



## ***SOUTH ASIA'S NEW FRONTLINE: HOW BANGLADESH IS SHAPING US-INDIA RELATIONS***

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Historically, Washington has viewed Dhaka through India's lens. Things have been transformed as Bangladesh is now one of the [fastest-growing economies](#) in the Indo-Pacific and has positioned itself as the guardian of the Bay of Bengal. As the strategic dimension of world politics changes, its ripple effect has been increasingly felt in South Asian politics. Therefore, Washington has changed its discourse on handling regional politics by itself by engaging in a more assertive and conspicuous way to align its foreign policy interests.

The US is increasingly edging towards Asia—centered largely on competition with China—and Bangladesh has found itself to be significant in this development. America knows well that to delimit the rise of Beijing, a coalition with like-minded democracies and strategically important countries in the Indo-Pacific is essential. In this context, the US views the promotion of democracy and stability in Bangladesh as a core interest—an outlook that contrasts with India's more cautious or divergent approach.

### **Democracy as faultline: Washington promotes, Delhi wavers**

The core of the current geopolitical tension lies in Bangladesh's democratic transition. Delhi is acutely aware of the [growing anti-India sentiment](#) among Bangladeshis. This is because, over the last 15 years, despite continuing border killings, unfair water-sharing, and skewed trade, India enjoyed disproportionate influence in Dhaka as a reward in exchange for Delhi's backing of Hasina's autocratic regime, accused of electoral malpractice, extrajudicial killings, and systematic repression across the country.

By contrast, in the last decade, the US has struggled to align its moral and strategic policies with the Awami League. Hasina's broad alignment with Indian interests and overt hostility toward the US convinced the White House to see her government as an Indian proxy that [undermined American interests](#). In a public statement, she even [accused America](#) of opposing her continued leadership because she refused to permit a US military base on Saint Martin—an island of Bangladesh that holds profound strategic value in the Bay of Bengal. The climax of tensions only eased in August last year, when Hasina was toppled following a popular uprising—an event that raised speculation of possible US complicity, though the Biden White House [denied](#) any role.

### **Dhaka's Indo-Pacific pivot may rattle US-India relations**

Now, as Hasina's autocratic reign is over. Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus is steering the government, endeavoring to reform the entire system to ensure a democratic power transition through a free and fair election. He is in continuous dialogue with Bangladesh's Western partners, especially the US, seeking assistance to fulfill this mandate. Though India has remained officially silent or tacitly consented regarding the next election without their "yes man," its [discomfort with a Yunus-led administration](#) is evident.

Without a doubt, for Delhi, whoever comes to power after the next election in Bangladesh will pose either [neutral or anti-India sentiment](#) in conducting foreign

policies. In contrast, the US has no such apprehension because in last few years, anti-Hasina parties have directly and indirectly gotten Washington to support their political rights and eventually facilitated pressure by [imposing sanctions](#) on a security agency and some of its top officials.

Although pro-Indian narratives cast doubts on America's intentions, Washington appears more supportive of democratic reform—or at the very least, opposed to another Hasina-style despot—as it realizes that democratic governance in Bangladesh will serve its broader strategic ambition to curb China's footprints from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.

Much before the formal steps toward the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US [invited](#) Bangladesh to consider joining the initiative. Though Dhaka did so eventually, drafting an outlook [without any precise planning](#) on how it would navigate the cooperation in the security dynamics, which is believed to be due to pressure from Delhi.

However, the potential upcoming government, most likely the Bangladesh National Party, appears to be [more consolidated](#) toward this strategy and has shared its goals and vision to work with Washington, which would eventually worry Delhi. [Faridul Alam](#), a professor and leading foreign policy expert in Bangladesh, said in an interview that “a strong security coalition may embolden Bangladesh's capacity to bargain for a fair share in the disputed maritime conflict with India in the Bay of Bengal and beyond.”

### **Dhaka-Washington security tie, Delhi's worry**

With regard to security matters, the US and Bangladesh have enjoyed a relationship that has been tightening for decades. Since 2014, Washington has [assisted Bangladesh](#) with nearly 100 million dollars under the names of foreign military financing and international military education and training. With a stronger relationship, there have been many [more deals](#) like the [General Security of Military Information Agreement](#) and the [Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement](#) that can be signed, which would allow Dhaka and Washington to exchange

sensitive information about military procurements and assist high seas surveillance and exchange food and energy in times of emergency. These would be time-intensive deals for both partners as Dhaka has drafted a vision to modernize its military ambition, “[Forces Goal 2030](#),” which the fallen regime reportedly pushed to slow down, reportedly at the instruction of India.

If Dhaka pivots to these deals with Washington, Bangladesh's military reform will replace the previous military doctrine and achieve sophisticated technology and military equipment required to tackle traditional security challenges in the 21st century. In addition, collaborating with Washington, Dhaka may also leverage building up its defense industrial base to be independent in its manufacturing, which surely would concern India over its unilateral hegemony in the region, and the consequence may impact the US-India relationship.

Finally, the Rohingya Crisis appears to be another point of future dissension, as India has [compounded](#) this crisis by deporting and denying entry to Rohingya fleeing oppression at the hands of the Myanmar military. Since the genocide began in Myanmar, Delhi has been keeping a strong grip on the Myanmar junta, which is sanctioned under the [Burma Act](#) crafted by Washington. While India seems little bothered about the future consequences of the refugee crisis, it prioritizes its [strategic and economic benefits](#) with an isolated junta regime, America wants regional stability, perceiving the resolution of the world's largest refugee crisis as an essential part of its focus. Left unaddressed, the US realizes, this crisis may destabilize the region through the kind of [transnational crime](#) that Washington takes seriously under its broader counterterrorism agenda.

Moreover, in recent days, US-India relations have experienced a [period of strain](#), particularly after Washington refrained from firmly supporting New Delhi's call to pressure Pakistan following the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir. Instead, the White House hosted Pakistani military official Asim Munir for lunch with President Trump. Many experts believe it's a diplomatic win for Islamabad as representatives from [both Pakistan and the US](#)

[reiterated](#) Washington's role in mediating the latest standoff, discussing bilateral trade, economic development, and collaboration on shared interests. This development has reportedly [frustrated India](#), which has long lobbied Western allies to designate Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism.

As the global order continues to shift, its ripple effects are increasingly visible across the world—South Asia, and particularly Bangladesh, is no exception. The breeze of this shifting touches, creating a new dividing point between regional and international powers. Yet, it is not going to be easy for Bangladesh to navigate an integral relationship with the US, as China has been a growing economic partner, leaving Dhaka with little choice but to maintain a delicate balance with major powers. Still, a more assertive and resilient Bangladesh is the frontline priority, which is likely to seek greater leverage in foreign policies, bargaining for its national interests—particularly in managing its complex relationship with India, with whom it shares the [fifth-longest](#) land border in the world.

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