

Dynamics of Conflict

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Peace, progress and happiness have been the most cherished goals of *Homo sapiens* since emergence of the race one million years ago. With remarkable progress in the fields of socio-economic development, technology, arts, culture and myriads of other areas, the human population increased from just a few in the beginning to about 80 million 10,000 years ago (8000 BC). The global population has now crossed 6.5 billion and is likely to stabilize at 9 to 11 billion in the coming two centuries.

Violent confrontations, conflicts and wars have been a largely undesired but inevitable component of the long and arduous trajectory of human history. No other member of the animal kingdom has killed, maimed and inflicted suffering upon its own species on the same scale as humans have done. Whether these events have been called revolutions, conflicts, insurgencies, wars or acts of terrorism, their results have been largely painful in terms of human sufferings but a number of them have opened opportunities for change over the centuries. Humans have also unduly infringed on environment as well as the life and health of other plant and animal species, the ominous consequences of which our planet is beginning to face and is yet to face more in the coming years and decades. Though living in greater physical comfort and having achieved more material progress in subsequent times, the human quest for happiness and peace remains unfulfilled.

Among the key causes, identity conflicts (Hutus vs. Tutsis, Hindu vs. Muslims, Shia vs. Sunnis, Catholic vs. Protestants, Israeli vs. Arabs, Madhesis vs. Pahadis, Janjatis vs. Bahun-Chhetris) lead to utterly devastating and destabilizing situations for peoples affected. "A strong and exclusive sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups" and can "kill and kill with abandon" (Sen, 2006). The illusion of singular identity, "which turns multidimensional human being into one dimensional creatures" of uniquely hardened categories, can be and have been exploited in fomenting conflicts, strife, confrontations and carnage. Sen recalls with horror the Indian politics of Partition in the 1940's, when "the broad human beings of January were suddenly transformed into the ruthless Hindus and fierce Muslims" as a result of skillfully orchestrated violence by the political interest groups and commanders of carnage. The vested interest groups may certainly have reasons to deny multiple identities and focus on dividing people into uniquely hardened categories. Unfortunately, it has historically been difficult to inspire the rest of the populace to resist such identity traps by getting them to focus on the richness of multiple identities in confronting and resolving such conflicts.

In the global context, Huntington (1996) has laid great stress on the "clash of civilizations" with a specific emphasis on the serious potential clashes between "Western" and "Islamic" civilizations. His contentions have been rather controversial. A school of thought opposed to the Huntington school of thought argue that the classification of the world into 'civilizations' is in itself problematic as none of these basic units are uniformly homogeneous. For instance, Sen argues that India classified as a "Hindu Civilization" has over 150 million Muslims. Furthermore, whatever their religion, each individual has multiple other identities as a poet, a scientist, a democrat, an atheist, a man, a woman, and/or an internationalist.

Galtung, 1996 sees poverty, inequality, exclusion, exploitation and humiliation as often among the root causes of conflict and peace keeping and peace making demands proper management of contradictions fuelling conflicts

Khatri (2008) sees conflicts as interstate, governance and authority related, ideological or class-based and identity related resulting from politicization of religion, ethnicity or minority issues.

Pudasaini (March 2006) stresses that political change, restructuring of the state and socio-economic transformation are at the center of conflicts. A largely centralized state, a lack of an adequately inclusive polity, disparities in socio-economic development and a sluggish economy, poverty and deprivation, longstanding inequalities (among ethnic groups and geographic regions as well as gender discrimination) are among the root causes fuelling conflicts.

Good neighborly diplomacy and poverty reduction and negotiated settlements rather than overdependence on a militaristic approach may offer a better solution to resolving the conflicts (Pudasaini, 2008). Neutral and experienced external partners (such as UN, Norway) could be helpful in conflict management if jointly invited by parties in conflict and supported by influential regional/global powers politically and financially (Pudasaini, 2006, 2008).

The United Nations states in the Preamble of its Charter that to "...save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" there is a need to "...reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal right of men and women of nations large and small....practice to learn and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors".

The purpose and scope of this paper is limited to dwell upon historical, philosophical or other broader issues of human achievements, challenges and welfare with any justice. It will briefly list the key factors that have been instrumental in starting, reigniting and sustaining human conflicts followed by glimpses of contemporary conflicts in South Asia. A comprehensive listing of the causes of conflict over the millennia is difficult to present but the following categories of factors largely encompass the key driving factors of modern-day conflicts.

- (1) Identity conflicts
- (2) Ideological Conflicts
- (3) Conflicts due to exclusion/marginalization from power, governance or resource use
- (4) Territorial/Inter-state conflicts
- (5) Hegemonic/Strategic conflicts
- (6) Civilizational conflicts

Evidences across the continents and over time clearly demonstrates that social suppression, denial of cultural and linguistic freedom, politico-economic exclusion, gender discrimination, geographic imbalance in development and identity are among the most dominant factors for conflicts in the recent times. Wars between nations and forceful nation building by monarchs and autocrats are now largely the items of the conflicts in the long past. Over 95 percent of the conflicts in the past six decades have been internal rebellions or insurgencies.

Glimpses into South Asian Conflicts

South Asia is home to over 1.5 billion people and is one of the most densely populated regions of the world. Poverty levels are high, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa. Income disparities between the rich and the poor are high and widening in most of the countries. Poverty, youth unemployment, exclusion, and disparities are among the root causes of many conflicts and identity grievances as well as interstate and hegemonic components are also prevalent.

South Asia is one of the most conflict affected regions of the world. Almost all the nations of South Asia have been troubled by ethnic disturbances, Maoists insurgencies, religious fundamentalism or political conflicts, whether they are recent of origins or long-standing. Conflict resolution and peace building have been attempted by different countries by using various approaches with some successes and a number of failures. Some conflicts are largely internal. Other conflicts have roots in more than one nation. Some internal conflicts have territorial

implications, while the root-causes of others are largely embedded in socio-economic disparities and identity grievances. An attempt has been made to resolve some of the conflicts through military force. Others have come to the conclusion that a negotiated settlement is the only sensible way to attain a sustainable peace. Some nations have tried to resolve conflicts and build peace internally. Others have engaged third country facilitators, while the rest have been assisted by UN monitors. However, all of them must be managed or resolved to an acceptable level through national, bilateral and collective efforts to build peace, stability and harmony, all so vital for the progress and prosperity of the peoples of South Asia.

Insurgencies have been matters of concerns to India in the North East and to Bhutan in areas adjoining NE India. The Maoists insurgencies in India that started in Naxalbari of West Bengal over 4 decades ago have left its seed in many states, including Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, and is now believed to be a serious and rising threat in over 160 districts scattered over almost a dozen states.

Bangladesh has faced insurgency in the Hill Tracts. The Maoists insurgency in Nepal has seriously affected political stability and socio-economic progress for over a decade now. It is believed that the Maoists insurgencies in Nepal and India are linked to some extent and such insurgencies cropping up in other countries may be fed by the Maoist insurgencies in Nepal and India. Sri Lankan ethnic conflict that started in 1983 has already cost over 65,000 lives and there has been tremendous loss of economic progress for the Island State. It has socio-economic and strategic implications to India, particularly to the State of Tamil Nadu.

Afghanistan is troubled with long lasting internal conflict in addition to those influenced by external forces. It is now one of the most unstable nations in the South Asia Region and attempting hard to ensure peace and stability. The presence of external army consisting of various nationalities, including the USA and EU, and the threat of Al-Qaeda and Taliban is a matter of serious concerns for security and peace of Afghanistan and the region, particularly to that of Pakistan. Similarly, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters and sympathizers hiding in the Pakistani territories bordering Afghanistan are reported to be problematic to the security and stability of the later.

The tensions between India and Pakistan, including over the Kashmir issue, has been going on for over 5 decades seriously dampening their bilateral relations. The conflict has affected political, economic, trade and security strengthening initiatives in the SAARC. Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, Karachi and some other parts of the country have also suffered or are continuing to be troubled with ethnic conflicts and insurgencies. Bangladesh and India have encountered tensions related to water sharing arrangements and at times clashes in their boarder. For SAARC to prosper as a region and for its members as individual nations the prevailing internal as well as bilateral conflicts must be managed better or resolved with internal as well as collective efforts. Since the domestic as well as bilateral tensions or conflicts are unlikely to have military solution they must be addressed through dialogues.

Almost 108,000 of the Bhutanese refugees are also languishing in several refugee camps in eastern Nepal over the past 16 years. The delay and subsequent denial of repatriation have forced the refugees to opt for a radical solution to the problem. In addition to the Bhutanese refugees, the South Asia region is also yet to handle the problems of Afghan, Bangladeshi, Tamil, Tibetan, Chakmas refugees properly. The frustrations that brews among refugees living under almost inhumane conditions with no hope of return to their rightful places and better outlet in the foreseeable future turns out to be a breeding ground for insurgencies and socially unwanted activities.

The Tamil Tigers have been fighting for an independent home land for ethnic Tamil minorities since 1983. They claim they have been marginalized by the Sinhalese dominated government. The 2002 ceasefire had raised hope for a peaceful resolution but resulted into death of over 5000 people in the last 2 years, almost 1,500 deaths occurring in the last few weeks since the Sri Lankan government announced its withdrawal from the ceasefire. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) sounded alarm over the "appalling levels" of civilian casualties as non-combatants were increasingly targeted or caught in the crossfire.

Peace-Building Approaches

Outright victory by force- a militaristic approach, and peaceful dialogue- a negotiated settlement approach, are the two key ways of settling conflicts. Most conflicts in the contemporary world are unlikely to be settled by solely militaristic approach. Consequently, no discussions are undertaken here about the militaristic approach and various aspects of negotiated settlement are elaborated in some detail. Negotiations with any armed opponent, whether a rebel outfit or the government of another state, are always frustrating, complex and time consuming. However, one may attempt to keep the dialogues afloat by using a framework of 5 C's: clarity, confidence, compromise, continuity and commitment (Pudasaini, July 2006).

First of all, a successful negotiation demands a minimum level of clarity on negotiating position or the 'bottom-line'. Secondly, adequate confidence between the negotiating parties and amicable chemistry between negotiating teams are essential to take talks to their logical conclusion in the face of many unexpected roadblocks. Thirdly, compromise or flexibility to adjust expectations, egos and positions as per the unfolding reality remains at the heart of sound negotiations. Fourthly, continuity is indispensable for successful negotiations as building confidence and reaching agreements on a myriad of complex issues requires much more time than can be predicted at the beginning of the process.

Today's conflicts around the globe are overwhelmingly asymmetrical and the internal armed rebellions or insurgencies are unlikely to be settled militarily. The poorest nations with weaker democratic institutions are more vulnerable to such conflicts and are directed towards settling political grievances.

The purpose of peace dialogue is to transform violent conflict into a problem solving partnership concerning political power, access to resources and imbalanced development. Peace process needs to address immediate issues related to violence cessation as well as the longer term root causes of the conflict. While peace processes vary from one conflict to the other, it is invariably essential to have commitment of the parties to negotiate and reach a political resolution for any talks to succeed. Most negotiations start "Too late" in the sense of lost lives and weakened bargaining positions of the protagonists to be able to attain their best alternatives. A pragmatic peace process follows a gradual approach dealing with confidence building measures and urgent issues related to violence in the beginning and more contentious issues and root causes in the later part of negotiations.

In the context of peace and reconciliation, balancing human rights standards and wrapping up negotiations with pragmatism stands as a dilemma. The question of amnesty, revelation of truth and victim's compensation should be dealt during negotiation even if persecution of all the rights violators is not feasible. Non-territorial conflicts need to deal with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the combatants but should also handle root-causes in the longer term. Involvement of non-armed groups and civil society in the peace process is crucial for lasting peace as the whole society is affected or involved in the conflict.

Conflict creates mistrust. Reducing confidence gap is, thus, necessary to ensure that the opposing parties understand each other's motives and driving forces leading to conflict, develop willingness to peacefully negotiate and implement the agreements reached. Peace can't be "bribed or bought". External actors contribute to peace process ideas and bring the parties in conflict out of their normal setting to new and congenial cities or locations for formal or informal consultations or talks. Civil society's pressure comes out to be more important than external actors as insurgents and states generally claim to be true representative of their people. A critical ingredient in building confidence requires a loyalty to the process, if not to each other.

Peace building must be understood as a process with many risks of backsliding and must deal with its structures and long-term horizon. Three key aspects of peace building stressed are: (a) reducing violence, including post-conflict violence, (b) promoting an inclusive and democratic political system and (c) promoting inclusive socio-economic development. Arms demobilization, respect for human rights, rule of law, removal of inequalities and targeted and inclusive socio-economic reforms are crucial for peace building. Any necessary constitutional changes must create consensus even if the process is a bit longer. Elections are important to consolidate early phase of peace building, but it must be accompanied by inclusive socio-economic development for consolidating democracy and building lasting peace.

UN and Third Party Facilitation

Promoting global peace, justice and development is at the heart of the United Nation's mandate and the UN Charter. It has succeeded in building peace in some hotspots and failed in others. But the reality of the world is that there is no other global organization as widely represented, broadly accepted and largely neutral to help manage conflicts and build peace. Additionally, it continues to pursue its mandate regardless of the successes or failures on demand from the parties in conflict and within the constraints imposed by resources, politics and bureaucracy to ensure a peaceful and safe world for its 6.5 billion inhabitants.

UN engages itself in peace-making, peace-building and peace-keeping. Peace-making refers to curtailing of violence through ceasefire and peace accord or understanding between the parties in conflict through the use of political and diplomatic approaches. It is important to curtail violence and build confidence and understanding to build a lasting peace. Peace-building may involve properly addressing root-causes, constructive and dialogue based management of conflicts, strengthening norms and values, enhancing trust and confidence as well as participatory governance. Peace-keeping is to enforce or monitor peace agreements by UN mandated armed set-up- troops, police, and observers - to keep peace and bring stability. In addition, provision of possible humanitarian services and protection of civilians are important component of "civil tasks" of peace-keeping. The Peace-keeping UN groups (Blue Force) are to prevent or eliminate threats from insurgents and armed rebellions (Red Force) to civilians (White Force) and the peace-keepers. Protecting innocent civilians, alleviating human sufferings, maintaining peace and helping to build conditions for sustaining peace become key ingredients of peace keeping. Over decades it has played all the three roles in many conflict affected areas across continents.

The UN has a long and deep experience in conflict resolution, facilitating peace talks, arms management, post-conflict planning, monitoring human rights violations, elections monitoring, peace-keeping etc. The role it plays in a country depends on the need felt by the people concerned, conflicting parties and the support of the regional and international players that matter. In the Nepali context, neither the government nor the key powers, including India and USA, wanted the UN to play any role in facilitating the peace talks. However, there was a

general agreement from the state, the Maoists and the key foreign powers for the UN to assist Nepal in arms management, human rights monitoring and elections observation.

UN completed the task of monitoring Constituent Assembly election in Nepal and is continuing to monitor human rights violations by the government, armed groups and political actors; including the Maoist affiliated Young Communist League (YCL). It is yet to complete arms monitoring function as the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants is hanging in a controversy. In Sri Lanka, Norway was invited to play the role of a facilitator for a number of years but has now been discarded. Afghanistan is being attempted to be stabilized by NATO led western forces but seems to be far from peace and stability. UN Security Council passed a resolution in the aftermath of the Partition of India and Pakistan in the late 1940's to deflect conflict over Kashmir but its facilitation or mediation role has not been accepted by India.

For the third party facilitator or monitor to succeed, it must work at the invitation of both parties in conflict. Additionally, the facilitator must have (a) a willingness to make a long-term contribution, (b) flexible and ample resources and (c) amicable relations with central actors in the international arena. He recognizes that a suitable facilitator can be helpful if parties in conflict feel it necessary and have garnered unflinching will to peaceful resolution

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

Promoting nonviolence and building peace within a nation and between nations has never been more important than it is now, at a time when a variety of conflicts, religious fundamentalism, ethnic tensions and terrorism add to the already large body-count. The Gandhian philosophy of peaceful coexistence, non-violence and respect for human dignity appears to be losing against the medieval doctrine of "Might is Right". At the heart of his model of non-violence exists religious tolerance, ethnic harmony and secularism. Justice, equality, non-interference and democracy are integral part of building peace and promoting non-violence. Gandhi was for stemming the tide of materialistic civilizations based on competitive greed and exploitation of a man by a man. Since a man can't live by "bread alone" his crusades placed due focus on spiritualism and human values. Gautam Buddha, the son of this region born in Lumbini in Nepal, has been inspiring and guiding generations for the past 2700 years, including Gandhi, to follow the path of non-violence and peace. Nevertheless, our own generation and region has failed to adequately benefit from his wisdom and teachings in building peace within nations of the SAARC and in the South Asia region.

A pragmatic peace process follows a gradual approach dealing with confidence building measures and urgent issues related to violence in the beginning and more contentious issues in the later part of negotiations. Non-territorial conflicts need to deal with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the combatants but should also handle root-causes in the longer term. Involvement of non-armed groups and civil society in the peace process is crucial for lasting peace as the whole society is affected or involved in the conflict. External actors can contribute to peace process provided that all the parties in conflict agree and the external actors have influence and genuine commitments to the welfare of the concerned people. However, the parties in the conflict must take a lead and resolve their own problems. Others, if at all, can help at the most.

In terms of internal conflicts, all the nations of the South Asia region are making efforts to find solution internally or with some external support. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal, which started in 1996 and cost almost 15,000 lives, massive destruction of infrastructures and retardation of the economy, is being settled through a dialogue between the former rebels the Communist Party of Nepal CPN (Maoist) and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA). The United Nations is

involved in supervising and monitoring arms management with the formal consent of the Maoists and the government of Nepal. The UN involvement in Nepal has a tacit support from global and regional powers; including India and USA. While the Nepal's peace process has moved much faster than any other peace initiatives across the continents and the final solution may take time as the transitional politics and mainstreaming the Maoists insurgents continues to encounter roadblocks.

The resolution of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been facilitated by the Norwegians. After some impressive negotiation between LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government after February 2002 ceasefire, the Sri Lankan conflict has faced serious setbacks. The internal insurgencies and conflicts in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are being tackled internally with a combination of dialogue and military force. Bhutan insurgency suppression is aided by the Indian security forces in NE India.

Challenges and Opportunities

Conflicts whether internal or inter-state occur due to misunderstanding or perceived sense of injustice among others. As discussed earlier, conflicts may result due to reasons of identity, ideology, exclusion, territorial claims, hegemony or civilizational differences. While violent conflicts are undesirable and may cause immeasurable sufferings and incalculable losses of life and damage of physical infrastructure, they also offer a window of opportunity to understand problems and begin to address them through negotiations in the current and contemporary contexts. Countries of the SAARC have adopted various strategies to resolve their internal conflicts and bilateral tensions with some successes and some failures. Based on the past experiences, the strategies may have to be carefully analyzed to come up with useful lessons learned to introduce more effective corrective strategies.

For instance, in many internal conflicts it may be more effective to support dialogues by sound socio-economic and political packages that address the root-causes of the conflicts than the current practices of greater focus on the use of force. Similarly, the key political actors within every country and important powers in the South Asia region may have to play a more harmonious and active role if the external interferences, such as in Afghanistan, are to be minimized. Being two most powerful countries of the region, the resolution of Pakistan-India tensions will have an overwhelming bearing on the resolution of socio-economic and political tensions in the South Asia region and their constructive role will have very beneficial effect on the resolution of conflicts in the region (Pudasaini, 2007).

If the countries of the SAARC are serious about resolving the many conflicts that rage within their shores they may have to establish a regional mechanism for conflict resolution. Globally speaking, the UN, as an institution, will have to be strengthened and be used more effectively, particularly by the influential global and regional powers, based on merit-based consultation and maximum understanding among its relevant member states. Arms trade and sales must be curtailed. Proliferation of small arms and mines should be checked with the seriousness it deserves.

Widening inequalities in income and opportunities between rich and poor nations as well as the haves and have-nots within poorer nations should be bridged with urgency. Power sharing and credit sharing are critical for conflict management and peace-building. Inclusion of poor and marginalized in the power structure and enhanced socio-economic transformation are critical. Coalition governance culture, inclusive and people's welfare centered democratic polity and efficient and merit-based bureaucracy are at the heart of peace-building and socio-economic progress in the contemporary world. Involvement of civil society and common person in

development as well as peace initiatives (Tract II and Tract III initiatives) have become necessary in addition to governments efforts (Tract I).

In the context of Nepal, peace-building and socio-economic transformation is likely to largely contingent on the following:

- * Formulation of an inclusive and forward looking constitution in time
- * Proper management of UN verified combatants, including the rejected, and building a professional and non-politicized national army
- * Management of ethno-regional conflict, including armed/discontented groups in the Tarai and Pahad and violent youth brigades of political outfits
- * Proper restructuring of the state/appropriate federal structure
- * Short and long term socio-economic development roadmap; including relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation package
- * Building a national consensus on foreign affairs
- * Impunity, Truth and Reconciliation

Conclusion

Conflicts have been part of human life since Homo sapiens appeared over a million years ago in this planet earth. Conflicts, big or small, national or international, are unlikely to disappear completely. Indo-Pak tensions, particularly over Kashmir, are at the heart of South Asian conflict adversely affecting South Asian Regionalism. Resolution of tensions between these two most powerful SAARC members will help advance collective welfare of the peoples of the region. Afghanistan, the newest member of SAARC, is confronted with a complex conflict resulting from external and internal factors. Sri Lanka has been in the mess of ethnic conflict for over two decades now. Nepal is in the process of building peace after a ten year old Maoists insurgency and is caught up in a complicated transition. Other SAARC nations are also not free from one or other kind of conflicts of complex or not so complex nature.

Identity based governance and power related, hegemonic and strategic, ideological, territorial and interstate conflicts are among the key categories of the modern day conflicts disturbing peace, stability and progress in the world; including South Asia and Nepal. Conflicts must be managed with greater focus on negotiations by addressing genuine demands of groups excluded and marginalized from political, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural opportunities. Negotiations are not easy or fast in most instances and may require the facilitation of leading civil society members or at times facilitation by international agencies such as the United Nations or neutral states. Nevertheless, without the felt-need and commitment of the parties in conflict no conflict can be resolved. A consensus or broad understanding among key political players or power blocks is inevitable to attain lasting peace. Socio-economic transformation and greater economic and job opportunities for burgeoning youth population and marginalized groups and regions are at the heart of sustainable peace and stability. Regional and global powers must play just and constructive role in resolving conflicts. For facilitation of conflicts resolution at the regional level, a SAARC Centre for Conflict Management may be useful.

In the context of Nepal, the negotiated resolution of conflict may come to logical conclusion provided that key political parties strengthen their understanding to implement key ingredients of understandings reached in the past and adopt an inclusive new constitution sooner, if not within the two years provided under the Interim Constitution. Proper management of UN verified Maoist combatants, deft handling of ethno-regional aspirations, agreement on suitable federal structure, negotiation and disciplining armed groups in Tarai and Hills. A deft management of support and pressures from the international community, particularly from key regional and global players, is no less crucial. Relief, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation will have

to get due attention. A longer term socio-economic development roadmap will have to be prepared and implemented to address the root-causes of the conflict and ensure socio-economic well-being so urgently desired by the masses.

At the end it may be worth remembering Gandhi's statement that "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil it does is permanent".

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