

Faltering Footprints of Security in South Asia

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Academics, theorists and practitioners working on security have remained ambiguous and no strong consensus has been formed around a single definition of the concept despite its popularity. The concept of security has expanded from state security to human security and now includes a range of military as well as non-military threats that recognize no borders. The security of people and the security of states are mutually reinforcing. Both remain imperative for stability and peace.

South Asia is one of the precarious regions with convoluted security in the world, primarily due to the fact that most of the South Asian states are overwhelmed with an anecdotal degree of conflicts and disputes. A number of nations in the region continue to struggle from the number of interstate and intrastate conflicts. Bilateral relations are generally defined by animosity and mistrust. Asymmetric warfare in the form of terrorism is a harsh reality in the region. Pakistan and Afghanistan, along with emerging terror trails in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are hotbeds of transnational terrorism. The Afghan-Pakistan border is becoming the modern epicentre of the "Jihadi Movement". Today, South Asia represents a classical arms race. The growth of Indian conventional military capabilities has resulted in an asymmetry in the regional conventional military balance. Conventional army deployment and engagement has been frequent. Such a mindset would augment the likelihood of military adventurism.

There are, inevitably, problems in the region, predominantly between India and Pakistan, with China in the backdrop of their traumatized relationship. There exists a trilateral India-Pakistan-China stand-off that impinges on the security calculi of all the states in the region. It would be realistic to bear in mind that India and China will inevitably be economic and political rivals with existing border disputes. The Sino-Indian border dispute over Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim remains unresolved, the same with the dispute between China and Bhutan. Nepal is going the communists' way. The increasing Chinese and Indian interests in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar can hardly be ignored. Tibet and Kashmir are integral to the security concerns.

The Indo-Pakistan confrontation has brought the Anglo-American powers into play in a manner that has not been seen since the early 1960s. The extroverted American war on terrorism has brought the United States, with Britain in tow, and the European Union into military and political efforts to deal with the security challenges of South Asia. The

post-Cold War budding tactical alliance between India and the USA is not taken empathetically by China as energetically entrenched by pushy posture taken by quiescent and apathetic dragon in contemporary days. A more skeptical scrutiny perceives China playing an enduring game premeditated to inhibit American influence and weave a close-knit economic and security community with China at the center. This is cogently demonstrated by escalating Chinese interests in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It also wants to gain influence in the region to defeat perceived attempts at strategic encirclement or containment by India and the USA. Any setbacks in the process will subvert the security milieu in South Asia. Being in a close neighborhood, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran situations are profoundly affecting all countries of South Asia. As history exemplifies, an enduring Afghanistan and Pakistan are essential for the stability of South Asia.

Non-military threats are rooted in social, economic, ecological and political choices made by South Asian countries. The burgeoning non-traditional security concerns that confront the region range from issues of chronic poverty and hunger, population growth, the energy crisis, environmental degradation(including deforestation and melting of the glaciers in the Himalayas, rise in the sea level owing to climate change and global warming, floods, cyclones, and droughts), misgovernance and deterioration in law and order, trafficking in persons and illegal drugs, the problem of gender discrimination, border demarcations and delimitation of maritime boundaries, trade disputes, the repatriation of stranded refugees, the problem of the theocratization of societies, and massive violations of human rights, among others.

Viewed from the above perspective, South Asia provides a grim portrayal of the social, economic and political facets of development, and nerve-wracking threats to security. The emerging security order reveals a multitude of fault lines: political, economic, social, environmental, cultural, scientific and technological. These faults overlap partially and often shift in direction. They sometimes reinforce each other and at other times work at cross purposes. The overall picture they present is one of turbulence and uncertainty, in which a variety of contradictory processes unlock a wide range of both opportunities and threats defying the established security order. Integration and exclusion coexist apprehensively side by side in all domains and aspects of the security order. This is an order that is regional but not integrated that puts all in contact with one another while simultaneously maintaining wide gaps between nations and between peoples within countries, thus benefiting only a small percentage of the region's population.

However, it will be erroneous to conclude that there cannot be a strategic premeditated concord in South Asia. The shifting gamut also provides an opportunity to build a

cohesive South Asia. Thus, analogous to the security problems of South Asia, the solutions also appear to be intrinsically interrelated. The challenge now is to develop the security architecture of South Asia and afford political and economic energies to the processes of problem-solving to accelerate wide-ranging regional security cooperation. Today, Security demands walking on both legs – expanding economic cooperation wherever possible and making sustained efforts to resolve political disputes. The focus of the security discourse in South Asia must be shifted from national security to people's security – from security through armaments to security through human development, from territorial security to food, employment and environmental security. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity. There are strong imperatives to work together despite differences in security perceptions, but it appears that South Asian regional policy experts currently do not recognize these. Given the geographic proximity, political, socio-cultural and economic complementarities, this region could become the greatest powerhouse in human history.

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