

Security Architecture of South Asia: A New Framework of Analysis

Raja Qaiser Ahmed*, Misbah Arif** & Sheryar Khan***

Abstract

This paper discusses the political landscape of South Asia and its reinterpretation vis-à-vis developments in South Asian security matters. South Asian security is volatile and beyond the comprehension through the traditional modes of analyses. This paper offers a broad analysis of South Asian security by identifying new variables and their relevance in the security paradigm of South Asia. The paper also discusses the political changes in the region and glimpses at the regional scenario beyond 2015.

Keywords: Security architecture; Nontraditional security; Terrorism; Political transition.

Introduction

South Asia is a region of great significance because of its geo strategic position. Its proximity to the Middle East, especially to the Persian Gulf region and Central Asian states, makes it not only important for great powers, but extremely observed by rest of the world. The Cold war and 9/11 attack on Twin Towers and Pentagon changed the contours of the world politics.¹

Security of South Asia during the Cold War era was primarily focused on Indo-Pak rivalry, Sino-Indian relations and nuclear proliferation. It ended with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Transformation in power structure from a bipolar to unipolar world has brought dramatic changes on the stage of international politics. In post-cold war era, regional organizations went operative to avoid regional tensions and to extend the sphere of cooperation. South Asia remains as one of the least unified regions in the world. Regardless of having a common history,

* Raja Qaiser Ahmed, Lecturer, School of Politics & IR, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. Email: rajaqaiserahmed@gmail.com

** Misbah Arif, M.Phil Scholar, School of Politics & IR, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad

*** Dr. Sheryar Khan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad

cultural correspondences little efforts have been made in security cooperation and economic integration.²

In post-colonial phase, South went through number of security challenges. It will not be wrong to call it, as most troubled region in the past half century. President Bill Clinton during his trip to the India in January 2000 said; South Asia had become “the most dangerous place on earth”.³ Many factors highlighted the importance of security measure regionally such as India’s emergence as a regional as well as seeking global power, U.S. presence in Afghanistan addition in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), terrorism along with numerous nontraditional and traditional security threats. Human security and environmental degradation are also pervasive threats in the region. The expected exit of International Security Forces from Afghanistan in 2014 is likely to destabilize the already complex situation.

Issues such as; Kashmir, Sir Creek, Siachen, the nationality of Tamils, Tibet, Nepal demanding open border, Bangladesh water and territorial disputes have been obstruction in towards cooperation in the region. Conflicts between India and Pakistan after the deadly partition in August 1947 resulted in wars of 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999, along with number of low intensity conflicts. Prolonged, unresolved disputes have resulted in acrimonious relations between the two countries and the pursuit of regional supremacy has increased the instability of the region. Conflict over Kashmir and quest for regional dominance through arms race, and military buildup has been at core of Indo-Pak relations. The prevailing asymmetry in military forces, economy, resources, man power, and other strategic objectives between India, being the largest country of South Asia and other smaller states is an additional factor which leads to competition instead of cooperation. India’s population of 1.2 billion and its economy GDP of \$ 1.4 trillion are about eight times that of Pakistan.⁴ Smaller states such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan are dependent upon India because of their economic and societal interaction. Nepal and Bhutan are heavily reliant upon India for transit routes and trade.

Economic and geopolitical areas have been overshadowed by India’s existential military threat to Pakistan. Along with Siachen and Sir Creek, Kashmir has been one of the major unresolved disputes, snowballing trust deficiency day by day. There are number of other incidents which hinder the way towards

improvement of relations. Both states were close to war in 1987, Brass Tack Crisis, Kashmir insurgency 1990 and Kargil War in 1999. India's competition is not only limited to region but it extends beyond. India and China went to war in 1962 and are still having border disputes. India faced a high level of tensions from 1987 to 1990 with Sri Lanka. India seeking regional hegemon status has further amplified the insecurity of the region.

Region went through paradigm shift in the strategic environment in May 1998, India and Pakistan successfully conducted nuclear tests. Pakistan went for nuclearization to maintain the balance of terror because of obvious threats from conventional might of India and historical background of mistrust. Presence of deadly arsenals in highly vulnerable and volatile region is a question mark on the issues of security and stability in the region. The arms race between Indo-Pak has further blued the security environment. Ironically, countries that possess nuclear weapons and advance technology with sophisticated delivery system don't feel secure. They are more concerned about the growing capabilities of the adversary. Cold Start doctrine, a limited war doctrine has been designed by India in order to counter any attack by Pakistan by quick mobilization and launching retaliatory strikes. Although the political elite of Indian do not accept Cold Start Doctrine but there has been multiple exercises conducted to operationalize this doctrine. In order to counter these conventional military threats right on the border, Pakistan is developing its tactical nuclear weapons to be used against invading Indian forces. Future armed clash between Indo-Pak would be disastrous because of the presence of nuclear weapons. It is crucial to improve relations between the regional arch rivals.

The attack on Indian parliament and Mumbai in 2001 and 2008 respectively again brought the two declared rivals at the brink of war. The relations have been strained with short lived sparks of hope such as Lahore Agreement between officials of the two states, cricket diplomacy and cultural programs. India and Pakistan relations cannot be strengthened given the blame game over Kashmir continues.

Terrorism in South Asia: Reshaping of Security Concerns

After 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington DC, South Asia became the epicenter of War on Terrorism. Terrorist's attacks demonstrated the ability of terrorist organizations to create instability in the region.⁵ It is estimated that about 200 militant groups are involved in different type of activities in the region.

Militant groups' presence in the region not only affected the security of the states but also had a deep impact on relations of the states. The intra and interstate conflicts in South Asia had always been interconnected. Insurgencies had been occurring for a long period of time such as Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and currently Pakistan is also facing insurgency in Baluchistan. India on the other hand, openly blames its neighboring countries for providing safe heaven to these terrorists and transnational groups. Unresolved conflicts, deprivation, and inequality have caused massive destruction in South Asia, affecting every state of the region. Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are the major victims.

Terrorists group namely the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Lashar-e-Jhangvi, Jamat-u-Dawa, Student Islamic movement of India, Indian Mujahedden, Communist party of India Maoist movement, and number of other groups in neighboring countries are involved in terrorist activities in South Asia. Terrorist groups along with locals also assassinated the top leadership. Rajiv Gandhi Prime Minister of India, Benazir Bhutto Prime Minister of Pakistan, along with high officials from Sri Lanka and many other were assassinated in terrorist attacks. Terrorism undermined the democratic structure and economic development of many countries. Proliferation of terrorism and increase in crime rate is due to the absence of regional security cooperation. Governments in the region are trying hard to curb this security threat by negotiations, as in case of Pakistan.

After suffering for years Pakistan finally opted for reconciliation and now military solution with the militant group known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Keeping the present scenario in purview this is the best way to end the ongoing turmoil in the region. Negotiations, ceasefires and bargaining have been effective strategies adopted by the government to counter the further damage. Terrorism can only be handled through regional cooperation.⁶ How the situation would change if negotiations fail or how long it would take to end this unrest is uncertain.

Sino-US Policies in South Asia: Defining Variables in Uncertain South Asia

Military, human aspects of security and interstates security dilemmas have confronted South Asian nations where military spending are given the top priority. Although the economic preconditions of the regional countries curtail large scale

production of weapons and other sophisticated systems, as South Asia is the most backward in economy in compare to rest of Asia.⁷ India's conventional buildup of arms is focusing more on China than on Pakistan and Pakistan is keeping an eye on India's increasing nuclear capabilities. If this triangular threat perception continues there is a chance of sporadic nuclear war in South Asia. Chinese military modernization dragged India into it and persuaded Pakistan to follow suit. There is a divergence on the security perception of India and other regional states. India's security concerns are related to its neighbor i.e. Pakistan and China. However, the smaller states are looking towards the external power to counter threats and insecurity. Participation of external powers in South Asia with divergent goals and priorities further complicate the already complex security environment. During Cold war both the super powers used hard and soft power to maintain their influence in the region followed with the demise of USSR. On several occasions arbitrator party has been called to ease the tensions and to resolve the conflict in South Asia as in case of Kargil war. Along with Russia, United States occasionally played a vital role as a mediator in South Asia especially in case of India and Pakistan.⁸ Mobilization of troops along the border, during 2001 and 1999 led to U.S. intervention and persuaded India to move towards dialogue with Pakistan.

After the 9/11 attacks the commitment of western powers in global war against terrorism has deeply affected the strategic and conventional balance in South Asia. Post 9/11 importance of combating terrorism and curbing the proliferation of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), along with the preemptive doctrine of the United States had immeasurable effects on the regional dynamics. U.S. had always tried to assure its balanced policies towards its two allies in South Asia. Pak-Afghan relationship on one hand, and India's relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan on the other hand were deeply affected by the U.S. policies. Pakistan became a frontline ally for U.S. in South Asia in War against Terrorism. Due to this partnership, Pakistan's tribal belt along the border of Afghanistan went through turmoil. Military Operations conducted in these areas led to the divergent public opinion among Pakistani nation. Indo-US relations also expanded after 9/11 attacks to counter terrorism and militancy in the region. The New Framework for U.S.-India Defense Relationship (NFDR) was signed by the Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld and Indian Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee in 2005 in Washington DC. The statement said that this agreement started 'a new era' in their

growing strategic partnership. The emerging Indo-Israel-US nexus is alarming for Pakistan. U.S. cooperation with India mainly in field of Missile defense and other weapon technology advancement will upset the nuclear deterrence in South Asia.

Indian Anti-Ballistic Missile system will directly destabilize the strategic nuclear deterrence in South Asia. It will undermine Pakistan's policy of minimum nuclear deterrence. US committed to India to help in areas of control, command and early warning systems.⁹ Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) activation in South Asia through one of the bilateral defense agreement with India, is a matter of great concern for Pakistan, as it is singled out. The Indo-US cooperation will have a dire impact on the Pak-US relations. As transfer of weapons or advance technology to India will have direct implications for Pakistan security and will destabilize the security structure of South Asia. Indo US nuclear deal 2008 welcomed India with number of opportunities but discriminatory behavior with Pakistan and refusal to provide same assistance persuaded Pakistan to look for other alternative options like China or Russia.

In addition to United States, China has also emerged as a major external factor in South Asia which is alarming for India. Chines strategy "Strings of Pearls" has made the regional security environment more complex. The presence of external powers and their involvement in the domestic affairs has put regional stability prone to vulnerability. China's place is that of an apparently interloper in the region. As a third party also played a vital role. The increasing Chinese influence in the region is a threat to Indian interests such as seeking status of regional hegemon, dependence of other states on India only. China proved to be a dynamic partner in the region by increasing its trade ties with many of the South Asian states. China has always been suspicious about the India's quest for regional hegemony and tries to balance it by helping Pakistan and other countries in different sectors especially defense and trade.

China has agreements with Bangladesh and is looking towards the construction of deep sea ports in Bangladesh and has been a major donor of military aid.¹⁰ Sri Lanka is being helped by China through supply of arms.¹¹ Nepal also receives aid from China occasionally.¹² China is also working on Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Gwadar gained significance because of Sino-Indian competition in energy sector and US presence in the region.¹³ Pakistan and China signed a free trade agreement, along with cooperation in defense sector. To counter Chinese expansion, India

brought Iran in to cooperation in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea by developing Chabahar port in Iran. The development of Gwadar and Chabahar will have implications on Pak-Iran relations. Along with the fulfillment of energy demands India would be able to encircle Pakistan by having good ties with Afghan and Iran government and balancing Chinese developments. On the other hand, China would be able to keep an eye on Indian influence in Indian Ocean. Pak-China cooperation is challenging for growing Indian economic and strategic objectives. Pak-China assistance will help in strengthening their economies and will counter growing Indian influence in the region. All the Central Asian states are landlocked; Gwadar port will provide them the shortest possible route. By investing in Chabahar, India is trying its best to counter Pak-China efforts to turn Gwadar into a regional pivot for international trade. Development of Chabahar port can also be viewed as an effort to sabotage Pakistan's efforts to increase its sphere of influence in Central Asian states with the help of China.

Indian maritime doctrine, focusing on getting hold over choke points, trade routes and activities in Indian Ocean, is to maintain its influence and to counter China.¹⁴ India's naval expansionism by transforming its brown water navy to blue water navy reflects its intentions of growing economic interests, defense capabilities and to project its influence beyond its shores. India would be the first country to have anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft, other than U.S. Naval expansion will defiantly give India advantage over other regional states. Pak-China collaboration in naval force would help to contain increasing Indian influence in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Indian military muscles are growing at a much faster pace than expected resulting in arms race and security dilemma.

India-Pakistan-Afghanistan: Troika of Relations Post 9/11

War on terror was apparently between the U.S. and the NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) against the Taliban and Al-Qaida. But India used it as a great opportunity to counter Pakistan influence in Afghanistan. The occupation of Afghanistan by U.S. provided India with an opportunity to strengthen its position and ties with Kabul. Indian consulates were opened in areas of Kandahar and Jalalabad which are closer to Pakistan border and are involved in subverting activities against Pakistan.¹⁵ Pakistan and India are fighting a proxy war in Afghanistan by trying to advance their political, military, economic interests and preventing the other from doing the same. Close Indian ties with

Afghanistan reflects the strategy of ancient strategist Kautilya's believing that immediate neighbors should be considered as an enemies but any state on the other side of immediate neighbors should be considered as an ally.¹⁶

Former Indian Army Deputy Chief of Staff R.K. Sawhney writes, "India cannot afford to beat a retreat from Afghanistan if it wants to remain a major regional player."¹⁷ India maintains close ties with Kabul and has invested in reconstruction projects in Kabul. India has assisted Afghanistan in military fields and intelligence to ensure that terrorism in Kashmir is linked with Al-Qaida and Taliban in Afghanistan.¹⁸ India worked hard to find the ground in Kabul to increase its trade expansion to Central Asian states. India helped building electric power plants, running sanitation projects solar energy projects, provided transportation facilities and offered scholarships to Afghan students.¹⁹ Pakistan is cautious about the military assistance India is providing to the Afghan government. In 2009 BBC/ABC News poll found that 74 % of Afghans favor India and only 8 % have positive views Pakistan. Along with this 86 % believed that Pakistan had a negative influence in Afghanistan.²⁰ Afghanistan may turn out to be a "second Kashmir" as proxy war between India and Pakistan is going on in Afghanistan. Indo-Pak rivalry in Afghanistan will have a deep impact on development in the country. Pakistan primary objective in Afghanistan is preventing the refugee's participation in politics and promotion of peaceful government in Kabul to overshadow Indian influence. India wants to project its power throughout South Asia by playing a crucial role in Afghanistan's security and development. The agenda of overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan was not possible without the regional cooperation either through human power, logistic or intelligence support. Indo-Pak-Afghan relations went through warm waters and future scenario cannot be predicted due to present situation tumultuous and fluctuating polices. Election 2014 in both eastern and western side of Pakistan will deeply affect the future policies.

Evolution of Democratic Culture and Challenges Ahead

It appears as if withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan is the only major event of year 2015 with the commencement of dialogue process between Taliban and US mediated by Pakistan, but many other political changes are taking place besides that. All the countries of South Asia are establishing democracies. Successful elections in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India have marked steps towards evolution of democratic

culture in the region. Despite, numerous challenges faced by Bangladesh, it still survived to follow democratic path. For the very first time, Pakistan power had been transferred from one democratically elected civilian government to the other. Since 2008 Pakistan is facing numerous controversies like terrorism, insurgencies, economic and energy crisis but managed to keep democratically elected government. Monarchical autocracy and Maoist movement came to an end in Nepal. Taliban are not able to capture power in Afghanistan despite instability at a large scale. Unrest in Maldives 2011 was not strong enough to bring end to democracy. Similarly in Myanmar and Bhutan efforts are made to promote democracy to bring stability.

It is interesting to note that even traditional Indian election campaigns targeting, blaming Pakistan were though there but eradicating poverty, providing jobs, flourishing economy and much more in human development and welfare have been the core issues during the election campaign. However beside this, the stance of Indian political ruling party: Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) on reviewing Indian first strike capability heated another debate and was criticized at national and international level. Afghan government led by Ghani is facing a number of challenges and legacy left by Karzai government in dealing with Bilateral Security Agreement with U.S. Throughout the region, states are keeping hawk eyes on Indian and Afghan elections results as it would contribute greatly towards the regional politics. Pakistan would be deeply affected by new government policies of its eastern and western border.

US Military Presence in South Asia Beyond 2015

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO's) presence in Afghanistan had a dire impact on the security dynamics of South Asia. Strategic equation in the region has been changed because of the NATO troop's arrival. This led to NATO's involvement in security affairs of South Asia. The intervention of foreign troops made the already delicate regional imbalance of power more complex and puzzling. Afghanistan had been a battle ground of the regional power before the arrival of international forces. A new Cold war over the issue of U.S. troop's presence in Afghanistan emerged between countries at regional level. All the actors involved in the Afghan domestic affairs are trying to fix the situation in a way that is best for their own interest. US military presence in South Asia after 2014 is uncertain as the President Hamid Karzai refused to sign Bilateral Security Agreement with

United States. Although his government will be completing its term in 2014, if the future government also follows suit then there is an obvious threat of Afghanistan becoming a base for planning future operations. Other affiliated terrorist organizations would also be strengthened by the vacuum of power left in the wake of the NATO's withdrawal.

The regional security of South, East and Central Asia depends heavily on Afghanistan. With the approaching NATO forces draw down from Afghanistan, concerns over regional security have been heightened. Afghanistan is still at war and will remain a volatile security concern for years not only for region but also at global level. Draw down of forces is not disengagement it's just an alteration in engagement. There are a few questions that are still need to be answered such as the ability of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to take charge for Afghanistan's security after transition and fill the vacuum left by U.S. Any legal and political framework to deal with Afghan situation has yet not been finalized. Negotiations with Taliban had not been possible because of no concrete strategy of withdrawal.²¹ Despite the millions of dollars being spent on the future of Afghanistan yet its impact on regional security is vague.

China and Russians are also not in favor of US military presence in Afghanistan arguing that small number of military forces would be useless. It is also believed that, US presence in Afghanistan will keep the fight alive. On the other hand full draw down may end up in insurgency prevalence. The major strategic concern is whether the Afghan forces would be able to hold the security and bring stability to the country. Afghanistan is a gateway to Central Asia and all the regional countries are interested in trade and resource exploitation in Central Asian state which heavily relies on the stability in Afghanistan.

Non Traditional Security Threats in South Asia: Threat Spectrum Revisited

The traditional, interstate security threat perception has been replaced by intrastate, nontraditional security threats like environmental scarcity, climate change, health security and many more. The nature of threats with the passage of time changed after the Cold war. Along with traditional concept of security, nontraditional security is also an emerging concern. Comprehensive security, encompassing political, social, economic and environment security is a major agenda. South Asia is a birth place of numerous traditional and nontraditional security threats.

Non-military threats are increasing at a much faster rate than ever before. The nonmilitary causes like illegal cross border movement, population growth, poverty, social inequality, money laundering, transnational terrorism, smuggling mainly of drugs and arms and environmental degradation are becoming the source of uncertainty at regional level. The inadequate national security apparatus in countering traditional and non-traditional security threats in South Asia is demanding cooperative security architecture to mitigate escalating threats for a long time.

Corruption is major regional economic security concern in South Asian region. In developed countries the top leader are answerable to the public and are investigated and prosecuted. While in South Asian countries it is promoted instead of accountability. South Asia is facing challenges in food and water security. Increasing food prices are demanding change in policies in agriculture sector, and food security. It has been estimated that millions of people are suffering high levels of poverty because of increasing prices without keeping in mind the salaries. The high level of poverty in the region is also because of excessive investments in the military sector and inadequate resources allocation for human security programs. These problems will further escalate political, economic, environmental and societal challenges.

Health security also poses a crucial security threat to South Asian region. In South Asia large number of population has no access to sanitation facilities and safe drinking water. Traditionally health issues were not regarded as a threat to security. In 2000 United Nations (UN) passed a resolution on AIDS, stating that it may pose a threat to security and stability.²² A large number of HIV/AIDS patients live in South Asia and are a direct threat to security of the region especially to India because of its population size. Cross border movement of infected patients pose a direct threat to all the nations.

Small arms and Light Weapons (SLAWs) kill a large group of people every year. For UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan declared SLAWs as “slow weapons of mass destruction”. The underdevelopment of country can be linked to illegal use of SALWs. Easy availability, mobility and cost made them more appealing. Because of their common use by police, military and civilians they are easily accessible. South Asia is facing number of ethnic conflict and availability of SALWs has played a vital role in making these conflicts less manageable and more violent.

Natural disasters made the South Asia among the world's most volatile regions. A great number of people have died and financial damages have been faced due natural calamities like floods, scarcity of water, high urban population density, energy shortages, air pollution etc. Environmental degradation and climate change will further increase the vulnerabilities leading to scarcity of resources, melting of glaciers, floods, diseases and migration. Smuggling particularly of arms, drugs and human trafficking are major criminal activities increasing the human security concern.

Regional Integration in South Asia: Between the Myth and Reality

The perturbed relationship among regional states after the division of subcontinent has been a major reason behind no institutionalization for security. Economic and Political integration in South Asia has not been possible yet because of Indo-Pak rivalry. The only regional organization of South Asia is South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The objectives of this organization were to promote welfare, trade, and mutual trust among the countries of South Asia. India perceived SAARC as a regional alliance of all the states against India, on the other hand smaller states perceive it as a direct threat to their sovereignty.

The cooperation has been further undermined because of bilateral disputes between the states. India is a country sharing border with every regional country and having different disputes. As per Charter of (SAARC), bilateral conflicts and relations cannot be discussed. Article X of its Charter which states that bilateral issues would not be discussed and would be excluded from the deliberation.²³ Failure to address the bilateral issues resulted in trust deficiency. Due to this economic integration and trust has not been developed among states. Asymmetry among the regional states in context of area, population, economy, and military might has proved to be a cause behind inefficacy of organization. Smaller states perceive India's ambitions for regional hegemon as a threat. On the other hand India views smaller states limiting its own economic freedom. Political disputes and conflicts acted as a milestone towards implementation of South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). There is no such policy of visa liberalization among the regional states for promoting trade. Instead of going for complementary economies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka prefer competition in the economic sector. Change in attitudes of states can bring them closer to one another, a more

stable, secure and peaceful region. SAARC is still a best option which needs to be strengthening to bring socio-economic and political changes at regional level.

Conclusion

Regional politics, security dynamics and national security of South Asia are deeply interlinked with these problems prevailing. All these problems will have a profound impact on regional security. To ensure the security and development of South Asia there is an urgent need of effective regional security architecture. The structure should be capable to deal with traditional and nontraditional security threats.

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