attained an international reputation as being a powerful, skilfully-managed state.⁶³ The prevailing regional political arrangement, to which each of the smaller states has had to adapt, is therefore one in which the successive Indian governments have perceived the state's minimum sphere of territorial and cultural influence to include the whole of the South Asian region. This perception contrasts markedly with that existing in Bangladesh, the newest South Asian state, where considerable effort has been expended simply in asserting sovereignty over the state's borders. The difficulty in determining their precise location, as mutually agreeable to India, has been a consistent source of antagonism, and at times enmity, between the two states. The essentially contrary nature of their security concerns therefore almost guarantees that comparatively minor dealings between the two will be accompanied by an exaggerated tension. In keeping with this assumption is the following observation made by Indian scholar, Surjit Mansingh:

In New Delhi, Bangladeshi officials gained the reputation of being the toughest, most demanding, and most sensitive of all national groups with whom the Indian government has regular dealings.⁶⁴

The Indian tendency to consider all South Asian activities to be of Indian concern has given rise to an intricate dilemma to be faced by successive Indian governments; a problem which has impinged directly on Bangladeshi foreign policy. The Indian predicament is characterised on one hand by the wish to ensure that the state continues to enjoy the post-1971 'unprecedented

62 East wing feelings of insecurity were exacerbated particularly during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, where East Pakistan was left defenceless against a possible Indian attack. For details, see D.A. Wright, *India-Pakistan Relations: 1962-1969*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 99-100.

63 B. Prasad, *India's Foreign Policy: Studies in Continuity and Change*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 107-8.

64 S. Mansingh, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

concentration of unchallenged power'.⁶⁵ On the other, there is a combination of pragmatism and idealism, whereby excessive interference in the region could prove too costly financially and politically. India has always prided itself on its non-aligned status in the international arena and, particularly during the Cold War era of superpower rivalry, on its support for the non-aligned movement. Expansionistic actions on India's part would undermine its self-perceived role as a bastion of non-alignment.

The term 'non-alignment' has been given a multiplicity of meanings, but according to former Indian Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, the pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy is synonymous with the assertion of sovereignty and independence. Rao believed that non-alignment was as relevant as ever, if not more so, for developing nations such as India in recent times.⁶⁶ Like his predecessors, Rao projected the Indian government as a staunch defender of the ideal of non-alignment, partly in response to the controversy associated with India's long-term liaison with the Soviet Union.

Because of India's self-proclaimed commitment to non-alignment, its security concerns over Bangladesh have fluctuated between fearing the ramifications of having a politically unstable neighbour in an already sensitive and at times turbulent area; and, as would be expected of an advocate of non-alignment, providing the conditions to ensure that Bangladesh is able to adopt an independent stance in the international arena. The quandary of Indian foreign policy makers has been given a more pragmatic emphasis in the following statement:

Any attempt to softpedal India's stakes in the South Asian power structure and security environment in a deliberately created maze of moral platitudes and demands of good neighbourliness may only result in serious weakening of the Indian position with no tangible corresponding gains in terms of sustained goodwill and cooperation from its neighbours. A more pronounced Indian profile, on the other hand, would meet increasing resistance from the neighbouring countries and become counterproductive.⁶⁷

India's sensitivities regarding non-alignment were easily played upon by the other South Asian states, as occurred at the Fifth Non-Aligned Summit, held in Colombo in August 1976. The Summit provided an ideal forum for Ziaur Rahman to air his grievances against the Indian government and to secure sympathetic

65 W.H. Morris-Jones, 'India - More Questions Than Answers', *Asian Survey*, vol. 24, no. 8, 1984, p. 809.

66 P.V.N. Rao, *Reflections on Non-Alignment*, New Delhi, [1992], p. 8.

67 N. Jetly, 'India and the Domestic Turmoil in South Asia', in U. Phadnis (ed.), *Domestic Conflicts in South Asia, Vol. 1: Political Dimensions*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 80.

international attention. His strategy was to undermine the traditional image presented by India as being the state which epitomised the spirit of non-alignment, by appealing for support to withstand the 'foreign interference' instigated by India in the affairs of Bangladesh.⁶⁸ Without directly naming India, but with obvious intent, Zia made these comments on the eve of the summit:

The strength of the non-aligned movement...was its flexibility and they had to look at the Movement in the context of the present complex problems when some bigger nations were trying to dominate the smaller ones, when one was trying to interfere with the political and economic sovereignty and independence and interfering in the internal affairs of other states, when some were trying to extend their hegemony over the smaller ones.⁶⁹

Zia was using what he considered to be the most effective diplomatic means to keep India in check.

Possessing regional strength has not meant that India has been exempt from having to engage in the intricacies of diplomatic manoeuvring in order to preserve its position. Indian foreign policy fears and concerns have been no less real than those of a weaker state such as Bangladesh, but much of the focus of Indian unease, at least during the period under study, has been aimed specifically towards Pakistan and its links outside the region, particularly with superpowers, China and the United States. Just as Indian political aspirations have tended to encompass a wider sphere than those of the smaller South Asian states, so has Indian political insecurity. That is not to deny Bangladesh's and Pakistan's own attempts to seek alliances external to the region, but the focus of those efforts has been characterised by the aim to find a counterpoise to dominant India. Tension between India and Pakistan has been exacerbated by the clash between India's desire to maintain the regional *status quo* and Pakistan's cultivation of superpower military and financial assistance.

Former Indian prime minister, Mrs Gandhi, whose foreign policy goals dominated the Indian government for almost two decades, believed that there was a tangible link between instability within the region and external interference. Her fears were expressed when interviewed by Surjit Mansingh in 1981:

⁶⁸ *The Bangladesh Observer*, 13 August 1976.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 14 August 1976.

It is not good for us economically, militarily or from any other point of view to have weak neighbours. Some of our present problems are because they are so instable. But we also think that there is a deliberate move to keep the subcontinent unstable.⁷⁰

She reiterated her opinion in a *Times of India* interview in 1983, when asked about external threats to India's unity and integrity:

We see all over the world how countries are being destabilised. Other governments look to their own interest rather than the interest of the country concerned (the country in whose affairs they intervene)...I don't think people can destabilise a government merely from outside. But there are plenty of people who wish to take advantage of the trouble, who like to encourage it in one way or another.⁷¹

The tension between Bangladesh and India therefore can be explained partly by the fundamental difference in the foci of their foreign policies. Indian concerns are typified by the broader fear of Bangladesh's potential to produce destabilising conditions in the subcontinent which, in the long term, could invite external meddling and perhaps, ultimately, the disintegration of the Indian Union. Superpower interference in South Asia has tended to have been driven more by 'external' strategic considerations, rather than by 'the intrinsic value of the Subcontinent itself', but India has remained suspicious of any superpower activities in the subcontinental region.⁷² By contrast, Bangladeshi foreign policy has been moulded by the fear of India's regional hegemonistic designs. While it is highly unlikely that India would resort to a take-over of Bangladesh in an attempt to restore regional stability in a crisis, the Indian government's obvious concern for regional security has fostered popular Bangladeshi fears of Indian domination. Indian fears regarding Bangladesh's instability are based not only on the latter's political fragility, but also on its deepseated and extreme poverty⁷³ and dependency on large amounts of foreign aid for survival.

Poverty is increasing in Bangladesh, despite the best efforts of the United Nations and various indigenous organisations like the Grameen Bank.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ S. Mansingh, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁷¹ 'As Mrs Gandhi Sees It', interview with Indira Gandhi by Fatma Zakaria, *Times of India* (New Delhi), 14 August 1983.

⁷² T. George (et al.), *Security in Southern Asia 2: India and the Great Powers*, Aldershot, 1984, p. 204.

⁷³ Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. *The Europa World Year Book 1996, Volume 1*, London, 1996, p. 502. See also Table 1.

⁷⁴ The Grameen Bank currently works in 36,000 villages in Bangladesh (almost half the total number of villages) and annually gives out 4 million loans to the rural poor, operating through 62,000 lending centres with staff of over 12,000. 94% of these loans are given to female heads of households. M. Yunus, *Towards a Poverty-Free World*, Paper Delivered at the 'Bangladesh: Democracy and Development' Conference organised by the National Centre for South Asian

According to a recent study by Rehman Sobhan, one of Bangladesh's foremost economists, the number of the poor has been increasing each year since 1983, at about 1.5% per year.⁷⁵ Approximately 60% of all households are below the poverty line and over half of those are below the so-called hard-core poverty line.⁷⁶ Being one of the most densely populated countries in the world, Bangladesh has a serious overpopulation problem⁷⁷ which has contributed towards the worsening poverty. The rate of population growth has declined in recent years to less than 2% per year,⁷⁸ but even conservative population estimates put Bangladesh's population at approximately 195 million by 2025.⁷⁹ Poverty, and the state's growing dependency on foreign aid, have become integral to Bangladesh's foreign relations and have ensured that Indian concerns over Bangladesh's viability have not diminished. The validity of those concerns is evaluated below.

Analysts have debated at length the impact of Bangladesh's increasing dependency on foreign aid, either pointing to the benefits of obtaining foreign capital and technology or to the burdens they have inflicted. The latter view has become increasingly accepted, where aid dependency is considered to have inhibited the nation's economic development, perpetuated poverty; and, ultimately, threatened the state's stability and sovereign independence.⁸⁰ Aid-donors have acknowledged some of the adverse consequences of aid, but have tended to blame mismanagement of aid within Bangladesh. Their criticism has

Studies, Melbourne, held at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 22-23 March 1997.

75 'Persistence of Poverty in Bangladesh', *Grameen Poverty Research*, vol. 2, no. 1, January 1996, p. 2. According to another recent report, produced by the 'independent Pakistan-based Human Development Centre, headed by a former Pakistan finance minister, Mr Mahbub ul Haq', South Asia was 'going backwards in all main social development indicators, despite higher rates of economic growth', the benefits of which had not 'trickled down' to the poor. The report also concluded that South Asian poverty eclipsed even that of sub-Saharan Africa. Admittedly, the report was produced partly in response to the Australian government's decision in 1996 to cut aid to South Asia, while maintaining funding for Africa. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 April 1997.

76 *ibid.*

77 See Table 1.

78 According to the World Bank, Bangladesh's population growth rate between 1990-1995 was 1.6%. *Bangladesh Country Overview*, (updated 22 January 1997, cited 7 February 1997) World Bank Group: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/offrep/sas/b.htm>

79 Population Reference Bureau: *1995 World Population Data Sheet - Bangladesh* (updated 5 February, cited 7 February 1997): <http://dbdev.ciesin.org:8989/cgi-bin/wdb/wdbprb/fdf/PRBWDS/>

80 For a history of the pro-aid/anti-aid debate, see Anisul Islam, 'Foreign Aid and Economic Development', in H. Zafarullah (et al.) (eds), *Policy Issues in Bangladesh*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 107-8.

been focused instead on the 'low rate of project implementation, slow rate of growth in the agricultural sector, and the fall in some of the social indicators'.⁸¹

In a recent study, economic analyst Anisul Islam has provided evidence to show that Bangladesh has become increasingly subject to economic difficulties associated with foreign aid. According to Islam, Bangladesh's dependence on foreign capital has increased steadily since independence.⁸² From 1971 to 1991, Bangladesh received a total of US\$22.46 billion in foreign aid.⁸³ The amount of aid received per year increased from US\$270 million in 1972 to US\$1,809 million in 1990, the latter amount constituting 8% of the 1990 Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁸⁴ By 1990, 96% of Bangladesh's development budget was reliant on foreign aid (compared with 17% in India's case), and approximately half of Bangladesh's total imports were financed by foreign aid.⁸⁵ At the same time, the international aid climate deteriorated after 1987, reducing the rate of 'real dollar' (inflation adjusted) aid flows into Bangladesh.⁸⁶ As a result, much more of Bangladesh's aid is now received in the form of loans, rather than outright grants,⁸⁷ adding increasingly to the cost of debt servicing. Bangladesh's total outstanding debt has increased dramatically over the last two decades, growing from US\$501 million in 1974 to US\$13,879 million by the end of 1993.⁸⁸ Debt service repayment figures also show that Bangladesh's debt burden will continue to increase. Loan conditions have tightened, becoming much more of a burden, particularly since 1985, resulting in higher interest rates and a corresponding decline in the repayments of principal.⁸⁹

Sobhan has taken a vigorously anti-aid standpoint, declaring that the process of development and the acquiring of aid for Bangladesh has

81 S. Rahman, 'Bangladesh in 1989: Internationalization of Political and Economic Issues', *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1990, p. 155. The obvious response which could be made to this criticism is that the donors have not allowed for the real conditions in Bangladesh.

82 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-135.

83 T. Maniruzzaman, 'The Fall of the Military Dictator: 1991 Elections and the Prospect of Civilian Rule in Bangladesh', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 2, 1992, p. 217.

84 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 97. By contrast, the ratio of aid to GDP for India was only 2% in 1990. *ibid.*, p. 101.

85 *ibid.*, pp. 100-1.

86 *ibid.*, p. 98.

87 Commodity aid grants declined from 84% in 1972 to 30% in 1990 and project aid grants dropped from 53% to 38% in 1990. *ibid.*, p. 100.

88 *ibid.*, p. 105, and *The Europa World Year Book 1996, Volume 1*, London, 1996, p. 502.

89 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

contributed towards 'the growth of external linkages, dependency and domination of the domestic policy'.⁹⁰ The external linkages have become 'critical to the emergence and development of an indigenous bourgeoisie, whose entire fortunes are intimately tied up with access to external resources in the name of development'.⁹¹ Ownership of wealth has become concentrated and poverty for the majority has become entrenched as a result.⁹² Sobhan scathingly considers that the 'immiserization of the masses' has grown correspondingly as the 'parasitic and unproductive...bourgeoisie has accentuated the need for external resource flows to both sustain subsistence consumption and to feed the growing appetites of the aspirant bourgeoisie'.⁹³ He warns that this process has marginalised the masses, threatening Bangladesh's domestic social order and, in turn, hampering Bangladesh's 'linkages with the world economic system'.⁹⁴ As well as reinforcing economic inequalities, foreign aid has produced dependency in large sections of the urban and rural population.⁹⁵ Employment, income and consumption have become increasingly dependent on aid availability, as has 'virtually every area of government activity'.⁹⁶

Sobhan's views are supported by T. Maniruzzaman who argues that foreign aid has hampered Bangladesh's economic development by the creation of an affluent, opportunistic class of entrepreneurs.⁹⁷ According to Maniruzzaman, Bangladesh has come under the sway of a moneyed business and industrial class which emerged partly because of the massive foreign aid received since independence.⁹⁸ The Bangladesh bureaucracy has also flourished artificially with the continuous flow of aid, increasing the country's dependency on aid, as explained by Maniruzzaman:

Indeed, a vicious circle developed where Bangladesh commission agents, Bangladesh bureaucracy, and officials in the donor countries or aid organizations kept the flow of foreign aid going to Bangladesh, such aid sustaining the rentier class which foreign aid itself helped to grow in the first place.⁹⁹

90 R. Sobhan, 'Bangladesh and the World Economic System: the Crisis of External Dependence', in S.R. Chakravarty, & V. Narain (eds), *Bangladesh, volume three: Global Politics*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 30.

91 *ibid.*

92 *ibid.*

93 *ibid.*

94 *ibid.*, p. 31.

95 *ibid.*

96 *ibid.*, p. 43.

97 T. Maniruzzaman, 'The Fall of the Military Dictator: 1991 Elections and the Prospect of Civilian Rule in Bangladesh', *op. cit.*, p. 218.

98 *ibid.*

99 *ibid.*

Many of the *nouveau riche* class have further impaired the country's economic and political instability by indulging in conspicuous consumption, using corrupt trading practices, defaulting in loan repayments and seeking personal political gain.¹⁰⁰

According to Sobhan, Bangladesh's increasing dependency on foreign aid has undermined the state's autonomy, giving donor countries an 'unusual measure of leverage' over domestic policy.¹⁰¹ Many development decisions, such as those associated with investment priorities and choice of technology, have to be 'tailored to the ideological predilections of donors, the types of aid provided and the terms on which it is made available'.¹⁰² Anisul Islam supports this argument, pointing out that the true cost of loans is much higher because of 'aid tying', where the 'recipient country is given very little flexibility or freedom to purchase inputs (or supplies) from cheapest sources or to select the most appropriate technology or projects...'.¹⁰³

B.N. Ghosh puts forward similar arguments, emphasising that 'aid is granted only when the ideologies and interests of the aid-givers and aid-receivers coincide'.¹⁰⁴ He argues further that supplying 'so-called' aid has become a highly profitable exercise on the part of donor countries whose business and political elites aim to prop up sagging domestic industries and to perpetuate the dependent status of the aid recipient.¹⁰⁵ In short, he considers foreign aid to be an instrument of 'foreign policy and even of blackmail'.¹⁰⁶ Sobhan believes that popular Bangladeshi fears regarding the impact of aid dependency on Bangladeshi sovereignty and independence have been particularly justified:

The decision makers of the developed world hold the lifeline of any regime in Bangladesh in their hands and can create havoc in the life of a country....The sovereignty of the Bangladesh nation state, in its prevailing social configuration, is therefore, a polite fiction which is perpetuated by the courtesy of the donors as long as Bangladesh does not challenge their current strategic assumptions and ideological perceptions.¹⁰⁷

100 Unpaid loans from Development Financing Institutions (DFIs) amounted to 11,000 million Taka in 1991 (approximately US\$290 million). *ibid.*, p. 219.

101 R. Sobhan, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

102 *ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

103 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

104 B.N. Ghosh, *Political Economy of Neocolonialism in Third World Countries*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 21.

105 *ibid.*, p. 36.

106 *ibid.*, p. 32.

107 R. Sobhan, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-50.

Heavy reliance on foreign aid is not restricted to Bangladesh in the South Asian region,¹⁰⁸ but when combining this dependency with the problem of extreme population density and the widespread nature of frequent natural disasters,¹⁰⁹ Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to any reduction in the supply of foreign aid. Considerable fluctuations have occurred in the supply of aid, forcing Bangladesh governments to seek new donors and forms of aid, particularly during the last decade, as explained below.

The largest provider of aid to Bangladesh has always been the World Bank, supplying 25.6% of Bangladesh's aid in 1990.¹¹⁰ The Asian Development Bank has quadrupled its aid to Bangladesh since 1984, providing about 15% of total aid by 1990.¹¹¹ Contrary to common perception, Saudi Arabia and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), have given comparatively little aid to Bangladesh in recent years, the Saudi portion declining from a peak of 10.8% in 1977 to a mere 0.4% in 1990 and the OPEC share dropping from a peak of 2.3% in 1982 to about 0.5% in 1990.¹¹² E. Ahamed's comment that the 'Muslim countries in general and the oil rich Arab countries in particular are important sources [of aid]'¹¹³ may have had some foundation in the early 1980s, but Islamic aid has declined substantially. Instead, the Islamic Middle East Gulf States have assisted Bangladesh indirectly by providing employment to migrant Bangladeshis who remit valuable foreign exchange back to Bangladesh. Remittances from abroad, largely from the Gulf States, amounted to US\$1,300 million in 1994-5, an increase of 20% compared with the previous financial year.¹¹⁴ Bangladesh's dependency on the Gulf States is therefore considerable, as exemplified in late 1990 during the Gulf crisis caused by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, when Bangladesh's economy

108 At the end of 1993, India's total external debt was US\$91,781 million. The cost of debt servicing for India is also high, being 28.4% of export earnings in 1993. *The Europa World Year Book 1996, Volume 1*, London, 1996, p. 1539.

109 For example, severe flooding and loss of life occurred in Bangladesh in 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1991.

110 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

111 *ibid.*

112 *ibid.* For a similar viewpoint see M.M. Khan, & S.A. Husain (eds), *Bangladesh Studies: Politics, Administration, Rural Development and Foreign Policy*, Dhaka, 1986, pp. 250-254.

113 E. Ahamed (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative*, Dhaka, 1984, p. 89.

114 *The Europa World Year Book 1996, Volume 1*, London, 1996, p. 502.

deteriorated rapidly because of the loss of remittances from Bangladeshi workers.¹¹⁵

Like the Islamic states, the United States has also greatly reduced its supply of direct aid to Bangladesh, dropping from the considerable portion of 36% of total aid in 1976 to only 5.5% in 1989. Similarly, aid from the Soviet Union and China also declined, respectively dropping to just 0.5% and 0.4% in 1990. Indian aid has also become negligible, in contrast to the initial period between 1971 and 1975, when India had considerable political stakes in Bangladesh's survival and supplied Bangladesh with the extraordinary sum of US\$304.3 million in aid when India itself was a major aid-recipient.¹¹⁶ Japan has taken over the role as the largest individual supplier of aid to Bangladesh, increasing from 2.7% of total aid in 1973 to a substantial 8.5% in 1990.¹¹⁷ The next largest individual supplier is Canada, surpassing even the United States by 1990.¹¹⁸

Whether or not aid has been of benefit to Bangladesh, it is integral to Bangladesh's economic structure and foreign policy. Successive Bangladesh governments have continually cultivated aid donors wherever possible in the name of progress and development, despite the debatable benefits of aid. Ziaur Rahman, for example, 'embarked on an unprecedented quest to woo aid donors', undertaking many fund-raising visits to wealthy countries during his regime: the EEC, the Arab States, the U.S., and Japan.¹¹⁹ Zia's foreign policy wholeheartedly embraced the notion that foreign aid was the key to domestic economic development, a naive and military-minded view, according to Marcus Franda.¹²⁰ As self-appointed champion of the 'third world cause', Zia urged developed countries to double their flow of aid to the Least Developed

115 C. Baxter, 'Bangladesh in 1990: Another New Beginning?', *Asian Survey*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1991, p. 151, and *The Europa World Year Book 1993, Volume 1*, London, 1993, p. 453.

116 R. Sobhan, *The Crisis of External Dependence: The Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh*, London, 1982, pp. 142 & 240. The United States supplied US\$577 million in aid during the same period. See also Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

117 Anisul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

118 Canada has more than doubled its aid to Bangladesh, increasing its share of total aid from 2.7% in 1972 to 5.7% in 1990. *ibid.*

119 M. Franda, *Bangladesh: The First Decade*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 282 and Z.R. Khan, *Leadership in the Least Developed Nation: Bangladesh*, Syracuse, 1983, pp. 165-6. For details of one of Zia's trips to obtain Islamic support and aid, see *The Bangladesh Observer*, 22 May 1976.

120 M. Franda, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

Countries in the interests of easing the world's 'grim economic situation' and promoting cooperation.¹²¹

The corollary to Zia's search for aid was the emphasis he placed on Bangladesh's neutrality in the international arena and on espousing the necessity for global peace. Being vulnerable and dependent, Bangladesh's best option, in Zia's view, was to take a non-aligned stance whenever possible, preferably via an international body such as the United Nations, in the hope of generating a broader source of political and economic support.¹²² His platform of neutrality included a commitment to establishing the Indian Ocean as a 'Zone of Peace'¹²³ and to creating a regional association of the South Asian states for the purpose of fostering 'regional friendship and bilateral interests'.¹²⁴ Zia's initiative regarding the latter was eventually fulfilled posthumously in 1985, with the first summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).¹²⁵ The themes of non-alignment and regional cooperation advanced by Zia were aimed ultimately as counters to India's regional dominance. They also flouted India's traditional preference for maintaining the regional *status quo* and for dealing bilaterally with the other South Asian states.

Like Zia, Ershad espoused a foreign policy ostensibly aimed at promoting global peace and non-alignment, but in reality partly aimed to curb Indian dominance over Bangladesh. The underlying message to India appears in Ershad's statement made during a visit to the United States in 1983:

We have been governed by principles of sovereign equality of states, territorial integrity and non-use of force, non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states and peaceful settlement of disputes.¹²⁶

Ershad's foreign policy also resembled that of Zia regarding foreign aid for Bangladesh. Ershad believed in the necessity of aid for Bangladesh's development and principally appealed to the same states for assistance: the United States, China and the oil-producing Gulf States.¹²⁷

121 *The Bangladesh Observer*, 27 August 1980 and 31 August 1980

122 See for example Zia's address to the United Nations General Assembly in August 1980, when he presented his 10-point plan for the 'restructuring of the global economic order' in order to 'remove the ever widening disparity between the developed and the developing nations'. *ibid.*, 27 August 1980.

123 *ibid.*, 8 March 1977, 5 July 1979, and 8 November 1979.

124 *ibid.*, 16 May 1980.

125 *ibid.*, 8 December 1985.

126 *ibid.*, 30 October 1983.

127 *New York Times* (New York), 11 April 1982.

Bangladesh's extreme poverty, economic instability and aid dependency have directly and indirectly fuelled and reinforced Indian fears of external interference in the region. These fears have been justified to the extent that severe and worsening economic problems exist in Bangladesh which is, in turn, indebted towards and dependent on assistance from states external to the region. Zia and Ershad also played on Indian fears by emphasising and exaggerating Bangladesh's strengthening links with the United States, China and the Arab states, long-standing allies of Pakistan, India's main adversary.¹²⁸ Whether or not the aid was forthcoming, Zia and Ershad were sending a clear message to India that their foreign policy leanings favoured Pakistan. Indian fears of external stratagems to destabilise its volatile northeast and northwest were widely known and easily provoked, as expressed by Nancy Jetly:

India has reasons to be wary about Bangladesh's potentially disruptive role in the northeast, in the context of continuing uncertainty in the strategic region. India has also reasons to be uneasy about any major destabilization in Bangladesh which would lead to the involvement of an extra-regional Power in the area and have major repercussions in India. A hostile Bangladesh, in league with China and Pakistan, or both, will be able to exploit the turbulence in the northeast to India's patent disadvantage.¹²⁹

A similar, more subtle argument has been put forward by Marcus Franda and Ataur Rahman:

The inability of Bangladesh to become economically self-sufficient, together with its terribly restricted power position *vis-a-vis* India, significantly affect the security environment of Bangladesh. Possibilities for big power penetration are, therefore, considerable. Given the volatility of Bangladesh politics, the intensity and depth of Indo-Bangladesh differences, and Bangladesh's economic vulnerability, it is difficult to envisage an extensive period in the future when the big powers would not be tempted to at least probe Bangladesh's internal affairs.¹³⁰

Zia and Ershad fostered, rather than allayed, Indian fears of external interference in their efforts to counter India's dominating presence in the region. As noted above, the level of aid to Bangladesh from the United States, China and the Arab states dropped markedly in the 1980s. Indian fears concerning the ramifications of Bangladesh's economic plight did not reduce correspondingly. If anything, they increased as India's domestic stability deteriorated in the 1980s.¹³¹

128 For example, Chinese links with Bangladesh were continually publicised with great fanfare in the Bangladesh press. See *The Bangladesh Observer*, 4 November 1983, 16 June 1987 and 11 December 1988.

129 N. Jetly, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

130 M. Franda & A. Rahman, 'India, Bangladesh and the Superpowers', in P. Wallace (ed.), *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 263.

131 See Chapter Four.

Bangladesh's poverty and aid dependency have been woven into the conduct of its foreign relations, but it is impossible to link economic ingredients precisely to outcomes in Bangladeshi foreign policy. On balance, economic factors appear to have been manipulated by, rather than instrumental in shaping political considerations and foreign policy. India will continue to see Bangladesh's economic strife in terms of a blend of political and ideological concerns, despite the reality that Bangladesh's economic dependency now principally involves either countries which are no threat to India, or organisations to which India is similarly indebted, such as the World Bank.

The above review has identified the most important influences on Bangladeshi foreign policy; those considered to remain valid throughout the period under study, despite the variations in policy which may have been instigated or implemented by the successive Bangladeshi regimes. These influences range from those which have general applicability to interstate relations, to those which apply specifically to Bangladesh. Bangladesh's foreign policy has been moulded not only by monumental domestic difficulties and insecurities: external pressures, insecurities and ideological concerns have also shaped Bangladesh's foreign relations. Subsequent chapters illustrate the interplay between these two realms, the domestic and the external, in the conduct of Bangladesh's relations with India and Pakistan.

India's regional supremacy has played a central role in the development of Bangladesh's foreign relations. For each of the smaller South Asian states, India's intentions are of great concern, but particularly to Bangladesh. Apart from being almost surrounded by India, Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable because it lacks the military strength and extra-regional alliances to withstand a serious challenge to its sovereign independence. Neither can Bangladesh take heart from the fact that it does not, like Pakistan, pose a military threat to India. Bangladesh's overpopulation and extreme political and economic fragility have become fixed in the Indian psyche as representing one of the most ominous, unpredictable and worrisome threats to India's stability and integrity, compounded further if the Bangladeshi leadership is perceived to be anti-Indian.