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**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
AMERICA'S PARTNERSHIP WITH BANGLADESH
NATIONAL DEFENSE COLLEGE
MIRPUR
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Commandant Lieutenant General Mollah Fazle Akbar

Distinguished Faculty Members

... and, you, the most distinguished students ...

Good morning ... Asalaam m'laikum ... Ramadan Kareem.

Thank you for the kind introduction and warm welcome. I look forward to exchanging views with you today.

The National Defense College reminds me of the National War College in Washington, D.C., where I taught for a year before coming to Bangladesh in November 2011. NDC, like NWC, has brilliant students, a great commandant, a beautiful auditorium, and truly outstanding professors.

The two institutions share something else ... a word, a single word, a simple word, a deeply complex word ... that word is strategy, the study of strategy. This thread runs through professional military education everywhere. American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., used to say, "Keep your eye on the prize." To us who work to advance our nation's interests, whether through military or diplomatic means, strategy – thinking strategically – keeping our eye on the prize – is essential.

I will offer today a case study of strategy, specifically, America's strategy of engagement with Bangladesh. I shall do so using a diplomat's language, and leave it to you to apply the lexicon of a military strategist, as you are learning here.

The starting point is the context, the global context. Changes in context have dramatically altered America's engagement with Bangladesh. Having served as a diplomat in Bangladesh from 1998-2001, I am often asked what changes I see in Bangladesh after an absence of over a dozen years. The answer is simple: The biggest change since my June 7, 2001 departure from Bangladesh

has been in Washington, more precisely, Washington's perception of Bangladesh. During my earlier posting in Dhaka, Bangladesh was a country much loved by aficionados like me and by those who specialize in development work; otherwise, America's priorities were more sharply focused elsewhere.

But what a difference a day can make ... the day after 9/11, America's priorities began a rapid and dramatic shift. America's security strategy changed as the United States sought to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat those who threaten our nation or our allies and partners.

In this context, America's strategic engagement with Bangladesh also changed. Recognizing that Bangladesh, too, is committed to defeating violent extremism, America sought to broaden and deepen its partnership with Bangladesh. Subsequently, as America and much of the rest of the world "pivots" toward Asia, America's partnership with Bangladesh is further deepening. Let me define the interests (to use the strategist's terminology) that underlie this partnership:

Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

A moderate, tolerant, democratic country, Bangladesh, the world's seventh most populous country, is a viable alternative to violent extremism in a troubled region of the world. Only eight or nine years ago, many thought Bangladesh was going down the wrong path in tolerating violent extremist elements. I recall in 2005 when over 500 bombs exploded in one day in 63 of Bangladesh's 64 districts; I recall the safe havens for cross-border insurgents, the arms trafficking. I doubt any of you has heard talk of how violent extremism was seemingly once taking root in Bangladesh. That notion is now passé, reflecting the Bangladesh government's success in addressing the threat of violent extremism. I am glad that America has been and remains Bangladesh's partner on this critical front.

Advancing Regional Stability.

Bangladesh's improving ties with its neighbors add to the region's stability, a key interest of America and the region. For example, Bangladeshi/Indian cooperation on countering violent extremism has helped rein in terrorism in both countries. Similarly, the improved trade environment between the two countries has unleashed an impressive expansion of trade with Bangladeshi exports to India nearly doubling, as I have witnessed during two visits to Benapole, one of the largest land port in Asia, on the Indo-Bangladesh border. The Prime Minister's visit to Burma in December 2011 and subsequent engagements showed Bangladesh is willing to take the first step (and the risk that comes with that) to reach out to its neighbors. As Bangladesh engages more with its neighbors on security, trade and investment, development and other issues, the region

becomes more integrated and stable. Bangladesh is blessed by geography to be the nexus of the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, which likely will be a major trade route of the 21st century.

Promoting Global Peace.

Bangladesh is the largest contributor to peace support operations in the world with nearly eight thousand military and police personnel on the ground in eight different operations. Bangladesh provides trained and dedicated manpower – and womanpower – to help maintain global peace, an invaluable contribution to the international community.

Ensuring Global Food Security.

In 2011, the population of the world surpassed 7 billion, and it is on track to hit 9 billion in my lifetime, and I'm already really old! America seeks that all of these people have adequate and nutritious diets. This interest cannot be achieved unless the world's seventh most populous country, Bangladesh, can feed itself.

Expanding Trade and Investment.

Last year, US-Bangladesh trade surged to over \$6 billion. Bangladesh's exports (mostly readymade garments) surpassed \$5 billion; US exports hit \$1 billion, double the amount of the previous year. This trade directly impacts both countries, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in Bangladesh and about ten thousand jobs in the U.S. My goal is to double American exports to Bangladesh by 2014, thus creating another ten thousand needed jobs in America. As Bangladesh strives to become the world's largest RMG exporter, its exports to America will grow as well. During our questions and answers period, we can, if you wish, explore the ramifications of President Obama's decision on June 27 to suspend Bangladesh's GSP privileges. In short, I think Bangladesh's engagement to restore those privileges will be the key to ensuring that there is never again another Rana Plaza building collapse or Tazreen Fashions fire disaster.

Promoting Core Values.

America believes democracies that respect the human rights of its citizens make the best partners for achieving peace, stability and prosperity for the world. Thus, a key American interest in Bangladesh is fostering democracy and respect for human rights.

Helping Fellow Human Beings.

Americans, like good citizens around the world, feel passion for those beset by disaster. As we well know, Bangladesh experiences many natural disasters: cyclones, floods, tidal surges, and earthquakes. Over the decades, America has played a leading role in helping Bangladesh cope with

the aftermath of these disasters. Now, however, in partnership with the government of Bangladesh, we are helping Bangladesh prevent mass casualties when these disasters strike.

I have shared with you America's key interests in Bangladesh. As a policy maker, I now must ask myself how to go about advancing these interests in Bangladesh. You will recall discussion of ways and means from your strategy courses. As every member of US Mission Dhaka well knows, we work to promote a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic because such a Bangladesh is in the interests of America, in the interests of the region, and, most especially, in the interests of the people of Bangladesh.

Now we come to the hard part of any strategy. What exactly are we to do to implement the strategy and pursue the interests? This is where the rubber hits the road. So, let's put some meat on the bones ... what is America doing in Bangladesh to advance this strategy to the benefit of America, Bangladesh and the region?

I will first speak broadly to the non-security aspects of our partnership here; then I will conclude with a more detailed examination of our security partnership.

Non-security Aspects of the US-Bangladesh Partnership

Deepening engagement is central to our growing relationship with Bangladesh, a country, as noted earlier, of strategic importance to America. Last May, Secretary of State Clinton visited Bangladesh. She came to celebrate the richness and success of our partnership with Bangladesh. She came to institutionalize the partnership by signing a Partnership Dialogue Agreement with the Foreign Minister under the approving eye of the Prime Minister. The first Partnership Dialogue was held last September in Washington and the second session was here in Dhaka in May; each Dialogue assessed the strategic direction of our partnership. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman led the U.S. delegation to each session. Sometimes I feel like a travel agent as we are inundated with VIP visitors, including in January the largest delegation from the U.S. Congress to ever visit Bangladesh. Since my arrival in Dhaka, we have had a steady stream of visits by Undersecretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, generals and admirals, the Secretary of the Navy, among others. In a couple of weeks, another congressional delegation will visit. They aren't coming to get frequent flier miles; they are coming for one reason: to further cement our partnership with Bangladesh and to seek ways with Bangladesh's civilian and military leaders to take the partnership forward in the coming years and decades.

America is working with Bangladesh to further institutionalize our partnership. In April last year Bangladesh hosted the first ever US-Bangladesh Security Dialogue here in Dhaka; America

reciprocated by hosting the second annual Security Dialogue in Washington a few months back. Last September, we held the first ever military-military dialogue in Hawaii; the second round will be held this September. We are now adding an Energy Dialogue to further broaden these exciting institutional linkages. I hope someday soon we will sign the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement, which would provide a forum for identifying and resolving obstacles to increasing bilateral trade and investment.

Our engagement with Bangladesh has an important people-to-people aspect. Last September we formally launched in Dhanmondi our new Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts in partnership with the Liberation War Museum to engage young people. The EMK Center has become a hotbed of engagement and interaction with young leaders, who are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but are also the leaders of today as they work now to engage youth to build the nation. As I committed when I presented my credentials in November 2011, I am visiting each of Bangladesh's 64 districts so America can learn about the rich diversity of Bangladesh and Bangladesh can get a taste of America. We also have numerous exchange programs to strengthen ties between our people.

Our development assistance program is another element of our engagement. At about \$200 million a year, our development program in Bangladesh is our largest in Asia outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan. I have been in the development business in some capacity since 1970 ... most of you were pretty little then ... and I have never seen a development partnership that yielded such rich, tangible results as here in Bangladesh, ranging from impressive reductions in maternal and child mortality rates, reduced fertility rate so Bangladeshis can have the family size they want, increased food security to greater adaptation for the impact of global climate change, strengthened democratic institutions, including parliament and the media, and the list goes on and on ... and so must I.

Security Aspects of the US-Bangladesh Partnership

America seeks to build a strong security partnership with Bangladesh. I believe that this security partnership can promote greater peace and stability in this region and beyond, a goal shared by both nations. I will focus on three important areas of cooperation: counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and global peacekeeping.

Countering the threat of terrorism is a high priority of both Bangladesh and America.

America partners with Bangladesh in the fight against terrorism. We support Bangladeshi efforts to build greater capacity to combat terrorism. We partner with the Bangladesh Coast Guard

and Bangladesh Navy Special Warfare and Diving Salvage (SWADS) unit, so it can better protect Bangladesh's maritime borders. Later this year, the Bangladesh Navy's effectiveness will be further enhanced by the arrival of a US-contributed cutter, which 378 feet will be the largest ship in the Bangladeshi fleet. Using strengthened capacities, Bangladesh has already reduced robberies of ships in the Bay of Bengal by over two-thirds, resulting in reduced insurance premiums by a third. We partner with the Bangladesh Army Para Commandos as they grow from a battalion to a brigade, so it can better secure Bangladesh's land borders and be capable of acting in a support role for counterterrorism operations. We support greater interoperability between SWADS and the Coast Guard and Para Commandos as well as those who secure Bangladesh's land borders like the Bangladesh Border Guards and Ansar and Village Defense Party (VDP). We undertake joint exercises, which increase the preparedness of both militaries.

We engage with other elements of the Bangladesh security structure beyond the military. We help Bangladesh as it endeavors to strengthen laws and policies on terrorism, to support police effectiveness in working with the communities they protect, to strengthen judicial and prosecutorial processes, to promote rule of law, to develop a strong forensics program, and to track and block terrorist financing.

I believe a robust counterterrorism partnership would be most effective if based on a framework that enables greater coordination of U.S. assistance to various elements of the Bangladesh government. We and the Bangladesh government are now in the final stages of concluding a Counterterrorism Memorandum of Understanding, which would facilitate increased cooperation and enhance sharing of critical information.

Increasing preparedness for responding to and coping with natural disasters is in the interests of both countries.

We all know of the monstrous cyclone that hit Bangladesh in 1991. The death toll was staggering, but it would have been worse had the United States and Bangladeshi militaries not worked together to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Both nations learned well an important lesson, that working together we can save lives, and we continue to engage on how best to respond to disasters. In 2007, Cyclone Sidr taught another lesson, that preparedness saves lives. Many Bangladeshis had survived that cyclone by seeking refuge in cyclone shelters. From that lesson, America partners with Bangladesh to build hundreds of these shelters, which serve as schools or community centers when not needed for refuge. America has built or rebuilt 547 cyclone shelters and is in the process of building another 130. Among these new shelters, thirty will be Coastal

Crisis Management Centers, which are equipped to sustain communications and coordinate relief and rescue during and immediately after a disaster strikes. Through this partnership, Bangladesh is better prepared than ever to cope with cyclones, floods and earthquakes. We take great pride in this continuing progress.

The United States and Bangladesh partner through Humanitarian Assistance /Disaster Relief exercises like our annual Disaster Readiness Exercise and Exchange , which includes the Bangladesh Government, the Armed Forces Division, US Embassy, US Army and many elements of civil society and various international entities, including other foreign missions here. This year's exercise in September will focus on how best to respond in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake. This exercise will include a robust field training exercise to strengthen our partnership's capacity to provide assistance during natural disasters.

America supports Bangladesh's unmatched engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations.

As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is the world's largest contributor to international PKO, and Bangladesh is prepared to increase its contributions by 50% over coming years. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon made clear during his visit to Bangladesh in 2011, the international community values Bangladesh's leading role in supporting global peace through its contributions to UNPKO. Bangladesh brings to peace support operations both a commitment to peace and stability and the necessary tools, including helicopters, armored personnel carriers, offshore patrol vessels, and that old, reliable workhorse, the C-130. We are working hard to add another four C-130's to the Bangladesh Air Force, thus increasing capacity for both PKO and responding to natural disasters.

When I was here a decade ago, I witnessed American-Bangladeshi partnership in establishing Bangladesh's PKO training center, BIPSOT. I am pleased that America continues to support this center through a range of activities, including multilateral PKO exercises like SHANTI DOOT III. In March last year, then Pacific Army Commander Gen. Wiercinski and I witnessed the Prime Minister's opening of that large exercise with participants from throughout Asia. At that time, I announced a \$5 million grant to further assist BIPSOT, which is now the world's largest PKO training center.

There are many other areas of U.S.-Bangladesh cooperation in the security realm that I could explore, such as our helping Bangladesh as it further professionalizes its military and other security elements, as it strengthens civilian-military relations, as it modernizes its forces and builds

its capacity to secure the people of Bangladesh, as it fosters security by improving the health, education, prosperity and well-being of the Bangladeshi people. Our bilateral partnership is engaged productively on all of these fronts. There is much more to say, but I know that you have been sitting in those chairs too long already.

I believe the U.S.-Bangladesh security partnership will go from strength to strength. My government is committed to this partnership and seeks to deepen cooperation in training, joint exercises, technical assistance, provision of equipment, professional military education, and high-level visitor exchanges. I am confident this security partnership is destined for even greater heights.

I just walked you through America's strategy for engagement in Bangladesh. So, the next time you hear anyone say "I wonder what those Americans are up to" you now know the answer.

With that, I close ... ever so thankful for this cherished opportunity during this holy month of Ramadan to share a few thoughts with you from my perspective as the Ambassador of the United States to the wonderful nation of Bangladesh.

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**As prepared for delivery*