

CONFLICT IN SOUTH ASIA : AN ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

The term South Asia is used for the countries lying south of Himalayas and surrounded by the Indian Ocean from three sides. The countries of this region include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan. Apart from Nepal and Bhutan, the rest of the South Asian region has been subject to colonial rule. These countries gained independence in 1947; Pakistan came into existence as a result of partition of India in 1947; Sri Lanka got independence in 1948. Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign state after breaking away from Pakistan in 1971. Though the countries differ from each other with regard to climate, race, religion and history, they constitute a single region and possess some common features. Firstly, most of the countries are very poor and majority of their people live below poverty line. Secondly, religion is a predominant factor in these states. In fact, some of the states like Pakistan and Bangladesh were created on religious basis. Thirdly, these countries are faced with problems of unemployment, illiteracy, over population, etc. Fourthly, the countries are agricultural and industrially backward. However, India is an exception and has made considerable industrial progress. Fifthly, most of the countries are faced with the problem of political instability. Finally, most of the countries (except Pakistan) do not have close military links with super powers.

In contrast with the external boundaries of the region, the political geography within the region does not follow any neat pattern.¹ The three most important rivers —Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra cut across the boundaries of the principal countries in the Indian sub-continent. In spite of differences in physical appearance, complexion, stature and other ethnological features, a common cultural and ethnic outlook unifies the people of the entire region of South Asia. However, the South Asian countries have sharp differences in their perception and approaches on the details of major global and regional issues of peace, security and stability. The pattern of these differences has remained somewhat consistent over a long period except for some occasional minor shift in their strategies.

THE GEO-STRATEGIC REALITIES OF SOUTH ASIA

The harsh geo-political realities point towards greater potential for conflict rather than peace. These may be well routed in geo-strategic factors and in the strategies of the leading powers of the world to influence these factors in their own interests. Some of the geo-strategic factors are-

1. **Military Stand Off in the Region.** Whereas India has tended to find greater convergence in its perceptions with Russian position on many issues, however other South Asian states have reflected towards west towards their world views.
2. **Emergence of China as a Reckonable Power.** China's growing power and its assertive approach in dealing with other nations can only create apprehensions and a sense of insecurity in the countries of South Asia excepting those like Pakistan who have sought a quasi alliance relationship with it. Similarly, China's growing capabilities of power projection could pose a major challenge to peace and security in the days ahead.
3. **Situation in Afghanistan and Middle East.** Afghanistan and Middle East are the two conflict areas where local indigenous conflictual factors have been entangled in great power strategies and interests. The continuation or resolution of the conflict in the two areas will have far-reaching influence on the peace and security in the region.²
4. **Growth of Extra Regional Military Forces in the Indian Ocean.** There has been a massive growth of extra regional military forces in the Indian Ocean in the recent years. The presence of extra regional forces only helps to exacerbate conflictual responses and aggravate the problem of peace and security in the region. Strategically too the Indian Ocean region is important for global nuclear warfare and thus it has become a victim of US and European game plan. The success of US Coalition Strategy to undertake military responses outside NATO areas in a conflict situation during the second half of 1987 in Persian Gulf Arabian Sea is noteworthy.

In Asia, China occupies a pivotal place. It has the largest population, largest land forces and it is a nuclear powered state. The emerging coalition between Russia, china and India may restrict the US influence in Asia. China and Pakistan are time-tested friends. They see their friendship through the prism of India. Pakistan needs china to check India's expectation to emerge as a regional power. China's active cooperation and assistance to Pakistan in becoming a nuclear state is well documented.

The problem of peace and security in South Asian region viewed in the context of fundamental factors affecting the geo-strategic environment point to a large number of issues and areas of potential threat to peace and security. The most important current issues are:-

1. Nuclear arms race in South Asia, and

2. Cross border terrorism.

The peace in South Asia hinges on Indo-Pak relations. Pakistan has been providing political, military and financial support to the separatist Kashmiris and Jihadis. The low intensity proxy war waged by Pakistan seeks to bleed India and wear it out.

In South Asia, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has made bad way since its formation in 1985. The basic reason for the SAARC being ineffective is the mistrust between India and its neighbours. Except Bhutan and Maldives, all other countries call India as the 'Big Brother' or a 'bully' who is insensitive to their national aspirations. There are territorial disputes lies 'Kachchativu' with Sri Lanka, 'Teen Bigha' with Bangladesh and 'Kalapani' with Nepal. The migration problem of Bangladeshis into India, Nepalese into Bhutan and Indian northeastern (NE) states are some of the unresolved problems.

The 2015 India-Bangladesh land Boundary agreement signed on 6 June 2015 in Bangladesh. The historic agreement facilitated the transfer of 111 enclaves, adding up to 17,160.63 Acres, from India to Bangladesh. Conversely India received 51 enclaves, adding up to 7,110.02 acres, which were in Bangladesh. Prior to this agreement, the 2011 protocol signed between Manmohan Singh of India and Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh agreed to maintain the status quo in addressing the issue of adverse possession of land, where by India will receive 2777.038 Acres of land from Bangladesh and in turn transfer 2,267.682 acres of land to Bangladesh. The 2011 protocol was made in an accord with the state government of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and West Bengal but could not be implemented due to adverse political circumstance. Thus the 2015 LBA implements the unresolved issues stemming from the un-demarcated land boundary.³

The present security environment in South Asia demands that all states ought to come together, settle their differences through diplomatic channel, and develop a common security model based on economic viabilities. Non-military threat to each other's national security should be minimized. The mistrust, rivalry and inimical attitude must give way to peace, cooperation and comprehensive security. The ever-increasing defence expenditure be curtailed and used for economic development. Earlier the strategic dimension dominated the South Asian region but now geo-political and geo-economic dimension carry greater importance.

In the complex security scenario when Afghanistan is militancy hit, orthodox Islamic army rules Pakistan, China is making attempts to encircle India through Myanmar, Tibet and Pakistan and India is hit by Pak sponsored terrorism, this region has become venerable to frequent wars.

The USA after the collapse of Soviet Union is strengthening its military power and currency investment only to keep up both with the possibility of a military war and a trade war. Apart from Diego Garcia, the US has also strengthened its military presence in Bangladesh through SOFA Pact.⁴ US believes that instability, conflict between regional powers and major change in balance of power would serve the interest of Russia or China and would therefore tilt military balance in its disfavor.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan was built up as a spoiler state both by US (early 50s, 60s, and 70s) and by China immediately after 1962 border debacle in NEFA and Ladakh with India. Pakistan's strategic importance was very much enhanced in early 50s when US looking for a base to fly the U-2 over USSR found the perfect base in Peshawar to sneak into the USSR from south and fly over vitally important USSR's space station and strategic missile bases which were far away from the USSR's European borders. This relationship ended with the shooting down of the U-2 spy plane by USSR. Peshawar, Sargodha, Rawalpindi ceased to be important military bases to US as these were before the U-2 shooting down.

As US was losing a bit of interest in Pakistan with the end of Eisenhower Administration, China stepped in with political and moral support to whatever the Pakistanis wished. After the 1962 victory of Chinese forces over India, China found it very useful to be friends with Pakistan. All this was done to keep India off balance and prevent it from focusing on its northern border. With the onset of Vietnam War, US had very little interest in Pakistan except supply of spares for previously supplied military hardware continued. China's influence increased. Several high-ranking visits by Chou En Lai and Liu Shao Shi took place to Pakistan. In return, Pakistani dictators and Prime Ministers paid visits to China.

The 1971 Bangladesh creation by India removed a major irritant in Pakistan's internal cohesiveness and made Pakistan a West Asian country, linked to it by culture, religion and military pacts (CENTO and SEATO). The 1971 war also forced the Pakistani leadership of the time - Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (father of Benazir) and later Zia-UI- Haq (the military dictator) to look around and find its own strategic importance in the peculiar geography it is located. The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a God sent opportunity to Pakistani dictator — Zia UI Haq to exploit its geographic location to aid and abet the US position of defeating Soviet Union in an Asian battlefield. It was only guerrilla action and counterstrike by the occupying force resulting in civilian casualties. US inflated the figures to make it look as a great US victory. Civilian losses were great. These occurred when after the USSR withdrawal, aided by Pakistani self-interest, civil war broke out and two groups fought to gain control of Kabul. Later, Pakistani aided Taliban appeared and defeated both the warring sides. At that time (1994-2001), Afghanistan became a client state of Pakistan.

The above brought into the focus the particular strategic importance of Pakistan in all West Asian related affairs.

With Iran under religious theocracy rule since 1979, Iraq completely unstable and at war with US since 1991, the breaking up of USSR into smaller states with three Muslim dominated states immediately bordering Afghanistan to the north made US to look around to find a country which could be brought under its influence and whose close proximity could be exploited to the US advantage. Choice again fell upon Pakistan. Although Pakistan's relationship with US was sour during nineties with Clinton

Administration not taking kindly to the moral, material and political support, which Pakistani Army was extending to the terror network of Osama Bin Laden, yet military-to-military relationship between US South Asia Pakistan was always good.

After the 9/11 attack on USA, his famous President Bush said that you are with us or against us, brought Pakistan again under the US fold.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIAN OCEAN REGION TO SOUTH ASIA

Indian Ocean is indeed a rim; its water washes the shores of countries of three continents-Asia (South East Asia, South Asia, Gulf and West Asia), Africa and Australia. Since beginning, South Asia has been a very important strategic and economic sub-region of Indian Ocean.⁵ South East Asia, China, Central Asia, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean encircle it. Home to nearly one-fifth of world's population, its countries are facing various political, economic and security challenges even in 21st century. The whole region is in turmoil. The biggest problem of this region has been the presence of external powers for various reasons.

Throughout the Cold War period, Indian Ocean littorals have witnessed a massive super power rivalry. The disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1990-91, ended the cold war and naval rivalry in this region completely. Russia withdrew its naval warships and bases from this region immediately. However, the US did not follow the Russian initiative and continues to maintain its naval forces and facilities, especially to ensure the supply of oil and trade through the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean as well as the security of the international waterways and friendly countries of the region. Although US withdrew its presence from several bases of Indian Ocean Region (ICR) in 1991, it still has a significant presence in the Indian Ocean and of Diego Garcia. During operation Desert Storm (Gulf War I) in early 1991, the Indian Ocean littorals have seen the biggest naval garrison of coalition forces in and around Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf region. After the Gulf War, the security and stability of the weak and oil rich states of this region has become the main objective of the American Naval Doctrine. For the security of the whole region the US has created the; Fifth Fleet' of Navy in 1995,⁶ which has its headquarters at Bahrain, after the historic incident of 9/11 the strategic importance of the whole IOR has increased suddenly in the form of US Global War against terrorism. The two US military operations of the decade have seen the major deployment of navel forces of allied countries in this region.

After US, China is the other power of the World, who has recasted its foreign policy and skillfully employing economic, technical and military means to expand its influence and relations with the countries of the ICR in the post cold war era. Although there is no Chinese presence in ICR yet to support its friendly countries and to protect its Sea Lanes of Communications, China will certainly deploy its naval units in this region in future. In South Asia, Pakistan is China's all weather friends. China has succeeded in maintaining good relations with Pakistan since 1950. Pakistan, which faces India across Arabian Sea, is undergoing a naval infrastructure modernization programme with Chinese assistance. Its Gwadar Port is being built by the Chinese economic and technical assistance. It is also constructing a highway from Iran to Karachi along coastline of Arabian Sea⁷. Pakistan has achieved nuclear and missile capability due to Chinese assistance.

China has upgraded her ties with Bangladesh to develop the Chittagong harbour. It has offered Bangladesh a nuclear reactor in return for access to the Chittagong port. It has signed a Defence Co-operation.

Agreement with Bangladesh in December 2002⁸, China has supplied warships and armaments especially anti-ship missiles to Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Despite all protest, it has gone ahead with arms and ammunition supplies to Nepal during Mao-insurgency. It is believed that China wants to establish a submarine base in Marao, one of the largest islands of Maldives. Maldives leased this land to china in 1999 for maritime traffic management⁹. In March 2004, Maldives secretly received a Chinese naval team for reportedly carrying out oceanic and environmental survey. In August 1994, Indian Coast Guard captured three mysterious trawlers off the Narcondam Island with charts showing hydrographic details of the area. One of which was equipped with electronic equipment¹⁰. Again, in October 2004, the trawler Yu-Man-Sing with a predominantly Chinese crew was seized off the Andaman Nicobar Islands. The vessel was engaged in an oceanographic survey for submarine operations. In this century, China has paid special attention towards India. Besides deciding on the establishment of the hotline the two sides are also expected to agree on enlarging the basket of items for trade through Nathu-La border and identify ways and means to step up bilateral commerce to achieve the target of India 40 billion by 2010. The bilateral trade between India and china has zoomed to India 24 billion in 2006 from a paltry India 2.7 billion in 2000.¹¹

Chinese are well aware of the fact that only US will try to constrain its emergence as a potential rival in the IOR in future.¹² That is why it has been continuously increasing its influence in the IOR littoral countries to counter the US endeavors. Keeping in view the future strategic scenario, US have also intensified her naval diplomacy in the past decade.

Since the departure of the British, South Asia has been a conflict prone region. The major sources of conflict can be traced back to colonial rule.¹³ These are:

1. The problem posed by the creation of an unnatural state system i.e. Pakistan. With its creation, the Hindu-Muslim rivalry of the pre partition days was transferred to the stare in the form of India- Pakistan rivalry.
2. The British had never bothered to clearly demarcate their borders with neighboring countries and this led to problems with the successor states in south Asia e.g. the Sino-Indian dispute.
3. There is considerable spillover of ethnic and religious groups in South Asia; there are Tamils in Sri Lanka; Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh; Biharis in Nepal, Nepalese in India and Bhutan, and Indians in Myanmar.

4. All the constituent countries of South Asia being newly independent states, whose unity was based on fragile foundations, had to engage in the task of nation building. While this was done in India by emphasizing secular and universal goals, in the rest of the countries it was attempted utilizing religious and linguistic distinction. Thus in Pakistan the emphasis was on Urdu and the Islamic character of the state. Similarly, in Sri Lanka the stress was on Sinhalese and Buddhism. This religious-linguistic method of nation building accentuated trans-border problems. The Hindu-Muslim riots in India, for example, caused great tension in India—Pakistan relations since the latter country had tried to project itself as the protector of Muslims in the continent. In addition, the emergence of the DMK stringed up anti-Indian feelings in Sri Lanka.
5. Finally one must take into account the role of external powers in aggravating external conflicts in South Asia. In the cold war period, the super powers in their efforts to compete with each other have often tried to use the local actors in South Asia as their agents. Thus, the US in a bid to contain the Soviet Union built up Pakistan as a military power during the fifties, sixties and eighties. The result of this buildup was that Pakistan was encouraged to take recourse to war in a bid to resolve its disputes with India.

The net result of all these factors is that it has made it extremely difficult to bring about meaningful co-operation amongst the nations of South Asia.

The roots of conflict in South Asia lie in three broad categories. *First*, there are legacies of colonialism, *secondly*, the conflicts which arose as the newly independent countries of the sub-continent sought to develop their national identities and strengthen their security, and *thirdly*, the fact that the lack of an adequate conflict control mechanism allowed disputes between states to escalate. In some cases, these three broad causes also merged to provide stimulus to each other.

COLONIAL LEGACIES

The legacies of colonialism are derived from the policies of the British in pre-independence India. The British policies were as given below:

1. The policy of divide and rule, which played on the insecurity of the minority Muslim community to build it up as a counterbalance to the rising nationalist aspiration within the country. With the partition of the country, the Hindu-Muslim rivalry was to be transferred to the national level and it coloured the relationship between India and Pakistan.
2. The policy of creation of artificial borders led to ethnic spillovers, which created problems of religious and ethnic harmony in the host state and soured relations with the other country concerned.
3. In the newly independent states, nation building and national unity was often promoted through the means of projecting an external threat. Hence the 'Indian bogey' in Pakistan, Bangladesh and now in Sri Lanka. India too used the Pakistani threat to generate national cohesion and achieve territorial integrity.

There has also been the question of the contradictory security considerations of the south Asian countries. For Pakistan, true security could only be achieved through attaining parity with India. Since parity could not be achieved in terms of geographic size or through industrial and technological development, Pakistan sought it through military linkages with the US, which heightened India's sense of insecurity and in nuclear terms of late. The two neighbours built their external security linkages, the Pakistan-US military alliance created an artificial balance in the sub-continent, which encouraged Pakistan to seek a military solution to its disputes with India. India responded with Peace and Friendship treaty with USSR with explicit security content. Added to these stimulants was the fact that South Asian region did not develop its own conflict control mechanisms. However, the picture changed in the post-cold war period.

For Pakistan, acquisition of Kashmir would strengthen its claim to be the homeland for Muslims in the sub-continent. Kashmir would also help strengthen Pakistan's security against India. Economically too Pakistan did not have any great sources of minerals, hydroelectric energy and forest wealth alternative to Kashmir. Territorial, strategic, economic and ideological compulsions therefore made Kashmir a plum prize and it was the primary issue focused on in the Indo-Pakistan conflict between 1948 and 1965. Leaders of Pakistan also saw the accession of Kashmir, a Muslim majority state ruled by a Hindu Maharaja, to India as India's determination to deny Pakistan the logical fruits of partition scheme; they interpreted the Indian action as India's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Pakistani state. Two wars were to be fought over Kashmir, external assistance was sought for the purpose, and having failed at that a low intensity conflict was started which is continuing until date.

Territorial dispute was one of the major types of conflict, which emerged in India. The dispute has not been resolved and in all probability will not be in the near future.

Conflict in South Asian region thus had its roots in a number of factors. The type and level of conflict which took place in the subcontinent, however varied with changing circumstances, both internal and external, which affected the region.

TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

The initial conflicts that arose in the sub-continent were in the form of territorial disputes and in the clash of competing ideologies. The first of the territorial disputes was over Kashmir.

For both India and Pakistan, the stakes in Kashmir were great and continue to be so. Kashmir's accession to India, it was felt, would be an important gain in her quest for a strong and unified secular state. Thus, the most important stake of India in Kashmir

was political. Besides there were also other interests.¹⁴ Kashmir provided a vital access to the strategic areas of the north-west and its importance to the India's security was heightened in 1959 when China seriously challenged India's northern borders. The defence of Ladakh and north-west frontiers region was not possible without an effective control over the Kashmir valley.

IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

If territorial dispute was one of the major sources of conflict in the immediate post-independence years in South Asia, the conflict generated by clash of competing ideologies was no less significant.

The single most important problem faced by Pakistan in its initial stages was how to give form and substance to the concept of Pakistani nationalism. The Pakistan that had emerged in 1947 had brought together ethnically, culturally and linguistically disparate people into a state based solely on unity of religion. Muslim League has played upon the religious theme and in most of Pakistan, it rolled over local opposition in the last-minute heat of communal war. However, once external pressure subsided, traditional animosities were revived and from the very beginning, the state of Pakistan faced divisive pressures from the different ethnic groups that constituted the nation. To check these divisive pressures, religion in the new state acquired a special role.

Thus, religion was the sole factor on which the state was based and it was only through the perpetuation and exaggeration of this religious fervour that the unity of the country could be maintained. While the Pakistani leadership wanted to keep alive, religious fervour there was a worldwide cynicism about religion. Religion and the unity it provided could only therefore be perpetuated through recreating the conditions, which had supposedly threatened it in the first place. The Pakistani leadership played upon the bitter memories of the partition, stressing that Pakistan had at its doorsteps a large and hostile Hindu state, which had never accepted dismemberment of the subcontinent, and that only unity provided by Islam could save the country. Sizeable

minorities were left behind in both India and Pakistan and their existence further vitiated inter-state relations for, "A demonstration effect unfortunately takes hold when rioting breaks out in one country; frequently then disturbances occur in the other. This tends to perpetuate and reinforce the hostile stereotypes of the other community or the other state in the minds of both Hindu Indians and Muslim Pakistanis. Thus a symbiosis occurs between political and communal contexts, that constantly embitters inter state relations."

It was the outbreak of such widespread violence in the eastern parts of India and Pakistan in 1950 that led to the signing of Nehru-Liaquat agreement. The two leaders agreed that the protection of the minorities was the responsibility of their respective governments. Although the agreement succeeded in cooling down tensions temporarily, trans-border reactions to communal violence notably in 1964 continued.

The Bangladesh war indirectly provided a solution. Since the large majority of Hindus were in the eastern wing of Pakistan, the issue of their treatment no longer acted as a hindrance to Indo-Pakistan relations. As for the Muslims in India, their attitude also underwent a change. Pakistan's defeat in the war made it a less dependable figure in the eyes of the Indian Muslims. Security, they realized, lay in integration into the Indian milieu rather than banking on an external protector. Likewise, Pakistan also stopped over-reacting to the communal incidents in India because its status as the only homeland for Muslims in the sub-continent had been lost since the 'creation of Bangladesh. The ideological conflict then has not dissolved. It is still there. However, it has lost its fangs and claws. Passions get heated but soon calm down. At, the same' time, India's ideology has begun to gain receptive audience in Pakistan. Sections of Pakistanis now see communal riots in India not through the old Muslim-Hindu lens but in the context of India's complex and bruised process of democratic development.

ROLE OF EXTERNAL POWERS

The emergence of the US and Soviet Union as superpower, after the second world war, and their quest to check each other's expansion of power and influence led to the birth of cold war. Being a confrontation waged at the global level the superpowers soon turned their attention towards South Asia to try to fit the countries of the region into the worldwide strategic framework which they were developing.

America's interest in the region developed with its efforts to build a framework of regional alliances with which to contain the Soviet Union. In South Asia, in fact, the US approach was a continuation of the earlier British policy in the region. Explaining the American perception of the significance of the region, the Atlantic Monthly of March 1948 declared, "we must realize that the British and the Russians have always understood, that Eastern Mediterranean basin and the middle east countries bordering it are part of a one political complex; and a new line from Karachi north to Kabul must enter into the calculations of Washington as it has for many years into that of Moscow and London." In such a framework India as the largest country in the region, should have been an integral part of a regional alliance system. India's intentions however were quite different.

India wanted to emerge as an independent actor in international politics by adopting a policy of non-alignment. Thus resulted India maintains distancing from the America-cum-western perception of how to contain communism. Thus although India signed a mutual assistance agreement with the US in 1950, it strongly differed from Washington on the Korean question. Similarly, despite the India having strong ties with The Commonwealth, they unequivocally condemned the Suez invasion. Nor did Nehru hesitate from trying to develop good relations with the Soviet Union and China despite his reservations about communism. India's independent worldview and its unwillingness to enter into regional alliance system therefore, left the US with no option but to try to cultivate Pakistan.

The America wooing of Pakistan resulted in the signing of the Mutual Aid and Security Agreement of 1954. Later Pakistan became member of both SEATO and CENTO. This new alliance had significant repercussions both on internal developments in Pakistan as well as in its external relationships.

Internally the new relationship and the military and economic aid that flowed from it paved the way for a military takeover. Externally, the new relationship accentuated regional conflict.

The Soviet Union's interest in South Asia grew only after the death of Stalin. The interest of cultivating Indian friendship was triggered partly by Moscow's anticipation of future rift with China and partly because Stalin's successors revived the Leninist theory that the newly liberated nations are potentially, if not actually, anti-imperialist and therefore potential friends of the Soviet Union in its bipolar conflict with US. With America leaning to the side of Pakistan, it followed that Soviet Union would take up the cudgels on India's behalf, and the issues on which the two regional actors sought the help of superpowers was Kashmir. The UN had undertaken the earliest efforts at external mediation of the Kashmir problem. However, neither Pakistan nor India was willing to compromise and therefore, a mutually satisfactory settlement could not be obtained. With the failure of the UN's mediatory efforts both India and Pakistan began to look to the super powers for support, diplomatic or otherwise.

Pakistan wanted America to support its demand as it still does for a plebiscite in Kashmir. It considered such support as a 'litmus test' of the new alliance. America's response however was ambivalent. It did not adopt a blatantly pro-Pakistani stand on Kashmir despite Khrushchev's assertion that Kashmir was an integral part of India. Nor did Washington try to downgrade its relationship with New Delhi. At the root of this ambivalent attitude was the continuing belief in America that India was an important country in the region and should not be alienated. This belief was strengthened with the outbreak of Sino-Indian War in 1962.

America in a bid to shore up India began a rapid transfer of limited quantities of arms and equipment to it. This, Pakistan felt, was a severe blow to its relationship with the US. Building up India's capabilities, it was felt, could only happen at the expense of Pakistan. To secure itself, therefore, Pakistan began to consolidate an already firm relationship with China.

By 1965, Pakistan's special relationship with the US had been secured; India had developed an indigenous arms manufacturing capacity and the military balance was to swing into its favour; the Soviet Union had adopted a neutral posture; and finally Chinese support to Pakistan was assured. Field Marshal Ayub Khan launched a war in 1965 with a view to securing Kashmir to Pakistan. He and his advisers expected the Kashmiri Muslims to rise in revolt against Indian rule and hail the Pakistanis as liberators.

When the conflict broke out in September 1965, the Chinese government condemned India as aggressor and firmly supported Pakistan for starting a just struggle. China even used an ultimatum to New Delhi to dismantle military deployments along the Sino-Indian and Sino-Sikkimese borders. Soon all Pakistani expectations were belied. The native Kashmiries did not rise in revolt to secede from India. India realizing the difficulties involved in limiting the war to Kashmir, attacked across the international frontier of Pakistan and advanced towards Lahore. The response of the superpowers to the crisis showed a similarity of attitudes.

Both the super powers declared a moratorium on all economic and military aid to the two countries. They also worked towards terminating the conflict by getting both combatants to abide by to Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire. It is notable that an unstable conflict mediation mechanism emerged after the ceasefire. Pakistan and India accepted the Soviet Union's good offices to help to negotiate a settlement. The Soviet Union's offer and the tacit approval of the western countries including the US for it meant checking Chinese influence in the region.

The resulting Tashkent agreement saw a change at the external level of this regional conflict, i.e. the entrance of the Soviet Union as the manager of the Indo-Pak conflict in place of USA. The spirit of Tashkent kept an uneasy peace in the sub-continent until the creation of Bangladeshi in 1971 was totally changed the regional and global dimensions of conflict in South Asia.

To sum up, the pattern of involvement in the region began when Pakistan in its bid to attain parity of military strength with India entered into the American framework of regional alliance system. This facilitated the emergence of the US as a conflict manager in South Asia. In trying to resolve conflict, in South Asia, American efforts only served to breed further fear and suspicion between the two main combatants. Washington subsequently limited its role to trying to convince Pakistan and India. The Soviet Union emerged in a new role as conflict mediator in South Asia. Washington was not overtly displeased because the Soviets, it believed, were keeping China out of South Asia.

NEW SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Despite all speculation in the late 90s, it was improbable that India and Pakistan would go to war over Kashmir, over the Muslim minority, over religious issues and other issues that divided the superpowers. If the two countries are able to climb up to the plateau of treaty bound relationship, issues like Kashmir and treatment of Muslims in India will yield to the conflict control mechanism that the treaty will provide. It is not likely that both countries will, for all practical purposes, be able to leave the Kashmir issue behind them. A treaty relationship will relieve the two countries to some extent of the strains their respective bilateral connections with the major powers place on their mutual interactions.

If the traditional conflicts in South Asia have lost much of their edges, new sources of conflict have emerged. The new conflicts, some still under control, others already explosive. Perhaps they are potentially more serious. The remarkable factor that is common to all of the new conflicts is that they cannot be controlled, far less resolved, except through bilateral and multilateral

cooperation. These conflicts are different from the old ones in that they are generated by the dynamics of domestic politics and elite perceptions of national security rather than generic factors of 1947 or superpower rivalries for building influence and power.

The new conflicts in South Asia stem mainly from three sources:-

1. Involvement in one another's domestic conflicts.
2. Uncontrolled transfer of arms and weapons to the region from superpower and other arms suppliers.
3. Nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan.

INTERMESHING DOMESTIC CONFLICTS

In South Asia, which is overwhelmingly one landmass divided into five sovereign states (Sri Lanka is separated from the landmass and has always meshed with seawater), domestic issues have always meshed with regional issues and shaped to a large extent, patterns or bilateral relationship. In the 1980s, South African neighbours have shown a dangerous proclivity to be enmeshed in each other's domestic cleavages. The cleavages are of broadly two main types, First there are cross-national ethnic groups like the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka, the Nepalese of Nepal and India, the Nepalese of India and Bhutan. The Sinhala -Tamil conflict of Sri Lanka exploded into an anti-Tamil carnage in August 1983 and immediately got India involved. It has seriously strained India-Sri Lanka relations, raising the fear and perception in Sri Lanka of an Indian intervention. About 1, 00,000 Tamils of Sri Lanka are said to have refugee in Tamilnadu, where a sizeable section of public opinion urging Indian intervention. Failure of the political leadership in Sri Lanka to resolve the ethnic conflict magnifies the role assigned to India by the different parties involved while, in reality, there are several limitations to the scope and relevance of Indian mediation or intervention, neither can work without popular support in Sri Lanka. The increasing dependence of the Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian backing, the enlarging threat perceptions of the Sinhala elites, the widening ethnic cleavage, and the inability of the political leaders to find a solution have joined together to distort the entire situation and severely strained bilateral relations between New Delhi and Colombo.

India and Nepal have a simmering ethnic problem between them, with which Social and Political stability of much of the eastern flank of India is enmeshed. How the Nepalese living in Sikkim and in parts of northern Bengal may, fare will effect India's relations with Bhutan. If the 90 lakh Hindus of Bangladesh do not feel safe and secure in their own country and start moving into India these minority population movements being a logical, though tragic, consequence of the partition of the sub-continent have acquired a certain legitimacy and cannot be by the government concerned—relations between India and Bangladesh may will 'breakdown. South Asia then is an ethnic powder keg. Each nation has either its own ethnic problem or has to face the problem of cross-national ethnic communities. In the 1990s these problems have become acuter than the past, and they are likely to get sharper in the future because ethnic issues are created by the political, economic and social policies adopted by majority regimes, and are therefore built into. the complex and bruising process of development.

India, Nepal relationship plummeted to a further low in the wake of the disruption in the movement of goods caused by the madhesi agitation. New Delhi and Modi suddenly became villains in the corridors of power in Kathmandu. Oli and some of his senior leader added fuel to the fire by blaming India for the 'blockade' and the resulting misery it had brought on the common citizen of Nepal. In the end, Oli lost the trust of both India and the larger political system of his own country and quit. Here the China factor can be a deterrent, but it should not. New Delhi realises that it would not only be futile but also non-pragmatic to expect Nepal not to deepen ties with Beijing. However, Kathamandu must ensure that it does not engage with China in a way that can harm India's strategic interest in the region.

On the other hand the sons of the soil movement in Assam inevitably has Bangladesh involved. The movement demanded disenfranchisement and even the expulsion of a large number of Hindus and Muslims who had migrated to Assam from East 2 since the 1960s. This created popular resentment in Bangladesh. The Indian decision to build barbed wire fence along the Assam-Bangladesh border strained the bilateral relationship. The corrosive chemicals released by subjective and objective involvement in one another's domestic political conflicts affected the entire canvass of bilateral relations and progress in the tasks on sharing the Ganga waters and developing the water resources of the eastern flank of the sub-continent more difficult and complicated.

NUCLEAR AND CONVENTIONAL ARMS RACE

The second new source of conflict lies in the arms supplies by the Super powers. The international arms trade has reached absurd proportions, and developing countries are purchasing the bulk of the arms. It is noteworthy that Pakistan has been buying from the US the high- tech weapons it has been offered under the 1981 package, and not receiving them as a grant or a gift. The India-Pakistan arms race fuelled by the second cold war, has the potential of another war between the two neighbours. In 1983-84, the smaller South Asian countries, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, were each shopping for arms supplies from the US, and India took a dark view of American arms flowing into the neighbourhood. The restraint shown by the US administration and the other major Western suppliers helped maintain the regional balance. If the restraint breaks down in the years to come, and the US, France, Britain and other countries start supplying arms to India's smaller neighbours, tension would develop between the latter and India. Arms trade has Its momentum especially in periods of economic slump; similarly arms (transfers to developing societies create their own dynamics which impact regional relationships as well as relations between individual developing countries and one or the other great power.

The third area of tension and conflict in South Asia, which has begun to in the form of undeclared nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan. India's nuclear explosions of 1998, as noted, immediately triggered the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme: India having demonstrated to the world its capability to make nuclear weapons, refrained from actually making them for long. However, the incumbent Indian Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, had also made it clear that the situation had reached "point of no return" for India, meaning that India was compelled to opt for nuclear weapons.

A nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan would create a host of new tensions in South Asia and may even ignite war between the two countries. As they both have gone nuclear, it is the first regional proliferation triggered by dynamics of regional hostility and conflict having nothing to do with the global strategic issues. Advocates of the deterrent power of nuclear weapons may argue that nuclear weapons in both India and Pakistan arsenals would guarantee a state of no war between the two neighbours as they have done in the case of five nuclear powers, especially the US and the Soviet Union (now Russia). However, it would be galling to Indian strategic planners to remain locked in nuclear parity with Pakistan, and Indians may prefer a war in which nuclear weapons would probably not be used because it has become an international convention not to use these weapons in war but to use them for nuclear blackmail.

The major prospect laying claim to autonomy may be envisaged as the continuation of the status quo i.e. hostility between India and Pakistan just short of war.

South Asian elites must learn that they gain nothing and stand to lose a lot by trying to get involved in one another's domestic issues and conflicts. Elites of individual countries will no doubt have their political and ideological persuasions. They would like these persuasions to prevail in neighbouring countries too. Nevertheless, the dynamics of political change generally belong to the domestic societies, though external forces often influence these. In the present phase of developments in South Asian countries, each political society is caught in hundreds of tensions, some big, others small, each must transverse its own political road to arrive at destinations each must define for itself. Outside intervention can only distort the dynamics of political change. The elements released by outside intervention more often than not play into the hands of powers that be. Not only do changes desired by the interventionist outsider not come off, bilateral relations come under severe strain. Conflict situations promptly build up in South Asia.

But Conflicts are not static. Old conflicts get frozen. They even disappear. New conflicts arise. Conflict is endemic in relations between and among nations as it is in the process of development and change. Yet nations generally live in peaceful coexistence, and only in extreme cases go to war to settle a conflict. South Asia has seen three major wars between India and Pakistan, and numerous small clashes of arms. It has seen the first dismemberment of a nation state into two sovereign states during the post war period. Regional cooperation has come very late to South Asia. It has been one of the most conflict prone regions in the world.

However, the old conflicts have probably subsided durably, and generic cleavages on territory and ideology are unlikely to create wars in the future. However, new tensions have come to the fore, and, when historical memories of the past are still bitter, these tensions, if allowed to escalate to the brink of conflict, would revive the old issues and mesh together to create more dangerous conflict situations in South Asia than in the past. It is therefore essential to the countries of South Asia do not allow the new tensions to get out of control.

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