Chapter VIII

Mukti Bahini – Strategy and Modus Operandi

Introduction

Mujibur Rahman gave a clarion call to the people of Bangladesh exhorting, “Fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is driven out of the soil of Bangladesh. Final Victory is ours.”

Mukti Bahini and the various groups of freedom fighters are synonymous with the liberation war of Bangladesh. However their history has been mostly mixed with facts, and fiction and sometimes harsh and uncharitable criticism depending upon who wrote their history. While bringing out the factual position about the organization and strategy of the Mukti Bahini, particularly of ‘the fighting force ‘Group Captain (later Air Vice Marshall) A. K. Khondakar, Deputy Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Liberation Force and his Commanders commented in their paper, that, “Due to improper recording of the events during the nine-month civil war, some facts were either not recorded at all or distorted leading to inconsistency about certain events of the war. Some popular stories in circulation may not necessarily be the real truth” The Bengalis of East Pakistan Rifles revolted immediately after the brutal repression of Pakistan Army that commenced on the night of 25th March 1971 and wanted to take on the might of the Pakistani Army in tune with the clarion call given by Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman to fight till liberation. The war was started by individual military officers with their own forces, in their own areas, in their own style without any central planning or coordination. It was only after the Bangladesh government formally took oath on 17th April, 1971, that the process of coordinating the entire war effort was initiated. In this chapter I intend to find answer to a few relevant questions. They are:

(a) What made people to join the liberation war en masse?
(b) What were their organizational structure, strategy and operational tactics?
(c) How one rates their performance and contribution in the liberation war?

Mukti Bahini was a generic term which was comprised of different categories of freedom fighters. Initially it started with the name Mukti Fouz which was later changed...
to Mukti Bahini by substituting the Urdu word Fouz with the Bengali word Bahini. The increasing terror tactics of Pakistan Army gave the Mukti Bahini more recruits than they could absorb. There was no dearth of volunteers from all sections of the society. Formation of Mukti Bahini went through various stages since the brutal attack on 25th March 1971 and grew into a large and complex organizations with different kind of capability. Col M.A.G Osmani their C-in-C had said that ‘the Mukti Bahini was manufactured overnight by the Pakistan Army. Bengalees in the Army and Police might have stayed neutral had Pakistan limited their action against selected politicians. It was only when the information got around that Pakistani army was out to kill Bengalee intellectuals and servicemen as well that they revolted to a man’. Bengali officers and men of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) who were deployed along the border were the first to revolt and raise the flag of Bangladesh as shown below.

![Photo No.7: FLAG OF BANGLADESH AT THE TIME OF LIBERATION WAR OF 1971](image)

On behalf of Mujibur Rahman, Maj Ziaur Rahman who later became President of Bangladesh declared independence on 27th March from a Radio Station at Kalurghat (Chittagong). These EPR and Bengali police personnel who revolted brought their arms
along and fought with the Pakistan Army at Chittagong, Saidpur, Kushtia and few other places. They suffered heavy casualties. Here they realized that they have to adopt the tactics of asymmetric warfare because Pakistan Army was much superior to them in strength, training and arms and ammunitions.

After the Bangladesh Government took oath on 17 th April, 1971, process was initiated to integrate and coordinate various aspects of the liberation struggle. The defected military officers who were so far fighting liberation war on individual mode in disjointed manner were invited for a coordinating conference by The Government of Bangladesh functioning from No.8 Theatre Road (now Shakespeare Sarani), Calcutta. The conference lasted from July 11 to July 17 was attended by the following:

1. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed.
2. Col M.A.G. Osmany.
3. Lt Col M.A. Rab.
7. Maj Khaled Musharaf.
11. Wing Commander M.K.Bashar.

**Organization of the Mukti Bahini**

Amazingly by the end of April, the number of volunteers rose to 2,50,000. They were screened by the Awami League MNAs(Member of National Assembly) and MPAs(Member of Provincial Assembly) and the followers of Awami League ideals were selected. After indoctrination, shortlisted persons were sent to India for training for use of weapon and explosives. By July 1971, its organization took the following shape:
MUKTI BAHINI

Niyomito Bahini (Regular Force)       Gano Bahini (Freedom fighters)
Swadhin Bangla Regiment                 Suicide Squads,
(Regular Battalion)                     Bichhu Squads,
                                              Toofan Bahini

While analyzing Mukti Bahini and its transformation and action, one finds similarity with the French concept of civil war that entails three stages. **Crystallization:** involves psychological rallying of the people. **Edification:** mainly includes organization of the revolutionary structure. **Militarization:** is the simultaneous creation of and operation of a military machine. 8

The credit for codified doctrine of offensive guerilla strategy goes to Mao Tse tung. As a matter of fact, strategy of a revolutionary warfare which in context of Liberation war of Bangladesh is essentially a mobile offensive operation against an well equipped and trained conventional army. In essence, it was an asymmetrical war. It may look simple in concept but its application is rather complex. Mao Tse –tung has taught, if a poorly equipped and trained revolutionary force wishes to fight a relatively modern and well equipped army, the only way to win ultimate victory lies in a strategically protracted war. To win such a war, the revolutionaries must try to reverse the power relationship (1) by wearing down the enemy’s strength with the cumulative effect of many campaigns and battles,(2) by building their own strength through mobilizing support of the people, establishing bases and capturing equipment, and(3) by gaining outside political and if possible military support. 9 From the point of view of Mukti joddhas, the liberation war ended in less than 10 months because India became partisan to this war. Their strategy by far followed Mao’s dictum.

General Giap, the Vietminh architect of the victory against the French and strategic brain behind the Vietcong in South Vietnam wrote in his book *People’s War People’s Army:*

Revolutionary armed struggle in any country has common fundamental laws.

Revolutionary armed struggle in each country has characteristics and laws of its own too. 10
The guerrilla movement was composed of three wings: well-armed Action Groups which took part in frontal attacks; military intelligence units; and guerrilla bases. Colonel M. A. G. Osmani (later General) was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of all Bangladesh Forces. The members of EBR, EPR, police and other paramilitary forces were later called "regular force" or "niomito bahini".

Teliapara document prepared under the supervision of Col M. A.G Osmani and ratified by the Bangladesh Government in exile gave the outline strategy of the liberation war. It stated that:

(a) A big guerilla force would be trained to destroy the pro-Pakistani collaborators, disrupt communications to immobilize the Pakistani troops, and follow hit and run tactics against the Pak posts and convoys so that the Pakistanis would live under perpetual tension and confusion.

(b) The already trained forces inside the Mukti Bahini would be organized as Sector troops and placed in different sectors for giving support to the guerillas.

(c) Capable persons from the regular units and guerillas would be selected and trained to form a regular force to undertake armed actions against the Pak Army.

Indian Army Extends Support to Mukti Bahini.

On 1st May 1971, the COAS of Indian Army issued Army Headquarters Operation Instruction Number 52 to GOC-in-C Eastern Command. Its aim was to assist the Bangladesh Government in Exile in organizing the liberation movement. It also spelt out broad scope of Indian Army in facilitating raising, training, equipping and providing logistics support etc to East Bengal Mukti Joddhas (liberation warriors) for employment in their own land to carry on the fight for liberation. GOC-in C Eastern Command was assigned following tasks by the Army Chief:

(a) Advise and guide Provisional Government of Bangladesh and obtain their concurrence on issues like setting up of an appropriate politico-military organization for waging war.

(b) Decide and obtain concurrence of the Bangladesh Government in Exile on the size of the guerrilla force. Plan for an initial size of 20000 men to enlarge to 100000 subsequently.

(c) Evolve and establish an intelligence set up.
(d) Enlarge the scope of guerrilla operation in East Bengal by gradually escalating intensity of the operation in the following manner:

(a) Stage 1. Tie down Pakistani troops by keeping the border hot. Isolate and eliminate selected weakly held BOPs by the Bangladesh Force with the help of the artillery and mortar fire support of BSF and Indian Army.

(b) Stage 2. Commence induction of the Freedom Fighters inside Bangladesh for carrying out destruction of communication systems and establishment of guerrilla bases deep inside Bangladesh.

(c) Stage 3. Carry out raids and destroy industries, installations, petroleum dumps etc.

Organization and Planning of Liberation Army

During the coordinating and strategy planning conference of all commanders held in July, in Calcutta, Lt. Col. M A Rabb was appointed the Chief-of-Staff and Group Captain A K Khondaker was appointed the Deputy Chief-of-staff. Force Commanders and Sector Commanders were also appointed by the Government of Bangladesh. On 15th July, Force Commanders and Sector Commanders were administered oath of allegiance to the Government of Bangladesh by the Acting President Mr. Nazrul Islam in presence of Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. For the purpose of liberation war, Bangladesh was divided into eleven sectors and area of operation along with demarcation of the sectors was decided. Sector wise details are enumerated below.

No.1 Sector

This sector covered the area of the districts of Chittagong, Chittagong Hill tracts and part of Noakhali district (area east of Muhuri River). This sector had five sub-sectors and approximately 2100 troops, out of which 1500 were EPR soldiers, 200 police, 300 army personnel and 100 members of the navy and air force. In addition, this sector had 20,000 guerrillas, of them 8,000 were organized in groups. Hundred percent of the sector troops and thirty percent of the guerrillas were given arms and ammunitions.

Maj. Ziaur Rahman was commander of this sector initially but during the July conference he was made force commander and Capt. Rafiqul Islam was appointed Sector Commander.
No.2 Sector
This sector comprised of eastern part of Faridpur, southern part of Dacca district including Dacca city, Comilla district (excluding area north of Akhaura –Ashuganj rail line), and Noakhali district (excluding areas east of Muhuri river). This sector was further subdivided into six sub sectors and in all total there were 4000 sector troops and elements of co-located ‘K’Force. In addition, the sector had 30000 guerrillas approximately. Maj. Khaled Musharraf was performing the duties of sector commander as well as K Force commander. Later Maj. M Haider was made sector commander.

No.3 Sector
This sector covered the area covering part of Comilla district (area north of Ashuganj-Akhaura rail line), part of Sylhet district (area south of Churamankati-Lakhai-Shaistaganj general line), northern part of Dacca district and Kishoreganj sub-division of Mymensingh district. The sector was further subdivided into ten sub sectors and had about 2500 sector troops and 25000 guerrillas. Maj K.M.Safiullah was sector commander. But on raising of ‘S’ Force, Maj. Safiullah became force commander and Maj. Nuruzzaman was appointed sector commander of this sector.

No.4 Sector
This sector comprised of parts of Sylhet district, with western boundary along the general line Tamabil-Ajmirganj-Lakhai and southern boundary along the general line between Lakhai and Shastaganj. This sector was further sub divided into six sub sectors and had about 2000 troops and 8000 guerrillas. Maj C.R. Datta was sector commander.

No.5 Sector
This sector covered the geographical area of northern part of Sylhet district i.e. west of general line Tamabil-Ajmirganj. The sector was further divided into six sub-sectors and had 800 sector troops and 7,000 guerrillas. Maj. Mir Shawkat Ali was the sector commander’
**Sector 6**
This sector covered the area west of the Jamuna river comprising the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur. (excluding Ranisankali and Pirgunj). This sector was subdivided into five sub sectors and had 1200 troops and 6000 guerrillas. Wing Commander M.K. Bashar was sector commander.

**No.7 Sector**
This sector comprised of the area Rajshai Pabna and Bogra districts, and parts of Rangpur and Dinajpur districts. It was further subdivided into eight sub sectors and the sector had approximately 2000 troops and 10,000 guerrillas. Maj. Nazmul Haq operated in this sector and due to his accidental death Maj. Q.N. Zaman was made sector commander.

**No.8 Sector**
The area of this sector covered the districts of Khulna and Jessore as well as part of Faridkot district and Satkhira sub division in Khulna district. This sector was further subdivided into seven sub sectors and had 2000 sector troops in addition to 7000 thousands guerrillas. Benapol was sector HQ and Maj. M.A. Manzur was sector commander. However till August, Maj. M.A. Choudhury was commander.

**No. 9 Sector**
The districts of Barishal, Patuakhali, Khulna (excluding Satkhira) and part of Gopalganj in Faridpur district were the area of responsibility of this sector. The sector was divided into eight sub sectors had about 700 troops and 10000 guerrillas. Capt M.A. Jalil was the sector commander.

**No.10 Sector**
This sector was formed to accommodate Navy and Air Force commandos of Bangladesh and during different operations at different areas, there control would fall on the respective sector commander. Therefore this sector did not have any territorial limits. There were also tasked to hold and defend the liberated area of Bangladesh. It was
planned that the Provisional Government of Bangladesh could shift its headquarter to the liberated area.¹³

Map No.14- Showing Sector-Wise Area of Operation of Mukti Bahini

No. 11 Sector
This sector comprised of the districts of Mymensingh and Tangail. Bahadurabadghat and Fulchariagh at in the Jamuna in the north were also included in this sector. This sector had eight sub sectors and a battalion worth troops in addition to 20000 guerrillas. Maj. A. Taher was the sector commander.
Raising of Regular Army Brigades (to be called Force)

It was later decided that regular army brigades will be raised and a brigade would be termed ‘Force’. Accordingly three of them were raised: K Force under Maj. Khaled Musarraf as its force commander raised in No.2 Sector, S Force was raised in No.3 Sector and maj. K.M. Shafiullah was named as its commander, and Z Force with HQ in India was lying North of Sylhet and Mymensingh districts. Maj Ziaur Rahman was the Z Force commander. 

Jackpot Sectors (India’s Support to Mukti Bahini)

On 26 March 1971, BSF on orders from the Government of India commenced providing assistance to the revolting Bangladesh Forces. On 29 April 1971, Government of India requested the Indian Army to take over the responsibility of assisting the Bangladeshi forces in their liberation war and BSF was placed under command of the army. Army HQ accordingly issued formal instruction to HQ Eastern Command on 1st May. Though Eastern Command was otherwise helping the Bangladesh Government in Exile to set up its infrastructure but it commenced its formal support to Mukti Bahini from May 15th onwards. Under the code name ‘Operation Jackpot’ Indian Army coordinated, training, arming, administration and logistics support and offering advice on guerrilla operation. Initially Maj Gen Onkar Singh Kalkat was head of this project who was later succeeded by Maj Gen B.N. Sarkar. The areas bordering East Pakistan was divided into six logistical sectors, each to be commanded by a Brigadier from the Indian army. Their areas of responsibility were called ‘Jackpot Sectors’. Mukti Bahini Sectors of Bangladesh were put under their command during the organizational stage. Each Jackpot Sector looked after one or more Bangladesh sectors each of which was commanded by a BSF Commandant along with a Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini Commander who shared responsibility of the particular sector jointly. Details of the Jackpot Sectors are as given below:

1. A Sector (HQ: Binaguri, West Bengal), Sector Commander-Brig. J. C. Joshi. Bangladesh Sector No.6 was under it.
2. B Sector (HQ: Raigunj, West Bengal), Commander, Brig. Prem Singh. Bangladesh Sector No.7 was under it.
3. C Sector (HQ: Krishnanagar, West Bengal) Commander, Brig. N. A. Salick. Bangladesh Sector Nos. 8&9 were under it.

4. D Sector (HQ: Agartala, Tripura), Commander, Brig. Sabeg Singh. Bangladesh Sector Nos. 1, 2&3 were placed under it.

5. E Sector (HQ: Masimpur, Assam), Commander, Brig. M. B. Wadke, Bangladesh No.4 Sector under it.

6. F Sector (HQ: Tura, Meghalaya), Commander, Brig. Sant Singh. Later this Sector was called FJ sector. In June, this sector was further divided by creating E-1 Sector at Jarain (Shillong). Bangladesh Sector No.11 and Sector No.5 (under E-1) were under this sector.

Through this network, Mukti Bahini forces communicated with the Mukti Bahini Headquarters Exiled in Kolkata and coordinated all supply, training and operational efforts for the war. Lt. Gen. J. S. Aurora, commander of Eastern Command, was overseeing the entire operation. Regarding coordination of Indian efforts through the Indian Sector Commanders, the official record states:

It was mainly through the Indian Sector Commanders (Jackpot Sectors) that the Mukti Bahini maintained their link with the Bangladesh Force HQ. All the operational policies were formulated at the highest level jointly between HQ Eastern Command and the Bangladesh Forces HQ and the implementation of these policies was the responsibility of the Indian and the Bangladeshi Sector Commanders. At times however contradictory orders were sent to the sector commanders which hindered their smooth functioning.

During the coordinating conference held in July, following broad strategy was formulated for conducting war against the Pakistan Armed Forces:

1. A large number of guerrilla fighters would be sent inside Bangladesh to carry out ambush at every convenient places

2. Industries would be shut down by disrupting electric supply. To achieve this power sub stations and electric poles will be blown up.

3. Pakistanis would not be allowed to export any raw materials or manufactured goods and warehouses would be destroyed.
4. The vehicles, railways and boats used to carry enemy soldiers and enemy military instruments would be destroyed.

5. The war strategy would be to force the enemy to disperse.

6. After dispersing the enemy, the smaller groups would be attacked by the guerrilla fighters.

A decision was taken to create a new non conventional fighting force by training a large size volunteers within a short time who would adopt hit and run tactics to weaken enemy morale. The combatants were also divided and reorganized into several groups.

1. Organizing guerrilla warfare:
   
   (a) Groups of 5-10 trained fighters which would be sent inside Bangladesh with specific instructions to carry out guerrilla activities.

   (b) Guerrilla fighters who would be classified as:

      - Guerrilla base: each base would provide food, medicine and accommodation of the guerrilla fighters.
      - Action group: members of this group would take part in frontal attacks, 50~100% of them would carry arms.
      - Intelligence: members of this group would gather enemy information, they would not take part in frontal attacks, 30% of them would carry arms.

2. The regular force would be organized as battalion force and sector troops.

**Training**

Under the supervision of Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, 25 Youth Camps, each with 1000 capacity to hold, were established adjacent to Bangladesh borders from where youths were recruited for the Mukti Bahini. To begin with, six training camps were established near Jackpot Sector Head Quarters to train 1000 men per month per camp. Local army formations were giving support by providing instructors at the rate of one officer for 100 trainees, one JCO for 50 trainees and one NCO for 20 trainees. All the freedom fighters were given four weeks training initially which later was reduced to three weeks to churn out more numbers of guerrillas. Training on weapon handling, field craft, raids & ambushes, commando training to include handling of simple demolition.
charges and operations of small radio sets were imparted. Medical training was also imparted to different groups for rendering medical aids to the guerrillas.

In July 1971, number of trainees was increased to 12000 per month which got enhanced to 20000 per month since September onwards by establishing additional training camps and also by increasing capacity of the existing training camps.'²⁰

A three month officers training was imparted to 130 cadets at Moorti Camp (Binaguri) to provide junior leaders for the regular battalions.²¹

Official account on the state of trained manpower can be gauged by the following statement:

By the end of November 1971, over 83,000 Freedom Fighters were trained, of which 51,000 were operating inside East Bengal. They were organized into teams of 10, squads of 20, and groups of 100-150. Each team was equipped with four .303 rifles, two SLR rifles, three sten guns and one light machine gun, plus two hand grenades per Freedom Fighter and sufficient quantity of explosives for demolition.²²

Various Groups of Muki Bahini ²³

1. Suicide Squad: They were tasked to kill prominent workers of the Muslim League, Jamaït Islami, Razakars, and the Pakistani Government officials. To avoid arrest, they were supposed to commit suicide.

2. Bichhu (Scorpion) Squad: They reportedly had a female wing comprised of young girls, who were tasked to carry out espionage, sabotage and subversion in big towns like Dacca and Chittagong.

3. Toofani Bahini. (Storm troops): Awami League in early 1971 created this organization. They performed the tasks of commandos and were operating underground.

Mujib Bahini

An elite force thoroughly loyal to Mujib whose members believed in Mujib’s ideology was created secretly under supervision of Major General Uban of the Indian Army and Student League leaders Serajul Alam Khan, Sheikh Fazlul Haque Mani, Kazi Arif Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Tofael Ahmed, A. S. M. Abdur Rab, Shahjahan Siraj, Nur E Alam Siddiqi, and Abdul Quddus Makhon. Apparently this force was created to have a check on the left wing Maoists of East Bengal to prevent from taking over the control of
Mukti Bahini. This force did not report to Col Osmani or even to Bangladesh Government in Exile, or to HQ Eastern Command though administrative support was provided by the Eastern Command, Calcutta. This obviously at times created friction. It had 8000 members who were indoctrinated and trained for 45 days on guerrilla warfare. The whole of Bangladesh was divided in to four zones and each was placed under a leader of this Bahini. Sheikh Moni controlled Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali and Sylhet districts. Abdul Razzak controlled Tangail and Mymensingh districts. Sirajul Alam looked after Rangpur, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra districts. Tofael Ahmed was incharge of Mujib Bahini operation in Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Patuakhali and part of the Pabna districts.

**Phantom Force**
A secret force comprising of 1800 persons of 22 Establishments directly operating under the control of Special Secretary External to the Cabinet, Government of India was operating in areas in and around Chittagong Hill Tracts to harass the Pakistan Army in that area and also to destroy their line of communication. This force was commanded by Maj Gen S.S. Uban and at times is referred as Uban Force. Eastern Command though provided logistics support but had no control over it. Uban was guided by the Chief of Army Staff on the operational aspect. Though both Mujib Bahini and the Phantom Force were placed under command of Maj Gen S.S.Uban but these two forces operated separately. ²⁴

**Local Guerrilla Forces** ²⁵
There were quite a few local guerrilla forces of varying sizes operating in their area of influence and control and these groups did not report to Col Osmani, overall Mukti bahini Force commander. A few important groups are listed below:
1. Kader Bahini. A former NCO of Pakistani Army and later Awami League student leader, Abdul Kader Siddiqui, popularly known as Tiger Siddiqui deemed to have organized 17000 guerrillas and an auxiliary force numbering approximately 70,000 comprising of rural area school students. Kader Bahini carried out some spectacular attacks in Tangail out post in June 1971 and killed 16 Pakistan Army soldiers. On 12
August, Kader Bahini successfully raided Pakistani vessels in Dhaleswari River, killed about 100 Pakistani soldiers and captured large quantities of arms and ammunitions including Chinese and British-made weapons. Later in September he met senior Indian army officers namely Lt Gen Aurora, Brig. Sant Singh etc. in Tripura and chalked out his further operational plan. Indian army assisted him with warlike stores including wireless sets and also provided air force support on 10 December during their attack on Ghatatal and Gopalpur police stations and next day on their attack on Tangail. After the Para battalion drop at Tangail, Kader Bahini joined them and Brig. H.S. Kler’s Brigade on their March to Dacca. He captured large numbers of Razakars and Pakistani soldiers and destroyed many bridges to restrict movement of Pakistani troops. Hemayet Bahini. This force consisted of approximately 350 ex-soldiers and was under command of Havildar Major Hemayet. This force was much supportive of Mujibur Rahman’s philosophy and cooperated with the Mukti Bahini and Government of Bangladesh. They were terror to Muslim League and Jamat-i-Islami followers. They operated in and around Faridpur district.

2. Left Wing Resistance Group

(a) The Pro Moscow Resistance Group of Bangladesh with leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, Moni Singh Garo, Deben Sikdar and Thakur participated in the liberation struggle. Initially they were active in Dhaka, Comilla, Narsingdi Brahmanbaria and Ghorashal. After the raising of Mujib Bahini they fell back to India. Later, they got direct support from India and formed a guerrilla force of approximately 20000 strength who actively participated in different sectors during the liberation war.

(b) Various pro-Chinese communist groups of East Pakistan were disillusioned with China supporting Pakistan. East Pakistan Communist Party (ML) leader Amal Sen, and communist leader Maulana Bhasani etc, came to Calcutta and formed a Coordination Committee for Bangladesh Liberation. This group condemned China but disliked dominance of Awami League and Indian Government. Later Bhasani severed relation with this group and started supporting Bangladesh Government in Exile. A section of East Bengal Communist Party (ML) led by Abdul Haq and Mohammed Toaha though condemned China but at the same time described the Awami League led movement as a conspiracy of Soviet Social Imperialism and Indian expansionism. They too raised 10000
Red Guerrillas who were poorly armed and equipped. However they took part in some actions against Pakistan army at different places but suffered heavy casualties. They also clashed with Mukti Bahini because of their ideological differences.

© There were other group of EBCP like Matin Alauddin group and Ohidul Group and Mythi Group led by Agni Prabha Mythi and another group named Sarbahara Group led by Siraj Sikdar. There were also other small pro Peking groups like Menon- Kazi Zaffar group and Nashiur-Nurul-Huda group. A few amongst these groups cooperated with the Mukti Bahini but some of them did not do so.27

**Bangladesh Navy** 28

Some 400 naval commandos and frogmen were trained at Plassey under Commander Mathis of Indian Navy. Bangladesh Navy was raised in August 1971 with two boats MV Polash and MV Padma taken on loan by HQ Eastern Command from the Government of West Bengal. They were fitted with Bofors L60 40 mm guns. Commander Samant the submariner seconded to Eastern Command by the Indian Navy was overall in charge of this force. The navy initially had officers on deputation from Indian Navy but had 45 former Bengali naval personnel of the Pakistani Navy, which included many frogmen. This naval force proved to be extremely effective for harassing merchant ships going to East Pakistan and also for laying mines on the waterways.

**Bangladesh Air Force.** 29

A small unit of Bangladesh Air Force was raised in Dimapur with those who deserted Pakistani Air Force. This unit commanded by Gp Capt AK Khandekar started functioning from Dimapur since 28 September 1971. The unit had 17 officers and 50 technicians. Indian Air Force transferred a Dakota, an Otter and an Alouette helicopter. Flt Lt Sultan Mahmud was commander of Kilo Flight. The unit relocated to Agartala and then Shamshernagar after 3 December 1971.

Bangladesh Air force performed communication duties with the Bangladesh Government in exile and the military top brass. After India launched offensive operation in Bangladesh, in December, the Bangladesh air force successfully launched 12 sorties against Pakistani targets.
Operations

In early stages of civil war, the Mukti Bahini guerillas attacked isolated Pakistani posts, lines of communications and other vulnerable areas. However, after the Pakistanis managed to gain reasonable control in Dacca and the major cities, they spread out into the countryside and on to the border areas. Their efforts were concentrated at preventing infiltration and depredations by the Mukti Bahini. Apart from re-establishing various out posts along the border, the Pakistan troops carried out combing operations, with a view to eliminating armed resistance. The local population was also so terrorized that they were unable to give full cooperation to the Mukti Bahini, for fear of reprisals. The job of the Mukti Bahini thus became difficult. During the initial stage of the liberation war, Pakistani troops crossing into the Indian territory while chasing Mukti Fouzs were allowed to return but from 1 June onwards this was not allowed. Indian Army joined the Mukti Bahini in repelling such hot pursuits by the Pakistani troops. Armed freedom struggle of the people of East Bengal can be broadly divided into four phases:

1. Period of Unorganized Resistance (25 March to 15 May 1971). During this period, serious fighting took place between the Pakistani troops and the revolted Bengali officers and men of EBR in the areas in and around Chittagong, Saidpur, Kushtia and in some other places. Heavy casualties were suffered by both the opposing forces. Pakistan army used all its might like artillery to air force to quell these attacks. EBR and EPR personnel crossed over to India for safe sanctuary and receiving further assistance from the Indian Army. However, some of the East Pakistan BOPs were captured with the assistance of fire support from the BSF.

2. Creation and Training of the Mukti Bahini (mid May to end June). Indian Army in according to the plan of liberation war evolved jointly with the Bangladesh Provisional Government commenced training of guerrillas. Selection from the volunteers were done by the Awami League Office bearers. Arming, equipping and other administrative arrangements were coordinated by HQ Eastern Command and the local formations deployed nearer to the borders of East Bengal.

and putting 14 tea gardens out of production. Communication lines and electric pylons were also destroyed at many places at Dacca, Comilla and Chittagong. Special mention must be made about the destruction of Railway Bridge at Narsingdi. Pakistanis suffered heavy casualties numbering over 4000. In the month of August, Mukti Bahini dominated quite a few pockets and salients and retained the territory like Belonia, and Kaliashar in Tripura. About 6000 freedom fighters were operating deep inside Bangladesh and organized about 1000 raids and ambushes which unsettled Pakistan army in many ways.

4. Period of increasing guerilla warfare (September to 3 December). During this period in addition to increasing guerrilla operations because of infiltration of large number of freedom fighters inside Bangladesh, more number of BOPs was also attacked. Particularly in the month of November, many preliminary operations were undertaken by the Mukti Fauz along with Indian Army.

5. Period from 4th December to 16th December. This is the period when Indian Army officially launched the Bangladesh Campaign. Regular units operated to complement the operational plan of the Indian Army. Later they came under the overall command of Lt Gen J S Aurora of Eastern Command and the combined force was called Mitro Bahini.(allied force).

Role of Cultural Activists and Intelligentsia in Motivating the Mukti Bahini
A civil war and uprising can be sustained if there is adequate level of motivation. In the instant case of Bangladesh Liberation War, Bengalis displayed great nationalistic spirit. They suffered deprivation, hardship but continued their struggle. In the hour of this crisis, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra (Radio Station of Independent Bangladesh) played a key role to ignite passion and motivate people by airing programs like Agnishikha( The flame) a programme for the freedom fighters, Jagarani(Awakening) a revolutionary musical programme, Rakta Shaskhar (Impression in blood) : a nationalistic literary programme, Chorompotro(Letter ultimate) hosted by M. R. Akhtar, "Jallader Darbar"(Court of a Butcher) by Kalyan Mitra and "Bojro Kontho"(Thunderous Voice) which presented speeches of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman . World Opinion: excerpts from different news papers and comments of the prominent world leaders on liberation war also aired to motivate people by letting them know the international support they have for
their struggle. Many poems and songs were written for broadcasting. One of those songs Joy Bangla Banglar Joy (Victory of Bengal) was the signature tune of the radio. Songs like Purbo Digante Surjo Uthechhe, Ekti Phoolke Bachabo Bole, Salam Salam Hajar Salam, Janatar Sangram Chalbe Chalbe (The people’s war shall continue, Sona, Sona, Sona, Sona, Loke Bale Sona, Sona Noi Tato Khati, Loke Jato Bale, Taro Cheye Khati Amar Bangla Desher Mati (The soil of my Bangladesh is purer than pure gold) became immensely popular. The radio station through its inspiring programme boost up morale and motivate people and the Mukti joddhas to face the Pakistanis and keep fighting. The radio station was no less strong than the men fighting with guns. Over twenty newspapers came out during the liberation war, a few were printed, some cyclostyled, even a few were handwritten to inspire the people to fight.32

Performance Assessment and Contribution of Mukti Bahini

To be fair to Mukti Bahini, their performance has to be gauged after pegging them as nationalists rather than revolutionaries. They should not be compared with Mao Tse tung’s Red Army nor with Vietcong soldiers. According to the philosophy of Mao, his Red Army fought a protracted revolutionary war for a long duration, so did Vietcong but here the war lasted for nine months and for her own politico-economic compulsions, India became partisan to Bangladesh liberation war. Liberation war was a war of masses where not only the leadership has to mobilize masses but also win over them. Mukti Joddhas also faced problems of inadequate arms ammunition and equipments. In the early phase of liberation war after some initial success, the insurgency started by the individual officers with their groups waned away because of their inability to stand against the much stronger and better equipped Pakistani Army. And another important reason for this can be attributed to the inability to draw up and implement an integrated plan lying down aims and objectives in proper priorities. Nor was an effort made to establish a countrywide and regional system of command and control by nominating leaders and defining areas of operational responsibility. This problem was overcome in stages after India joined them in their struggle albeit tacitly abinitio, because of her concern over the mass flow of refugees. BSF and later Indian Army got involved with the Mukti Fauz who crossed over to India in end April after being driven out by the
Pakistani troops. Operation Jackpot launched by Indian Army mitigated this issue which was further streamlined after the mid July coordination meeting of Sector Commanders with the Bangladesh Government in Exile. Col Osmani had a mind-set of conventional warfare where as the requirement was more of a guerrilla warfare. But from August onwards, the performance of guerrillas improved. They disrupted communications and their actions hit many industries particularly the tea industry to almost a grinding halt. Most importantly Pakistan Army changed their deployment strategy because of numerous guerrilla operations.

Prior to Bangladesh campaign, regular units duly supported by Indian army and BSF, could gain some territory in Bangladesh by reduction of Pakistani BOPs which were later used as launching pad for the main operation. And during the actual campaign, they became part of the Mitro Bahini and launched operation to complement Indian plan. Many of them helped in arranging local transport to facilitate speedy movement of the Indian army when it was racing for Dacca. Freedom fighters provided much needed intelligence to the Indian Army.

Other freelance guerrilla groups like Kader Bahini, Hemayet Bahini etc undoubtedly contributed towards accelerating the operation. Kader Bahini claimed to have liberated 97 km of the road from Jamalpur to Mymensingh and captured 7000 Pakistani soldiers and 14,500 Razakars.\(^33\)

Pakistani writers in particular have shown Mukti Bahinis in poor light. For example, Niazi wrote:

> Our opponents the Bengalis were not considered a fighting class by the British. They had no military traditions and background or war experience…They were not a cohesive team, only a collection of units, groups, and individuals. Their Commander Colonel Osmani was not the type who could instill confidence in his subordinates….he had experience of staff work but lacked the experience of command of troops in battle. If the Indians and the Russians had not helped the Bengalis, they would have never dared to revolt against the centre. \(^34\)

This expression comes from a typical West Pakistani mindset of looking down at the Bengalis as the non-martial race, though it is true that the civil war initially was not centrally coordinated and some groups till last were functioning independent of Bangladesh Government in Exile.
While describing the situation as on November 1971, Maj Gen Sukhwant Singh wrote: Niazi was gradually squeezed by Mukti Bahini, and this inflamed the entire border with well planned attacks on the BOPs accompanied by efforts to capture some salients inside East Pakistan which could help India’ eventual full-fledged intervention....If Mukti Bahini got into difficulties, they were helped out by BSF and Indian Army. Operations of Bayra, Belonia, Kamalpur, and Akhaura fall into this category.\textsuperscript{35}

Mukti Bahini had their mixed bag of success till monsoon got over, Rather they got very little success which did not dent the military capability of East Pakistan Army. But the scenario changed from the post monsoon period till end of the liberation war. Maj Gen Lachhman Singh offering balance view on Mukti Bahini’s contribution states:

The direct impact of the guerillas on the Pakistanis was not great and their contribution to the final outcome of the war was limited in the tactical sphere. But strategically, Mukti Bahini achieved its aim fully. It kept the flame of struggle aglow and the Bengali masses never gave up hope of eventual freedom…….The mere presence of a large number guerillas posed a strategic threat to the Pakistanis, who had the feeling of sitting on the top of a volcano which might erupt any moment. Indirectly it helped in dispersal of the Pakistan Army and compelled to adopt a forward posture. The most significant contribution of the Mukti Bahini was to force a faulty strategic deployment on Pakistan involving a rigid out post policy which denuded them of balance and reserve.\textsuperscript{36}

Though small in size, the newly created Bangladesh Navy and the naval frogmen did a commendable job by sabotaging merchant ships at Khulna and Chalna ports and the estuaries. Even the newly raised Bangladesh Air Force though mainly was employed in communication duties but undertook twelve combat sorties in support of the main operation of the ground forces. It contributed in damaging the oil depots at Chittagong and Naryangan on December 2, 1971. It was the sense of participation doing a bit for the country became more important. So overall, all shades of freedom fighters contributed in accelerating liberation of Bangladesh not withstanding certain weaknesses shown in some actions. General Jacob comments, “Due credit be given to the achievements of the Mukti Bahini. They played a crucial and major role in the operations leading to the surrender of
the Pakistani Eastern command. They fought with courage and determination……. They
demoralized the Pakistani forces and eroded their will to fight”.  

**Conclusion**

Historians generally ascribe the birth of Mukti Bahini and commencement of civil war on the aftermath of Pakistan Army’s brutal repression on the night of 25/26 March 1971 i.e. the date when Operation Torchlight commenced and immediately thereafter Mujibur Rahman declared East Pakistan ‘a sovereign, independent People’s Republic of Bangladesh’. However Maj Gen Fajal Muqeem Khan in his book *Pakistan’s Crisis in Leadership* has mentioned that Awami League had already formed a military committee under the retired army officer, Col M.A.G Osmani and a plan was made in December 1970 to seize power militarily through insurgency should political negotiation fail. Whatever may be the truth, Mukti Bahini became visible in their sporadic successful actions against Pakistani troops since 27 March. But the joy of this early victory did not last long because Pakistan Army retaliated with great ferocity resulting in heavy casualties. Those Bengali troops who revolted became terror stricken, traumatized and rudderless. They crossed the Indian border for safe sanctuary. That glowing flame of freedom was flickering, it was time to protect its spark and nourish it back to life again lest it died down. Initially, India’s response was cautious. India did not recognize the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. She was not to be seen openly supporting and abetting the insurgency. So BSF was tasked to provide limited support. Bangladeshi rebel forces that crossed over to India was reorganized in to rough sectors for the purpose of operation and sector commanders were also nominated. On 30 April 1971, the Government of India made Indian Army responsible for coordinating all affairs of Mukti Bahini because of the magnitude of influx of refugees and BSFs inability to handle such a large force. Responsibility obviously fell on the HQ Eastern Command, Calcutta who worked in tandem with the Provisional government of Bangladesh and as per guidelines issued by the Chief of Army Staff. Initial operations of Mukti Fouz did not at all give any semblance of a planned action. There was no central command structure, neither was there any effort to coordinate countrywide operations centrally. The revolting Bangladeshi troops adopted conventional
military tactics of fighting pitched battles against the formidable Pakistan military instead
of resorting to guerrilla tactics. There were many clandestine insurgent groups raised by
various political parties operating locally, but the regular Bengali units and the
paramilitary units did not have any connection or coordination with other groups till later
part of the civil war, that too not with all the groups. A thorough appraisal of the
situations prevailing and reasons for inability to sustain the insurgency was carried out by
India and appropriate corrective measures were initiated through Operation Jackpot by
coopting six Indian Brigadiers who organized training, equipping and coordination of
operations by the guerrillas. Though Col MAG Osmani was appointed Commander in
Chief on 14 April, 1971 but till the coordinating conference held in mid-July, he did not
have full command and control of the Mukti Joddhas. Osmani raised EBR (East Bengal
Rifles), but later retired in the rank of Colonel and joined Awami League and got elected
in the National Assembly. A man of very high integrity and great patriotic zeal but with
orthodox bent of mind who believed more in regular warfare than guerrilla tactics. By
end of October, Bangladesh Army had eight regular battalions which were divided into
three brigades, called Z, K, and S Force, one field artillery regiment. There were also a
small navy and an air force organization. In addition, the Mukti Bahini had more than
80000 guerrillas by then.40

India’s Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, told the Lok Sabha on 6 December 1971:
The valiant struggle of the people of Bangladesh in the face of tremendous odds
has opened a new chapter of heroism in the history of freedom movements.....The East Pakistan Rifles and the East Bengal Regiment became
the Mukti Bahini which was joined by thousands of young East Bengalis
determined to sacrifice the lives for freedom and right to fashion their future. The
unity, determination and courage with which the entire population of Bangladesh
fighting has been recorded by the entire world Press.41

Mukti Bahini had less training, shortage of weapons and ammunitions and other warlike
stores. Most importantly, they had shortage of junior level officers and JCOS/NCOs.
These handicaps notwithstanding, their overall contribution towards liberation of
Bangladesh was not at all negligible. Vast number of guerrillas operated inside the
Bangladesh acted as eyes and ears for the Indian invading force. Their contribution in
ensuring local resources and transport was of immense help to the advancing Indian
Army which ensured greater mobility. Above all, they created a great fear psychosis amongst the Pakistani troops and thereby lessening their will to fight and forcing them to change their defense strategy which the Indian Army during the invasion of East Pakistan reaped the benefit. Exact number of Mukti Bahini persons killed could not be corroborated. Suffice to say if blood was the price for freedom. Mukti Bahini has paid no less.
End Notes: Chapter IX


3. Ibid.


5. Flag of Bangladesh had map of Bangladesh on both the sides. Through out the liberation struggle this flag was used. Due to administrative problem of maintaining correct size map on both the sides, some time in January 1972, the flag was modified by removing the map of Bangladesh.


15. Ibid., p.159., Khondakar, p.6.


17. S.N. Prasad, p.163.

18. Khondakar, p.3.


30. Lachhman Singh, pp. 70-72.


32. Ibid, p. 182.


34. Niazi, pp. 54-55.


36. Singh, Lachhman, Maj Gen, p. 78.

37. Jacob, p. 119.


39. Ibid.
