

# Rituals of Violence in Armed Movements: Evidence from Bangladesh

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*Abstract:* Existing studies explain the public display of violence either as a pure religious or magical practice of some rightwing fundamentalist groups or as a strategy used by social movement organizers to exert pressure on authorities. In this paper, I argue that armed civil militia groups engaged in a protracted movement resort to violence following the same symbolic and strategic logic as the state military does in a counterinsurgency operation. The state military displays violence as part of their professional norms. Armed civil militia groups also view the armed movement as a profession and display violence as part of their version of militarism. To support this view I provide empirical evidence from three armed movements in Bangladesh and highlight the policy implications.

*Key Words:* rituals of violence; armed movement; civil militia; militarism; counterinsurgency.

*Résumé:* La recherche actuelle explique la démonstration publique d'actes violents soit comme une pratique purement religieuse ou magique de groupes fondamentalistes de droite, soit comme une stratégie utilisée par les mouvements sociaux pour exercer de la pression sur les autorités. Mon argument est plutôt le suivant: lors d'une opération de contre-insurrection, les milices armées actives de manière prolongée recourent à la violence suivant la même logique symbolique et stratégique que l'armée gouvernementale. Les démonstrations de violence de la part de l'armée gouvernementale font partie de normes professionnelles. Les milices armées voient leur activités dans un mouvement armé comme une profession et leurs démonstrations de violence font partie de leur version du militarisme. Je soutiens cet argument à l'aide de données empiriques concernant trois mouvements armés au Bangladesh et mettons en évidence les implications de mes résultats en termes de politiques publiques.

*Mots-clés:* rituels de violence; mouvement armé; milices; militarisme; contre-insurrection.

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## Introduction

A systematic display of violence is an important feature of many armed movements. Most studies of armed movements explain violence as a strategy of movement organizers to exert pressure on the authority to give in to their demands (Freilich, Peinik and Howard 2001; Pape 2005; Wickham-Crowley 1992). They largely overlook the symbolic aspects of movement violence. Similarly, those who view rituals of violence as pure religious or magical practices fail to understand their strategic dimension (Berlet 2005; Eller 2010; Kirsch 2009; Perlmutter 2002). In this paper, I argue that armed civil militia groups follow the same strategic as well as symbolic logic in practicing violence as the state military does in a counterinsurgency operation. Without examining both the symbolic and the strategic

dimensions in relation to military professionalism our understanding of the rituals of violence in armed movements is only partial.

Militarism is by definition associated with the term ‘militia’ which is etymologically derived from the Latin *miles* or *milit* meaning ‘soldier.’ Adding the suffix *ia* with the root *milit*, the word ‘militia’ literally means “military service.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014) defines militia as an “organized body of people comparable to a military force.” Originally, a militia was a “body of soldiers in the service of a sovereign or a state.” Subsequently, it came to mean “a military force raised from the civilian population of a country or region, especially to supplement a regular army in an emergency, frequently as distinguished from mercenaries or professional soldiers” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2014). Later, civil militia groups were separated from the state military force in most countries and existed as armed movements, often having antagonistic relations with the state military. In this backdrop, we observe that much like the state military, members of many contemporary and historical civil militia groups engaged in a protracted armed movement resort to violence as a strategic and ritualistic practice of their ‘profession,’ as they view it. They take armed movements as a ‘career’ and try to follow the same professional norms of a conventional army. In support to this claim, I provide empirical evidence from an analysis of three protracted armed movements in Bangladesh, a country that experiences violent movements throughout its history. Before going to the specific case, in the following section, I review the existing literature to understand why different armed movements practice violence.

## Understanding the Rituals of Violence

The dictionary meaning of ‘ritual’ (Latin origin: *ritualis*) is commonly related to a religious act or ceremonial observance. In later use, the term also means “repeated actions or patterns of behaviour having significance within a particular social group” (see *Oxford English Dictionary* 2014, entry ‘ritual’). As with the original meaning, rituals of violence are often understood as religious or magical practices motivated by religious texts, precepts, beliefs or doctrines (Perlmutter 2002). Religiously motivated violence often places an emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the act such as a sacrifice of human life in order to eliminate a curse. Understanding rituals of violence from this religious perspective does not help us distinguish religious or magical from non-religious or secular rituals of violence because all secular events of violence also place an emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the act. Both religious and secular militia groups legitimize violence in reference to the principle that the end justifies the means. Many contemporary Islamist militia groups use suicide bombing as an effective tactic to achieve their ends despite the fact that suicide is religiously prohibited in Islam. These groups justify suicide attacks as a form of sacred violence, a supreme form of *jihad* allowed by the highest Islamic jurisprudence, the *Sharia*. According to these groups, suicide attacks are not meant to commit suicide (*intihar*), but martyrdom (*istishad*), a voluntary sacrifice of oneself for the cause of Islam (Zeidan 2001: 19). They believe that the martyr will receive a special place in the heaven. However, as Pape (2005) notes, about one third of the suicide attacks are carried out by groups with more secular orientations. Pape (2005) claims that the world’s leader in suicide terrorism is Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) whose recruits are mostly Hindu Tamils. Their source of motivation is not religious texts or beliefs but a variant of Marxist-Leninist ideology. This group committed 75 of the 186 suicide attacks recorded all over the world during 1980 to 2001 (Pape 2005: 343).

Pape (2005) examines the “strategic logic” of collective violence, particularly of suicide terrorism. According to him, groups that sponsor suicide attacks create circumstances around the death of a suicide attacker, which increase the expectations of future attacks. As a tactic to attract more recruits, as Pape argues, groups using suicide attacks try to elevate the status of the martyrs by justifying suicide attacks on the basis of religious or ideological motives that match the beliefs of a broader community. In order to glorify the death of a suicide attacker, movement organizers commonly promote what Pape (2005: 347) terms “sacrificial myths” which “include elaborate sets of symbols and rituals to mark an individual attacker’s death as a contribution to the nation.” Material rewards are also attached to these myths. Often the families of suicide attackers receive monetary benefits from the suicide attack organizers. This elicits popular support to the “art of martyrdom” from the attackers’ community and helps increase the number of recruits for future suicide attacks.

Pape (2005), Schalk (1997), Southwold (1993) and Tambiah (1992) assert that many rituals of violence seem religious, but they reveal powerful political and ethno-nationalist motives. The strategic logic of LTTE’s suicide attacks might be clear, but one might wonder why Sri Lanka’s Buddhist monks are also involved in fierce violence against Sri Lankan Tamils. The monks cannot justify violence on religious grounds because Buddhism teaches nonviolence. Pape (2005), Schalk (1997), Southwold (1993) and Tambiah (1992) argue that Buddhist monks are involved in political violence rather than religious violence, as is commonly understood. According to Tambiah (1996: 279), the “leveling crowds” of Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh militants display “jubilant and festive moods” when they perpetrate violence against each other. Their acts of violence “are of a piece with their collective identity, their temporary sense of homogeneity, equality, and physical intimacy, their sense of taking righteous action to level down the enemy’s presumed advantage and claim their collective entitlements” (Tambiah 1996: 280).

Similar to Tambiah’s analysis, which considers the rituals of violence from a Durkheimian approach focusing on “moral economy,” Freilich, Peinik and Howard (2001) analyze the American militia movement and claim that civil militia groups use various ritualized practices in order to instill coherence and discipline in the group and convey a sense of belonging to a noble and just cause. They find two forms of ritual in the American militia movement: The first form is a symbolic display of militarism in public meetings or workshops through uniform dress and other military artifacts. Above-ground militia organizations tend to practice this type of ritual mainly to gain public support. They also display military bearings in the public to show their organizational power. The second form of ritual in the militia movement is paramilitary exercise such as training and regular assembly drills through which members learn about basic first-aid and self-defense techniques. Some militia groups also organize boot camps to teach members how to secure an area and how to use arms. Since this type of ritual can be hindered by law-enforcement agency, it is practiced in isolation. According to the authors, underground organizations usually practice paramilitary exercises to prepare their members for violent combats. New recruits are trained through this ritual and seasoned members are given a sense of adventurism which helps them reduce their stress caused by their underground operations.

Freilich, Peinik and Howard (2001) cite Hobsbawm (1959) who in his study of the “primitive rebels” in southern Italy and Spain noticed that the rebels were dependent upon ritualistic elements such as initiation, ceremonials of public meetings, and symbolism to bind members closely to the group and reaffirm unity. Hobsbawm (1959: 153) also observed that the primitive rebels were most likely to turn to rituals of violence when “they were or had to be secret” and “their revolutionary aims were extremely ambitious.” Peasant riots and banditry were also violent but, according to him, they

differed from rebels' ritualistic violence. He termed the former's violent act as "pre-political" to differentiate it from the "revolutionary" violent politics of the primitive rebels.

Alexander (2006: 92) argues that revolutionary violent politics of today's terrorist groups is rather "post-political" since it "reflects the end of political possibility" of resolving a conflict. While Alexander talks about the "post-political" nature of militia violence, he does not relate it to military violence because the latter is conventionally considered as part of 'normal' politics. In a strict sense, military violence is also "post-political" as it denies the possibility of conflict resolution by normal political means. A common feature of both types of violence is that they are justified as righteous acts. Armed militia groups, religious or secular, view their opponents as satanic, unjust or oppressive, and violent attacks are believed to be necessary for their elimination. Similarly, their opponents, most often those with legitimate power within a state frame of reference, view the militia groups as terrorists. State-induced violence has a legitimate name such as the "war against terrorism" which calls for the observance of some civic "rituals of solidarity and security in the wake of terrorist attack," if such an attack takes place (Collins 2004: 53). Thus, the dictum "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" complicates the definition of militia violence vis-à-vis military violence. Although often weaker than the state armed forces, militia groups follow the same strategic logic as the state military does in a counterinsurgency operation. State armed forces coerce civil militia groups to stop perpetrating violence against the state and the 'common' people. Similarly, militia groups coerce the state armed forces to withdraw from what they see as their homeland and stop perpetrating violence against them.

The symbolic display of violence is equally, if not more, important in understanding the rituals of violence in the armed movement. The public display of militarism is more like a symbolic act of violence than a strategic one. In both contemporary and historical political systems, war remains a principal means of survival and territorial expansion. From the preparation to the actual battle, and more importantly, in the aftermath of a war, elaborate rituals are performed. According to Harris (1977, cited in Davis and Robinson 2000: 5-6), warfare in primitive societies is a "ritual murder, regardless of whether the enemy is killed in the battlefield or at home." At home, the prisoners of war occupy the center stage of the rituals of military violence. Torturing the prisoners of war to death, as Harris (1977) claims, has its own gruesome economy. By torturing a few captives the military wants to warn a thousand enemies of the same consequence. Here, the symbolic aspect of violence is at the same time its' strategic aspect. If we do not take both of these dimensions into consideration we may not understand rituals of violence properly. Violence becomes ritualistic since torture is "a spectacle – an entertainment – which has been time-tested for audience approval down through the ages" (Harris cited in Davis and Robinson 2000: 5).

Today both insurgency and counterinsurgency-related violence are an entertaining spectacle thanks to digitally-mastered action films, 3-D first-person shooter video games, and international media corporations that broadcast war news live from the battlefield. We may remember how enthusiastically BBC, CNN and other international media corporations set up their media units in the battlefield of Iraq in 2003 to broadcast the spectacular scenes of bombing by the coalition forces led by the United States. Due to their media activity we could watch the massive devastation of an ancient civilization in real time. The media documented every aspect of the ritualistic performances: the intense diplomatic drama staged in the United Nations Security Council surrounding Iraq's alleged possession of the weapons of mass destruction, the war preparation of the mighty coalition forces against the dictator of Iraq, the festivity of setting up media units in the battlefield, the broadcasting of emblazing battle

scenes by the media, and the final capture of Saddam Hussein, his trial, and tearing off his head while hanging him to death. After the initial victory, the coalition forces and other international actors had other rituals to perform in Iraq such as the reconstruction of the war-torn society and devastated civilization, fighting periodic battles with dispersed militia groups, arranging a democratic election, and deciding about the final withdrawal of the army. These were all ritualistic performances, as defined by Alexander (2006) and others, surrounding the Iraq invasion which was highly digitally mediated.

In *Watching Babylon*, media theorist Mirzoeff (2005) examines the experience of watching the war against Iraq on television, on the internet, in films and in print media, and explains the symbolic and strategic aspects of the ritualistic performances. He claims that the media turned war images into powerful weapons, sending a strong message for other contemporary and future global insurgents. The barbaric photographs of the Iraqi prison at Abu Ghraib, which became public in April 2004, called for a spectacle with the same message that any insurgents against the Western interest would embrace the same fate (Mirzoeff 2006). In the field manual, *Counterinsurgency*, issued by the United States Army in December 2006, the objective of its counterinsurgency operation is explicitly stated as: to fight global insurgency by waging a cultural war, using the media as a principal means to legitimize its operation and strengthen solidarity among Americans as well as their friends (Mirzoeff 2009).

As an unintended consequence, global insurgents possibly read one message from the US military's counterinsurgency violence in Iraq: that is, violence works through the symbolic and strategic dimensions of militarism. As militarism requires the conventional military personnel to view their violent action as a 'call of duty' to defend a country and its people from terrorists, so do the civil militia members, who strive to defend their homeland against occupational forces. Many civil militia members might take the armed resistance movement as a career because of the military professionalism associated with it and perform rituals of violence in the same way as the conventional military does in a counterinsurgency operation.

In the following section, I substantiate my claims by providing empirical evidence from a particular country, Bangladesh, which has witnessed rituals of violence since its inception. Three major protracted armed movements are identified in this country: religious or Islamist, leftwing or Maoist and ethnic or ethno-nationalist (Quamruzzaman 2010). Activists from these militia movements practice different rituals of violence depending on their ideologies, motivational sources, mobilization tactics, and organizational structures, but they publicly display one common feature in their ritualistic practice: militarism.

## Rituals of Violence in Context

The founding of Bangladesh through its separation from Pakistan in 1971 was very violent. Under the charismatic leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the political party Awami League led a mass movement on the basis of Bengali nationalism, demanding autonomy of former East Pakistan, the homeland of the majority Bengali-speaking people who were economically and politically discriminated against by the Urdu-speaking West Pakistani rulers and political elites. The party discarded the religion-based two-nation theory of the Pakistan movement that resulted in the 1947 partition of British India, creating Pakistan as a homeland for Muslims and India as a homeland for the majority Hindu population. Instead, the Awami League adopted secularism, democracy, socialism, and Bengali nationalism as the party ideologies. In the first democratic elections of 1970, the party

won the majority of votes, but the Pakistani military junta did not accept the results. Instead, it launched a military operation in former East Pakistan on March 25, 1971 that killed thousands of unarmed Bengalese. Bengali politicians and army officers announced the declaration of Bangladesh's independence on March 26. The war broke out as the Pakistani army, in collusion with Islamist militias, committed horrible atrocities against Bengali civilians, including university students, teachers, nationalist intellectuals, politicians, and religious minorities. Bengali defectors from the army and paramilitary officers organized civilians into a militia that was subsequently known as the *Mukti Bahini*, meaning the Liberation Army. It engaged in guerrilla warfare against Pakistani forces. The name Liberation Army signified that the band was like a conventional army, fighting for the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan, but initially it did not have any conventional arms. The Liberation Army members used locally available and homemade weapons. Later they captured a few weapons from the Pakistani army, as one of the Bengali defector army officers recalls: "We were fighting with weapons captured from the enemy, although we did receive some support from the Indians.... We were regular troops in uniform and fought like a conventional army" (Moinul Hossain Chowdhury quoted in Al-Mahmood 2009). Composed of defector army officers and civilians, the militia troops were not part of a conventional army but they felt like they were. This feeling of professional militarism gave the troops the strength to fight against a conventional army, as the defector army officer, Chowdhury, admits.

With Indian army's help, the Mukti Bahini guerrillas and defector Bengali army personnel liberated Bangladesh on December 16, 1971. Mujib's party ideologies, now popularly termed as *Mujibbad* (Mujibism), were adopted in the first constitution of Bangladesh in November 1972 as the fundamental principles of the new state. Ironically, Mujib's secularism disappointed many religious-minded people, particularly the Islamists. Socialism was considered by the leftists to be too slow to lead to any 'revolutionary' change; Bengali nationalism was not inclusive of other indigenous minorities living in different parts of the country, and democracy was later killed by Mujib himself through the authorization of a one-party dictatorship in the country.

The Mujib government highlighted the role of the common people and the freedom fighters rather than the role of the army in the liberation movement of Bangladesh. In order to absorb them in regular troops, the government created a citizen militia force in the name of *Jatiya Rakshiki Bahini* (National Protector Army) and tasked them with tackling some of the serious domestic conflicts of the time, which were created by some leftist and Islamist militant groups. By creating the civil National Protector Army the government indeed undermined the state army. This created serious resentment in the military, which ultimately resulted in the assassination of the president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975 (Mohsin 2002). Following the assassination, a series of military coups and countercoups occurred that had devastating effects on the discipline of the army.

After the political transition in 1975, Lieutenant General Ziaur Rahman took over the power of the state and sought to reestablish discipline in the army. His first step was to highlight the role of the army – rather than the role of the Mukti Bahini and the common people – in the "historic war for national independence," as he termed it, replacing the words "historic struggle for national liberation" from the constitution through an amendment (Riaz 2003: 310). He took other measures to improve the morality of the army. He increased military budgets to recruit more members in the army. The 'surplus' military men were then deputed in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region where an ethno-nationalist armed movement was organized by non-Bengali ethnic militias who rejected Mujib's Bengali nationalism. The counterinsurgency operation in the CHT "provided the Bangladesh military

with a sense of mission and purpose” since their activities “were projected as nation-building endeavours, and were used to justify the rapid increases made in the Bangladesh army both in terms of personnel and revenue receipts” (Mohsin 2002: 170).

On the other side of the spectrum, the counterinsurgency measures of the army were viewed by the ethnic militia groups as “a state mechanism to erase their identity” (Mohsin 2002: 173). The ethnic militias, under the ideological and organizational framework of the Chittagong Hill Tracts People’s Solidarity Organization (PCJSS), started organizing various small ethnic groups, thirteen in total, on a nationalist agenda. This agenda provided them with an ambition to establish a separate homeland for the *Jumma* nation, a common name given to the thirteen ethnic groups, through an organized movement rather than sporadic insurgencies, although the PCJSS continued such insurgencies through its militia organ *Shanti Bahini*, meaning the Peace Army.

General Zia assumed the presidency of the country in April 1977 and made some vital constitutional amendments in order to legitimize his rule. Article 12, which defined the state principle of secularism, was omitted altogether; “Bengali nationalism” was replaced by “Bangladeshi nationalism” and “socialism” was given a new meaning: “economic and social justice.” He turned his foreign policy from India and the former Soviet bloc to America and the Muslim world, including Pakistan. Soon the cabinet and his newly formed Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) “were composed of the defectors from various political parties and people who collaborated with the Pakistani regime in 1971” (Riaz 2003: 311). The Islamist political parties that were banned during the Mujib regime due to their involvement in the atrocities against Bengali people were given the opportunity to participate in political activities under the Political Parties Regulations Act promulgated in July 1976.

India did not like Zia’s policy. When the ethnic militia group Shanti Bahini sought help, “India provided Hill guerrillas with arms and ammunitions...[and]...allowed Shanti Bahini to set up their bases in the Indian state of Tripura and Mizorum” (Chowdhury 2006: 43). Brigadier Shahed, who was once deputed in the CHT, claims that with India’s sanctuaries, finance, training facilities, arms, and ammunition, the “profile of the insurgent group changed rapidly and, since 1976, a well-trained, equipped and motivated guerrilla force had tied down a large Bangladesh security force in a tug of war in the jungles” (Shahed 2002: 227-228). In the tri-junction point where India, Burma and Bangladesh meet, different national and transnational ethnic militia groups came together in 1978 to form a common network and exchange experience and expertise (Van Schendel 2005: 270). This has striking similarities with such military rituals as the signing of regional bilateral military cooperation agreements.

In the early 1980s, the Shanti Bahini militias intensified violent attacks against the security forces and also the Bengali population settled in the area. The strategic objective of those attacks was to make “the military campaign of the Bangladesh government internally expensive and externally unpopular to the international community” (Shahed 2002: 229). As a counterinsurgency strategy, the security forces also intensified attacks on the Shanti Bahini militias, which affected many civilians of the indigenous community. Because of the gross violation of human rights in the military violence the government faced tremendous pressure from the international community, including the United Nations (Talukdar 1988: 185-186). The ethno-nationalist movement not only succeeded in securing the attention of both national and international communities but also gave the militias a sense of worthiness and justified their violence against the regime they viewed as oppressive and unjust (Quamruzzaman 2010).

The Shanti Bahini ethno-nationalist movement quickly succeeded in creating a supportive network with other similar movements in South Asia and beyond. Similarly, various Islamist militia groups also began rising in Bangladesh as part of a transnational network in the 1990s. The rise reached its peak in the 2000s and was linked to the rise of Islamist extremists in other parts of the world (Riaz 2008). A *New York Times Magazine* article claims that some of these groups had links with al-Qaeda's Global Jihad Movement in Afghanistan (Griswold 2005). One such group, the Party of Holy Warriors of Bangladesh (JMB) received international attention during the 2000s. Its front organ Awakened Muslim Masses of Bangladesh (JMJB) was led by Siddiqul Islam who fought as a *mujahidin* in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation force during 1979-1982. Upon his return from Afghanistan, he tried to continue his fight against the communists – now leftist militias, called *Sarbahara*, meaning the proletariat, of a small village in the southwest part of Bangladesh – “to protect the common people from their atrocities” (Haider 2007). Sarbahara militias were also viewed as infidels as they organized public meetings to convince people that God did not exist. Siddiqul Islam received support from local elites, and the law-enforcement agency in Rajshahi district believed that it was “not possible for the undermanned and under-equipped police to hunt them [leftwing militias] down,” as the Divisional Inspector General of Police in Rajshahi reportedly told *The Daily Star* on May 5, 2004. Journalist Haider (2007) claims that in “the years preceding the rise of the JMB, the Sarbahara...would openly carry automatic weapons and machetes through the major roads of Baghmara, with the administration turning a blind eye.” Taking advantage of the weakness of the law-enforcement agency, both the Maoist and the Islamist groups started performing some of the functions of the state police force, while competing for power and dominance with each other.

Within a very short time the JMB emerged as a major Islamist militia group. It introduced two new components to the Bangladesh militia movement: They showed their expertise in large-scale time-bomb operations, and they introduced suicide bombing as an instrument of coercion. On August 17, 2005, the JMB and JMJB cadres in collaboration with other Islamist militias staged the most extraordinary time-bomb operation in the history of Bangladesh. In an interval of 30 minutes, time-bombs exploded in 459 locations throughout the country. The bombs contained no shrapnel, indicating that they had no intention to kill but to demonstrate that they had the capability to inflict enormous harm on their target if their demands were not met. Apparently, their demands were to implement Islamic rule in Bangladesh, as they stated in the leaflets distributed along with the bomb blast. They advised the government to shun what they called the “evil constitution” and remove all rivals of God, non-Islamic practices and obscenities to implement Islamic rule in the country and allow the people “to perform Islam the correct way” (*The Daily Star* 2005). They said with a note of caution that steps would be taken against those who would not cease loyalty to the “evil power,” indicating the United States of America that invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. Through this extraordinary public display of violence the militia group wanted to symbolize the current regime as unjust and uphold their ideological position as just. At the same time, their bombing operations were “the demonstration of expanded capabilities, a strategy of mobilization and a campaign of intimidation” as well as “a powerful tool for further recruitment in areas where such operations are executed, and a severe warning to political opponents that dire consequences attend any efforts of opposition” (Laksham 2006: 17).

JMB's threat to inflict further harm materialized very shortly thereafter. On November 14, 2005, JMB's first suicide bombing killed two senior assistant judges in Jhalakati district, injuring four others. Police seized leaflets from the attacker that read: “Ban manmade laws and establish Qur'anic laws”



(*New Age* 2005). Subsequently, JMB extremists killed six other judges and lawyers and sent death threats to thirteen others between August 17 and November 20, 2005 (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2005: 2).

As the attacks on judiciary intensified, police and a police-military combined force called the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) more actively pursued JMB kingpins. Since its creation in 2004 as an elite counter-terrorism force, RAB's main targets were the militant-Islamist and the leftwing-militia groups. Soon the RAB became the most visible epitome of military violence under the state legal framework. Between March 2004 and March 2011, the elite force killed 732 people in an extrajudicial way (Human Rights Watch 2011: 1). Many of the deaths for which the RAB was responsible resulted from summary executions and extreme physical abuse. RAB's torture methods included beatings with batons, boring holes in the soles of the feet and other parts of the body with electric drills, and applying electric shock. The RAB introduced a new ritual of violence in the history of Bangladesh, which is infamously known as "crossfire" killing. Human Rights Watch (2006: 3) defines crossfire killings as "cold-blooded murders in the RAB custody," invariably following an event of an "imaginary" or "staged" shoot-out between the RAB officials and an alleged criminal group. Although crossfire killing is highly criticized by human rights organizations, it is still a common counterinsurgency strategy of the national elite force in Bangladesh.

The insurgency from the part of the militia group and the counterinsurgency from the part of the state military or the elite force are two opposite sides of the same ritualistic practice – display of militarism, which provides both parties with a sense of duty, adventure, engagement, pride, and identity. One-sidedly, the laws of the state often ban the militia group and provide the military with supreme authority to annihilate their 'mimicking' counterpart. Thus, although a militia group might want to practice the same rituals of a conventional army, the superiority of the latter as legitimate power may not let the former do that. Only the state armed forces can legally keep and use arms while the civil armed groups cannot. This distinction might be clear in a stable and strong state, but not so clear in an unstable and fragile state, such as the Bangladesh state in most of the time of its history.

During the 1971 liberation war some Islamist and ethnic militia groups collaborated with the Pakistan army in their atrocities against the Bengalese. After the war, the freedom-fighter guerrillas brutally killed many of the collaborators to take revenge. Mohaiemen (2006: 297) claims that "indicators of the potential brutality of the future Bengali state were nested in moments like the ruthless and porno-voyeuristic public bayoneting of people accused of collaborating with the Pakistan army." To stop this civil violence, the newly formed Bangladesh government soon asked all freedom fighters to surrender their arms to the government. While many surrendered their arms, many others did not. Particularly, some leftwing militias did not surrender their arms to what they called the "petty-bourgeois puppet government" (Mohaiemen 2006). Rather, they started using the arms against the government, hoping to replace it with a revolutionary socialist regime. On December 16, 1971, when most people participated in the celebration of victory with the freedom-fighters, the Sarbahara Maoist group was distributing leaflets renouncing the liberation as false and the Awami League government as the puppet government of India. As the war was over in nine months, they might have lost the opportunity to continue their military adventurism and career in line with the protracted people's war in China. So they declared that the war was not over and wanted to finish the "unfinished revolution" according to their own ritualistic plans. Soon the people's army "spread from the villages into towns and were marked by lightning strikes, bomb attacks, targeted assassinations and seizures of public buildings" (Mohaiemen 2006: 297). They used to celebrate their victories inside the party and asked

the public to be with them. Their ritualistic or patterned violence against the government, and against what they termed as 'class enemies,' continued for quite some time.

In several occasions, the government urged the leftwing militias to come back to 'normal life,' marking the end of their militia career. In one of those occasions, in July 1999, at least 340 outlawed Maoist militias surrendered their arms to the government in response to a general amnesty. Earlier, in February and March 1998, more than 1,500 ethnic militias also surrendered their arms to the government, and their political platform, the PCJSS, signed a peace accord with the government. The government announced an amnesty to those who turned in their arms in a public ceremony that took place at a stadium and attended by thousands of people. In that ceremony, the leader of the PCJSS announced the formal disbandment of the Shanti Bahini militia group.

The surrender of arms and declarations of amnesty are events observed with elaborate ceremonials as they mark the victory of the state armed forces. At the same time, they mark the end of the militia movement, at least for the time being. Most importantly, they mark the end of the militia career of the activists. Many active members indeed lose their 'job' when the movement comes to an end. This is one of the main reasons why many militia members refuse to surrender their arms to governments offering amnesty or moral support as compensation. The elaborate celebrations of Independence Day, Victory Day and other major national events with mock displays of arms and uniforms, staged dramas, patriotic songs, and poems are some common ways the state provides moral support and honor to the civil militia members who end their careers by surrendering their arms and returning to normal life.

However, if the government fails to implement its promised post-accord programs, militias who initially agree to come back to normal life might turn back to even more violent action or might themselves become victims of more violence by their opponents. This happened in the case of the peace accord with the PCJSS who later claimed that the government betrayed them. As the government that signed the peace accord in 1998 changed in the general elections of 2001, the new four-party coalition government did not take any steps to implement the accord since the coalition parties opposed it from the very beginning. Rather, it helped create a new political party in the CHT to mobilize public sentiment against the PCJSS. Earlier, another party was formed by a section of the indigenous people who rejected the peace agreement outright. Now, all of these parties are engaged in violent conflict against each other. The PCJSS is hoping that the current government and the international community will come forward to implement the peace accord in full without further delay (PCJSS 2013).

## Conclusion

Much like the state military, armed movements justify violence on both strategic and symbolic grounds. The rituals of violence often help the movement gain public support and new recruits. Gaining public support further justifies violence as a necessary means to achieve the goal. The confidence of movement activists in the use of violence increases when violence is used successfully. On the other hand, offensive military action is often considered as the most effective means to contain militia violence because it aims to destroy the confidence of militia groups in their ability to afflict further damage. However, as the militias are literally inspired by militarism, increased offensive military action is more likely to aggravate militia violence rather than to contain it.

Defensive strategies are also ineffective and expensive in the long run. Pape (2005: 344) suggests that “states should invest significant resources in border defenses and other means of homeland security” so that the militias cannot carry out their attacks on a targeted society. However, increased homeland security does not reduce the confidence of militias to practice the rituals of violence since this has little to do with the justification they give to their violent acts.

Another common strategy is to give occasional concessions to particular militia groups in the form of ceasefire, amnesty or peace agreements. Often concessions alone are not effective as most militias might not want to end their career, as was evident in the Bangladesh militia movements. Most importantly, if the militia groups have reason to believe that the post-agreement situation will be worse for them, they might reject the concessions and turn back to even more violent action.

In order to effectively contain militia violence the government needs to identify and address the real sources of militia grievances. Militarism adopted either by the state or by civil militia groups for coercive or defensive purposes is not a solution to a social, economic or political problem. This is evident in the birth of Bangladesh through a long violent movement. At the root of the movement was the grievances of an ethnic group, the Bengali-speaking people in former East Pakistan, who felt relative deprivation vis-à-vis the Urdu-speaking people in Pakistan. Grievances arising from relative deprivation are identified as a common cause of many armed movements (Gurr 1970). Poverty or economic dislocation may lead some people to be engaged in the militia movement. However, if the economic problem is combined with a political one, job creation and such other economic measures alone cannot resolve the issue. Opportunities should be created for the aggrieved people to resolve problems through inclusive political processes. Since military and militia violence both tend to be ‘post-political,’ inclusive political processes need to be more than ‘normal’ politics, if necessary at the expense of the disappointment of the state military and opposing parties. Not all militia groups are willing to come to terms with oppressive governments. Not all political parties are willing to come to agreements with some militia groups, as evident in the CHT peace agreement. But inclusive political practices will yield positive results in the long run.

In the twenty-first century, when good governance is suggested to be the most effective long-term solution of political violence and ethnic conflicts, there is no denying that strong institutions help states manage public grievances more successfully. A state strong in rule of law, control of corruption and political violence, bureaucratic efficiency, infrastructural power, and service provisioning is more inclusive in its politics, more effective in social development policy, and more capable of implementing its decisions logistically rather than through coercive means (Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2009; Mann 1993, 2008). New leadership should envisage creating strong institutions, rule of law in particular, to sustainably contain militia violence.

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