



An Analysis of India's Security Perspective: Implications for Stability in South Asia

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Abstract

India is a major country of South Asia, constantly effortful to ensure its Security and Development on internal forum, on other hand simultaneously it has ever been very sincere to its role and contributions towards establishing International peace security and stability, after its independence in 1947. While coping with so many internal challenges and threats, having a very huge population of diverse culture and adequate natural resources it has great possibilities of comprehensive national development. India has shown its firm intentions to be very sincere with flexible practical approaches to ensure its security from all external threats including its hostile neighboring countries China and Pakistan.

The present research paper investigates briefly all the prevailing circumstances of South Asia; India is surrounded by including the internal threats and challenges to its national security. Further it highlights all its efforts and intentions to achieve objectives of its vital national security interests as well as its development. It also reveals how the adverse and hostile neighborhood of India is responsible to disturb the peace stability in South Asia.

Key Words: India, South Asia, Security and Development, neighboring countries.

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1. NATIONAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

India's huge landmass, strategic location, vast natural resources, historical linkages, rapidly growing economy and technologically trained manpower confers legitimacy to play a leading role, both regionally and globally. India's strategic vision is in natural harmony with our traditional character as a peaceful, responsible nation that has abjured aggression and played a constructive, mainstream role in international relations. India's security policy flows from two cardinals i.e. we have no extra territorial ambitions and no desire to transplant our ideology on others.

India's National Security Aim 1 is to ensure a conducive internal and external environment for unhindered economic progress and socio-political development, towards enabling India to assume its rightful role in the emerging world order. Therefore, the security objectives 2 that emerge are

- (a) Defence of National territory, to include island territories, off shore assets, maritime trade routes, exclusive economic zone and the air space;
- (b) Creation of a secure internal security environment to mitigate the threats to our unity, core values and peaceful development;
- (c) Possessing an effective contingent capability to prevent destabilization of the immediate neighborhood and also address security concerns of the extended neighbourhood, when mandated;
- (d) Contributing effectively towards regional stability and international peace-keeping and
- (e) as far as NBC capability is concerned, the focal elements of our nuclear doctrine, are policy of no first use; declaration of no-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states; a posture of minimum credible deterrence and unilateral moratorium on further tests. The strategic arsenal in India is fully under political control.

India's society is made up of diverse cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religious denominations. This is both our strength and a challenge. Although India's national integrity remains fundamentally secure; poverty, communalism and religious extremism do throw up challenges which are at times exploited by inimical forces to create disturbances. With a vibrant democracy and a spirit of accommodation, we are confident of resolving our internal disputes. These challenges are however not unique to India but span the entire sub-continental canvas. India thus is a reflection of entire South Asia.

2. UNDERSTANDING SOUTH ASIA

The South Asian sub-continent³ bounded by the Hindukush Mountains, the Pamir Knot and the Himalayas in the North and by the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal in the South, may be seen as a single strategic entity with terrain contributing to an insular perspective and a tradition of localism and regionalism. Historically, this part of the world has been the eternal crucible of human civilisation; accommodating, absorbing dissimilarities and evolving new cultures, theories and concepts. South Asia is the visible manifestation of what our first Prime Minister called 'Unity in Diversity'⁴. If we take India as the hub, we can see a smooth transition of religion, ethnicity, culture and language in all directions. The geo-strategic

significance of South Asia is that the region not only serves as a geographical bridge, but also as cultural and economic linkage between South East Asia, the Indian Ocean Region, Middle East and the Central Asian Republics.

Home to nearly 4.68 billion 5 people, this populous region is perhaps the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Interestingly, most of the South Asian countries do not share common borders with regional countries other than India. Today, Asia has become the engine of growth driving global economy, and South Asia is a part of this resurgence. Tragically, the region is also host to deeply entrenched ethnic hostility, communal violence and numerous inter and intra - state conflicts. All the countries in the South Asian region are developing countries and face internal instabilities that threaten economic progress and peace. However, led by India, South Asia has the potential of becoming a powerhouse in human development and progress 6.

3. STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Few places in the world offer as daunting a set of security challenges as South Asia. Bilateral relations among some neighbours remain defined by animosity and mistrust, while some remain mired in inter and intra-state conflicts. Non-military challenges are rooted in social, economic, ecological and political choices made by respective countries and governments. While the region poses diverse challenges, it also provides tremendous opportunities, provided there is an understanding of our common concerns and collective approach towards ensuring regional security and economic development. Some of the challenges and opportunities in South Asia 7 are articulated in the Succeeding paras.

3.1 Regional Security Dynamics:

Social unrest, political evolution and violence driven by separatist movements in some of the countries continue to affect the security situation in South Asia. In particular, the security situation in Afghanistan remains a cause of concern for the entire region. The US, crippled by Pakistan's duplicity, failed to defeat Taliban and withdrew completely on 30 Aug 2021 8.

Today it is under pressure to engage the Taliban for political solutions and ensuring stability of the country now in Taliban rule. Taliban rule in Kabul has security implications for the region. Pakistan remains engulfed in serious internal dissensions due to internal hybrid security challenges like terrorism, sectarian violence, political drift and economic turmoil, with the situation being extremely precarious. The lingering territorial dispute and animosity between India and Pakistan continues to cast a shadow in the region. The democratic institutions in the region remain fragile. Due to porous borders and our historical, cultural and ethno-linguistic linkages, India cannot remain insulated from the spill-over effects of instabilities in neighboring countries. Growing Chinese assertiveness and inroads into South Asia further add to our security challenges. Within India, we have internal security challenges in Kashmir, North East and the Maoist/ Naxal affected regions. However, the situation has improved considerably under the present government 9.

3.2 Terrorism

South Asia has witnessed growing spectre of fundamentalism and terrorism in the last decade with the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region having become the epicentre and fountainhead of global

terrorism. Terrorism has affected all states and remains the single biggest threat to regional stability. Non- state and state sponsored terrorist groups like Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Al Qaeda and ISIS have cross-linkages and tremendous ability to constantly morph into new forms to survive. These pose a serious challenge to states, civil societies and security forces. The prospect of these groups acquiring 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' is a very serious concern. States cannot be selective in targeting some terrorist groups, while supporting others as strategic assets. All countries in the region must act jointly to defend the values of pluralism, peaceful co-existence and respect for the rule of law. Only a determined 'Collective Effort' will address this growing menace.

3.3 Religious Fundamentalism, Regionalism and Divisiveness in Society

Although the national integrity of countries in South Asia remain fundamentally secure, pressures due to poverty, uneven economic growth, communal tensions and secessionist designs coupled with ethnic and religious divide pose major Challenges. There is a constant demand for the sub-division of existing states and carving out of smaller autonomous zones based on ethnic lines or misinterpretation of history. While smaller administrative zones could arguably deliver better administration and bring power closer to the people, the trend could also fuel sub-nationalism and weaken central control. Managing aspirations of various regional and ethnic groups, while retaining a strong national character is a long term challenge in a number of South Asian States. Despite various regional differences, the region on the whole has strong religious, cultural and ethnic affinities. These linkages transcend borders and once developed; have the potential to bind Nations into lasting relationships. However, creating ethnic cohesion requires dynamic leadership and strong political resolve to initiate a process for greater regional integration.

3.4 Economic Disparity

South Asia has large untapped natural resources and is recognised as a potential technological powerhouse. Overall, economy of the region is growing at a respectable rate. However, the number of people living below the poverty line is still very high and the lack of equitable and inclusive growth could create internal instability in Nations. With globalisation, the economies of neighbouring countries in South Asia are today more interconnected than most other regions. We have only to see the rapid integration within SAARC / ASEAN and its emergence as an important regional bloc in Asia to realise the opportunities that beckon South Asia.

Youth Bulge and Lack of Opportunities. World population has grown from 6.1 billion in 2000 to 7.98 billion in 2022. 95 percent of this increase has taken place in the less developed parts of the world with resultant adverse consequences. Moreover, while the population of countries around us like China is ageing, countries in South Asia have a large percentage of the population in the 15 to 55 years age group. The creation of employment opportunities to channelise this large work force will be a formidable challenge in the future. At the same time, correct harnessing of the 'Population Dividend' could derive rich economic benefits 11.

3.5 Scarcity of Resource and Debt Crisis

National, economic and energy security are inextricably linked. Increasing competition amongst various groupings on account of their quest for energy sources, food, water and raw material has

the potential to fragment and incapacitate regional cooperation. It is anticipated that by 2025, energy scarcity will be the driving factor in regional and global geo-politics. This, coupled with water shortages, could lead to 'Regional Confrontation and Conflicts'. We need to pool our resources to tap renewable sources such as solar energy, hydro-electric power and wind energy, all of which South Asia has in abundance. However, today the scarcity of resources is also linked deeply into the debt crisis being faced by certain countries in South Asia which have serious ramifications on the stability of the country. Sri Lanka and Pakistan are two recent examples.

3.6 Trade Barriers

South Asia has been considered as the least integrated region in the world. This is despite attempts to liberalise trade using various bilateral, regional and multilateral arrangements. It has long been argued that the limited success of South Asia to liberalise regional trade was due to limited tariff reductions and remaining barriers present in trade agreements, namely; less complementarities in production and consumption and political friction among countries. Recent studies indicate that smaller trade gains in South Asia are mainly due to the fact that inadequate attention was paid to trade facilitation measures such as efficiency of customs and other border procedures, quality and cost of international and domestic transport. South Asian countries are rich in natural resources. Significant trade gains can be achieved by reducing inefficiencies at the borders in South Asia. In this context, while focussing on increased export of food and agricultural commodities; the removal of trade bottlenecks and regulatory constraints at trade gateways / border crossings with concurrent improvement of transportation and port facilities, will ensure the true mutual trade benefits to be realised.

3.7 Environmental Degradation

South Asian countries remain susceptible to environmental disasters and humanitarian crises. Rampant 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 continue to pose catastrophic challenges.

3.8 Collective Frameworks/Institutions

Bilateral issues and differences amongst Nations continue to hamper regional progress. While there is a need to develop regional economic and security mechanisms, nations need to use bilateral forums to resolve all outstanding issues at the earliest. The nations must develop a stake in each other's success and prosperity. This mutuality of interests should be the central driving force for regional cooperation. The architecture and mandate of such collaborative arrangements must ensure that the region remains insulated from extra-regional influences. Such forums must also address common concerns like terrorism, drug trafficking, gun running and security of 'Global Commons'.

4. INDIA'S ROLE

India is a large, strong, vibrant, secular and multicultural democracy on the path of rapid economic growth. In years to come, as we grow economically and technologically, get to harness the demographic potential of our people and spread the soft power of our culture and values; India will play a significant role in the emerging world order. With growing aspirations come

responsibilities and India would be expected to contribute increasingly towards ensuring peace and stability in the region and beyond. Here I wish to highlight that our national strategic vision is rooted in our civilizational ethos and that a quest for peace, stability and war prevention, guides Indian policies.

India's geographic location and size makes it a principal stakeholder in the stability of the region. Our immediate strategic interests range from beyond the Malacca Straits in the East to the Persian Gulf and Red Sea in the West, and from the Central Asian Republics in the North to the Indian Ocean Region in the South.

4.1 Engagement of the Neighborhood

Being a major country in South Asia, India has the responsibility to assist its neighbours in becoming stable, self-reliant and secure. There is a firm belief that all neighbours have a contributory effect on India's economic growth and regional stability. There is therefore, an increasing willingness to work with all our neighbours for overall development of the region and our people. Towards this end, a comprehensive collective approach for positive engagement with our immediate and strategic neighborhood is needed to ensure their benign cooperation. Making them partners and stake holders will help us achieve mutual economic growth and development through integrated and inter-dependent economies.

Political Stability: Besides fostering regional efforts to ensure that our neighbours transit towards stable democracy, India will need to play a more proactive role. Early and appropriate mediation, at the behest of the affected Nation concerned, will enable our neighbours to reap regional economic and security benefits.

Free Trade: Being the largest economy in the region, India will need to take the lead towards opening trade barriers and making free trade possible amongst all neighbours. Economic cooperation, connectivity and integration; which form the cornerstones of SAARC must be exploited for mutual benefit of all Nations. India has a rich pool of experience in development which can be utilised, in concert with our neighbours, to create a model of inclusive and sustainable regional development.

Leveraging our Military Strength: Defence Cooperation is an effective instrument in soft power leverages. Participation in UN sponsored peace missions, disaster relief and anti-sea piracy operations are some activities that project a nation's image in the international fora. With our immediate neighbours, we need to develop a strong military to military cooperation, primarily to assuage apprehensions of our intent and minimize the growing influence of our potential adversaries.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude most of the countries in the region are trying to come to grips with their own economic, social and internal security challenges. Lack of governance in some areas and porous borders has resulted in radical forces spreading their tentacles. However, the danger to the security of the region lies in terrorism emanating from the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In spite of India's stability and tremendous economic growth, much of the region has

failed to capitalise on this regional growth model. As a stabilising influence in the region, there will be demands upon India to play a greater role in supporting peace and promoting economic growth and development in the region. Due to emerging interdependencies and intricate linkages, India will have to increasingly involve itself in ensuring stability, prosperity, peace and nation building in the region as also project the country as a responsible state that is ready and willing to shoulder this responsibility with élan and pride.

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