

**The Changing Security Spectrum of
South Asia : Consequences for Saarc**

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(1) The demise of the cold war necessitated the reappraisal and the reevaluation of the agenda and priorities by the states throughout the globe. Apparently, it seemed that in the so-called new world order human security would gain prominence over the traditional sense of security i.e the State Security. It was also expected that the paradigm shift from geo-strategic (guided) relations to the geo-economic inter-state relations would make the developed states more cognizant of the vulnerabilities faced by the weaker states / societies. The double standards of globalization being exploitative have not helped in eliminating poverty from the developing societies. Equally responsible is the bad and the negative impact (particularly) of the economic and political liberalisation on their societies. The South Asian states being no exception continue to struggle the multi-faceted dilemma confronting them in the form of global trends particularly in three ways i.e.

(a) the negative impact of globalization, economic, political and social liberalization policies ;

(b) identification of new threats and changing concepts and notions;
and

(c) the regional factors i.e. the traditional problems surrounding the state security issues besides the impact of the changing concept

and notions on internal policies and its implication for social structures and the domestic factors i.e. issues related to soft-state crises.

The post 9/11 developments have resulted in the making of new types of threats, hostilities, rivalries, security concerns and approaches world wide. The latter four largely being an outcome of the new interpretation / understanding of threats namely, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and extremism. With the absence of any universally applicable definition of terrorism and mutually agreed approach / strategy the states consented to participated in the International Coalition to fight against terrorism. On the one hand the action of the coalition forces and its consequential development brought to prominence theory of clash of civilization, a theory that was being disputed against prior to 9/11 provided a new discourse in which Islamic societies are being debated as a potential threat to western countries; civilization and culture, while on the other side, the international coalition geared with 'Operation Enduring Freedom' faced resentment from the masses and resulted in generating a whole new set of challenges which ought to be addressed / countered by the regional states. So far, the regional states have not been seen making efforts to (either) build mutual strength and perceptions or in identifying mutual interests. Hence, the very basis of any comprehensive security is non-existing.

The recent developments in trend to encourage unilateralism, interventionism and intrusiveness (both) globally as well as within

the region has also raised pertinent concerns regarding traditional and non-traditional problems confronting the regional states. Today, the regional states seriously needs to address the security concerns and issues through collective or cooperative actions or else the present tendency of opting for a 'unilateralist' approach - an outcome of Anticipatory Right of Self Defence of collective and cooperative security. Excluding India, most of the regional states continue to face uncertainties and insecurities. Particularly, Pakistan which is geographically much smaller and comparatively has limited military capability as against India which continues to follow the antagonistic path.

(2) War on Terrorism – an aberration for most of the South Asians has caused a paradigm shift in the struggle for global order. It has not only caused division between the governments of the world and its people but has also widened the gap between the (developed) State Security approach from that of (Developing) State Security approach. The former is focused on evolving strategies to fight against military aggression and in improving Homeland Security rampantly crushing the social rights of its people, which is not only creating new types of prejudices and discrimination but has raised new concerns about the rights of immigrants, minority rights, religious rights thus posing new challenges to the concepts of liberalism, freedom and liberty. In the latter category of Developing States, the South Asian states security approach is focused more on the internal security dynamic--confronting the challenges emanating from religious extremism, political instability and increasing poverty i.e. the poverty of

employment, poverty of opportunity and poor human resource development. The states at the same time are being pushed to understand the new connotations of the changing concepts such as what is meant by territorial integrity and sovereignty of States? And what justifies a desire for a pre-emptive strike? The developments has necessitated the inter-cultural critique and dialogue between East-West and North-South and within region. Unilateralist approach gradually making in-roads would not only weaken the United Nations but would also encourage the 'Use of Force' by countries to settle their grievances which in turn, would undermine crises-management and conflict resolution through peaceful means. As for the South Asian States, the developments have confronted the region with some serious threats and challenges consisting of extremism, terrorism (in all its forms and manifestations), negative impact of globalization, understanding and adjusting to the changing concepts, international law, international humanitarian law and int. human rights law. Unfortunately, the regional states lack the mutual understanding of the common threats, which has resulted in preventing the making of the new security cooperation framework. The human security concerns being similar and common to all the regional states can play a pivotal role in helping the states identity, common interests and common perspectives but unfortunately the regional states continue to ignore the importance of human security element for any comprehensive security paradigm.

(3) In South Asia the trends and the tendencies seen in the widening / deepening of the concept of security has necessitated a fresh and a

fuller understanding of the nature of conflict/s that have its tentacles extending beyond the borders of the South Asian countries. Today, I would like to draw your attention towards issues that do directly / indirectly and covertly have contributed in creating tensions at different levels of the government machineries and are bracketed as the potential source of conflict that exist at the state level among and between the South Asian States.

The popular believe that conflict in all its forms and manifestations is a South Asian reality continue to create a daunting task of creating and maintaining a conducive environment among the regional states. An environment that strengthens trust and not mistrust or distrust; an environment that could facilitate the regional integration process; and an environment that would be supportive of the regional context of development. South Asia compelled to respond to the post cold war realities simultaneously continues to hold on to the cold war security paradigm where the internal and external issues are intrinsically linked. For countries to eventually disentangle the linkages of inter-state contentious issues, the following sources of impediments to peace needs to be addressed. Among many the ones that I would like to draw your attention towards are ideology and institutions of media, defense and bureaucracy. The four have either been the primary or else the augmenting factors in preventing peace and tranquility at the governmental and societal level and at best have contributed in creating fear, or mind-set that have encouraged ideology based politics; created greater space for jingoistic nationalism; and have encouraged retaining the maximalist position.

(4) The traditional concept of ideology and its role both at the inter and intra-state level are highly contested. The articulation of identity based upon religion in the recent past impacted the South Asian region with a new vigor— where religion emerged as a defining factor. Sadly, it has been used to ignite the religious ferocity and has increased the importance of ideology in the polity of the region. Between India and Pakistan it has been described* as a common denominator of the conflict matrix. Ideology is considered to have worked as a major impasse on Kashmir and has prevented consensus on the type of nation that India and Pakistan should be. Similarly, the intermittent emergence of the communal strife in India unfortunately resulted in the renewed focus on the ideologies of Islam and Hinduism which speeded-up the politicization of ideology that continues to be a source of conflict between the two nations. The Indo-Sri Lanka tensions over the Tamil issue also cannot be fully understood without taking into account the ideological crisis confronting Sri Lanka. The identity of Tamils and Sinhalese, apparently, is now based on two separate ideological adherents namely the Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese. A proper and an objective understanding of the nexus that exist between religion and politics is extremely crucial for understanding the nature and the type of conflict/s that exists among the South Asian countries / societies.

* Baqai, Huma, Non-military sources of conflict in South Asia. Phd. Dissertation (unpublished)

- (i) Religion in South Asia thus has predominantly played a continuous and a vital role in the concept of nation state;
- (ii) the religious conflict have demonstrated its potential to intensify tensions (both) within and between states; and
- (iii) religious values as invoked have been used to justify political actions of the political leadership. The three elements combined together, undoubtedly, have complicated the conflict spectrum of the region. The fact that ideological confrontation functions at the inter-state level and has the potential to assume inter-state character has prevented the patterns of cooperation to emerge. Unfortunately, the continuous use of religion and ideological leaning marks the polity of South Asia and is an impediment that continues to prevent the peace building and regional cooperation. However, religion being politicized is a dilemma not confronted solely by the South Asian states for not too long ago one had witnessed religion being politicized in Yugoslavia where it helped legitimize the ethnic cleansing of Muslims.

(5) In South Asia the states institutional structures influences the states internal and external policy preferences and has had its affects on the regional linkages. Meaning that their exists a complex nexus between the various state intuitions namely the institutions of media, defense

and bureaucracy and the regional environment. The three above-mentioned institutions wielding enormous power continues to negatively impact the inter-state relations and are held responsible for either the dampening / slowing the pace of the relations among the regional states.

(6) The institutions of media including the private and state controlled gaining significance continues to influence the developments. However, the indirect control of the government of communication networks has prevented the scale of positive influence that the electronic media particularly can have on the process of regional integration. Being controlled by power lobbies it has been used to project and build a particular image that has prevented the regional states coming together. In a region that is predominantly occupied with different types of conflicts, media is still to play its role in building a culture that works to build peace. The pretext of national interest continues to be the norm, causing disillusionment among people. Seemingly, media has failed to bring forward the real dynamics of either the nature of animosity or political realities. Sadly the colonial mind-set continues to exist and the conflicts are reduced and projected as inexplicable cycle of violence. Media, today, inspite of all people-to-people contact continues to be used as a tool to blame the other side and in consolidating the enemy syndrome.

(7) The strategic thinking among the South Asian regional powers is characterized by the classic concept of power and national security. Any genuine rethinking on the issue of power and security apparently

has not occurred in the region. The nature of the relationship that exists among the regional states is largely shaped by the military insecurities and perceived power differentials. The two mainly India and Pakistan have adopted policies that have distorted realistic political military concerns and has devalued their critical social and economic needs. This has resulted in retaining and justifying the emphasis of the governments on establishing sphere of influence and the need to have a strategic vision. Report of the Planning Commission, Govt. of India named Vision 2020 stated that “the fundamental ideological conflict between India and Pakistan is unlikely to be resolved without a major social-political change in Pakistan’ or that ‘the territorial disputes with neighbours that have defied resolution for fifty years may not lend themselves for easy solutions’. The two points are indicative of the fact that military concerns are well entrenched in the processes of decision making pertaining to national security. According to Lt. Gen (R) Satish Nambiar ‘the India military power has with time grown to be an extension of political power, where they want their political leadership, civil bureaucracy and intelligentsia to accept it.

Any justification to justify military’s role in politics and policy decision-making would continue to justify the continuity of conflict and would further institutionalize the role of the armed forces in the conflict-cooperation matrix of the region besides jeopardizing achieving / gaining security in a broader sense

(8) Bureaucratic behaviours seen in the bureaucracy establishment of the regional states have had its own impact on the regional policy decisions of the states. For instance, the role of the India and Pakistan bureaucracy has been controversial. Its politicization and its efforts to maintain the status quo has negatively impacted its relations among regional states. Unfortunately, the minimalist positions taken by the bureaucrats and politicians had prevented rational policy options and have been the bane of cooperation. Summing-up one can say that institutions of defense, media and bureaucracy are said to be the influential players in the conflict cooperation nexus in the region. All three are taken to be a part of the power blocs and elitist alliances and are said to have a definite state in the conflict and the status quo of the traditional security paradigm.

(9) The weak, ineffective and illiberal democracies of South Asia are largely accused of preventing the people – centric approach of the paradigm of security (both) in the bilateral as well as regional context. The region, so far, has not succeeded in evolving institutional framework that are conducive to build an environment of trust, confidence and that which strengthens peace. The present trend has resulted in consolidating perceived threats and challenges. The regional states will have to work together to strengthen the traditions of ensuring the comprehensive security, whereby, the linkages between the different aspects of human security, sustainable development, environment and poverty are given precedence.

Theme : Copying with Cross-border linkages of contentions conflict

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