

# Prospects of Peace and Security in South Asian Region

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With the development of the atomic bomb, Albert Einstein argued that everything has changed except our thinking about the world. Einstein and Bertrand Russell warned us that 'we have to learn to think in a new way ... shall we put an end to human race; or shall mankind renounce war?'

Unfortunately, humans have not renounced war. Even though, with a couple of catastrophic exceptions, we have avoided wars fought with atomic or hydrogen bombs, however, more people have died, directly and indirectly, from wars since Einstein and Russell's warning, than in all wars fought up until that time. The cold war, which so routinely produced surrogate hot wars of enormous destruction, pitted the US against the former SU for over 40 years. It changed practically none of our thinking about international relations; rather it intensified our old thinking in a dangerous, nuclear age.

In the last few years, we have witnessed another turning point in world history. The cold war has largely ended. Extensive changes have taken place in the world over. Militarism and violence continued despite the end of the cold war, with militaries inventing new tasks—such as stray wars—to maintain their budgets. The US has adopted an even more aggressive role as the world's policeman in places like the Persian Gulf and Latin America—co-opting the UN along the way. The gap between rich and poor nations has widened. Third world communities in the developed world are suffering. Nuclear weapons are still aimed at cold war enemies, nuclear capabilities proliferate to new nations. Crime and other domestic violence escalates. The new nationalism promotes racial and ethnic conflicts and erodes the possibilities of restoration of

peace and security in the universe. The South Asian region is no exception to this development.

#### SOUTH ASIAN REGION

Region can be defined on geographical, political, social or economic basis. The commonsense way of defining region is on the basis of distinct landmasses, such as Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. However, there are other criteria used for grouping nation-states into regions:

(1) Geographical criteria: Grouping nation-states on the basis of their location in continents, sub-continents, archipelagoes etc. for instance, Asia and Europe.

(2) Military/Political criteria: Grouping nation-states on the basis of their participation in alliances, or on the basis of ideological and political orientation, for instance, the former Communist bloc, the Capitalist bloc, NATO, the WARSAW PACT and the Third World.

(3) Economic criteria: Grouping nation-states on the basis of selected criteria of economic development, such as gross national product (GNP) and industrial output, for instance developing versus non-developed states.

(4) Transactional criteria: Grouping nation-states on the basis of volume and frequency of exchange of people, goods and services such as immigrants, tourists, trade and commerce, for instance, the US, Canada, the Western European market Area, the former Soviet Market Area, including East European Nations, etc.

One can group countries into regions according to a number of other criteria as well, for example, language, religion, culture, population density and climate.

The south Asian countries bear certain specific features from the ethnic point of view; all the states of South Asia cut across national boundaries; an ethnic group dominant in one country constitute a minority ethnic group in another country; concentration of an ethnic group in a particular geographic region as a dominant community provides a basis for its assertion for regional autonomy; ethnic violence has become a major source of internal instability and ethnic conflict in all the states having regional and extra-regional linkages.

Almost all the South Asian nations have been facing ethnic

conflict and tensions. In the pre-independence era, ethnicity did not become a serious issue because of lack of social, political, and economic mobilisation of various groups. But gradually, ethnicity has assumed serious proportions, its degree has ranged from demand for equitable distribution of resources, liberalization of power structure, autonomy within the state to separatist movements, and separatist to terrorist acts. Lately, self-determination movements have acquired a significant dimension and pose a serious threat to the integrity of the nation and peace of the region. The situation created by these movements is further aggravated due to cross-country affiliations of such ethnic groups and cross-border terrorist activities. In fact, because of racial, religious and linguistic overlaps between different states, the situation has been complex in South Asia. Further, the situation has become serious with the emergence of terrorist organisations, added and abetted by foreign nations.

The South Asian Region comprises of the seven states of Indian subcontinent, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The great Himalayan region not only casts its cultural and ethnic shadow on the five thousand years old glorious heritage of the region, but five of the seven sisters bath in the blue waters of Indian Ocean. The modern day global security environment shaped through the First World War (1914-1919), Second World War (1939-1945) and fifty long years of cold war, have given rise to the ill-founded western belief that South Asian people are not capable of living in peaceful harmony. These so called guardians of peace led by the infamous big brothers—America, China, England, France and Russia—firmly believe that the South Asian sub-continent needs their advice and assistance to maintain peace, security and prosperity.

The five members of the elite nuclear club have slowly but gradually not only improved and increased their nuclear weapon arsenals but have not hesitated in using their nuclear stockpiles as a currency of power to neo-colonise the developing nations of South Asia. At the global level, the nuclear weapon states showed no sign of moving decisively towards a world, free of atomic danger. In 1995, they extended the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) indefinitely, thus legitimizing the existence of nuclear weapons in the hands of these five countries, while denying the same to rest of the world. After conducting over 2,000 test in less than 40 years, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is offered for

signatures to the lesser mortals. At the same time, they engaged in the proliferation and transfer of nuclear technology to non-nuclear nations and above all, the all powerful US senate has refused to ratify the CTBT.<sup>1</sup>

The emerging global security environment at the end of the twentieth century found the nuclear options of developing nations of South Asia being narrowed critically. The nuclear explosions by both India and Pakistan in May 1999 at Pokharan and Chagai and missile tests in April 1998 and 1999 have created regional tensions and insecurity in South Asia. These tests have led to a new strategic situation that is bound to have lasting implications for both the countries, for the whole region of South Asia and the international community. Nuclear and missile race between the two South Asian countries—India and Pakistan—has become a troublesome focus point of regional and international politics. Both these countries have formally claimed that they become nuclear weapon states. India is self-sufficient in missile making technology. Pakistan is importing know-how from China and North Korea to produce short and intermediate-range series of missiles. All these developments have resulted in a costly nuclear and missile race in South Asia and increased the risk of nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan. This has resulted in a threat to peace and security in South Asia in the new millennium.

With both the major South Asian countries, testing their nuclear and missile capabilities, the security scenario in the region has been radically transformed. South Asia that had witnessed three wars between India and Pakistan, and one between India and China, is the most likely area of the world to explode and wage a nuclear war in the new millennium. There was escalation of tension and exchange of fire between India and Pakistan in Kargil areas of Kashmir in May-July 1999. It was almost a war like situation. Both the countries are able to deploy nuclear weapons and they have developed ballistic missiles that could carry the weapons to the selected targets. Foreign policy experts have perceived that the nuclear and missiles race in the sub-continent constituted the greatest threat to the peace and stability of the region. South Asia is witnessing a dangerous pattern of action-reaction and escalation phenomenon that generates tension and arms race in the region. So, here is the attempt to explore the possibilities of the prospects for peace and security in the South Asian region in the twenty-first century.

#### WHAT IS SECURITY?

The Latin word 'Securitas' means freedom from care and now security for a nation-state is multi-dimensional concept and encompasses various concepts. National security can be most fruitfully defined as the 'ability for a nation to protect its internal values from external threats'.<sup>2</sup> But we may adopt a broad concept of national security, accordingly changes took place in international environment, i.e. the preservation of the core values critical to the nation-state from external and internal threats. Henry Kissinger has stated that, 'the national security in its widest sense comprises every actions by which a society seeks to assure its survival or realizes its aspirations internationally'.<sup>3</sup> The basic factors that governs national security is political, social, technological, military, economic and psychological.

According to Jaswant Singh, 'National Security is the preservation of the core values of our nation, the political, economic and social well being and preservation of our state, the inviolability of our territorial boundaries and the maintenance of national interests within the strategic frontiers of India.'<sup>4</sup> National security is part of government policy which aims to create favourable national and international conditions for the protection or extension of national interests against existing or potential enemy threats, both external or internal or externally fostered internal threats.

India has always approached the subject of security in its larger framework. The concept of security has involved the preservation and perpetuation of the core values. They are:

- (1) democratic political set up,
- (2) secular state,
- (3) socialistic nature of the state,
- (4) attainment of egalitarian society,
- (5) maintenance of internal/external peace and security,
- (6) maintenance of political sovereignty and territorial integrity, and
- (7) economic development and progress.

These values has shaped the Indian civilization and they provide foundations on which modern India can be built. Given the pluralistic society, socio-economic inequalities, regional disparities at the time of India became independent, these core

values have been enshrined in the Indian constitution from 1950.

Kautilya, the great political thinker classified four threats to national security in his *Arthashastra*. They are:

1. External threats with external complicity: China and Pakistan.
2. Internal threats with external complicity: Problem of Mizo and Nagaland.
3. External threats with internal complicity: Kashmir issue.
4. Internal threats with internal complicity: Naxalite problem.

India is a pluralistic society where religious, regional, sectarian and linguistic identities get intertwined with social and political identities. The problem arises when a conflict or an adversarial relationship develops amongst these identities. Here, the crisis of identity and the crisis of legitimacy to the identity are the root cause of our current national security problems.

The roots of peace and security problems in South Asia are thus indigenous, and their threat perceptions are sufficiently diverse to preclude a common approach for all, for India and the region, the major sources of threat continue to be Pakistan and China, despite the initiation of normalization processes and formation of a regional organization such as SAARC. For Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, the main threats emanate from Indian policy pursuits. Indeed, India is a dominant power in the region and, as a result of this, its policies affect the security perceptions of its immediate neighbours (e.g. after Pokharan-II). However, Indian threat perception includes threats emanating not only from developments within the region but also from outside. It is precisely the interlocking of regional and extra-regional factors that have come in the way of normalization of India-Pakistan relations.

Undoubtedly, the major issue, which vitiates South Asia's security climate, is the state of permanent antagonism between India and Pakistan. The roots of the antagonism go back to the partition in 1947, which embittered relations of the two independent states right at their birth.<sup>5</sup> Possibility was that time might heal past wounds and thus encourage the development of a healthy relationship between India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, Kashmir has become the major issue for the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. Kashmir provided an occasion for direct military confrontation between the two nations. In pure

military terms, the situation has not changed much even after the end of cold war. In recent times, the American decision to provide a military package to Pakistan under the Brown Amendment has created further apprehensions in New Delhi. This is where we see how external factors have added undesirable complexities to South Asia's security climate.<sup>6</sup>

Pretext of Kashmir, or more recently of nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan, triggering of a nuclear arms race in the sub-continent are attributable reasons of natural distrust and discord between the two countries. Mounting distrust has been brewing ever since the run up of events leading to the Kargil conflict. Since the dawn of the era of militancy in Kashmir in 1989, Pakistan has subvertly supported all sorts of separatist and terrorist movements in India. Defeat in the Kargil, further fuelled dismay and dissension into the Pakistani military establishments. This was the turning point in the days leading to the *coupd'etat* of 11 October 1999 in Pakistan. India become enemy number one, and this is not only reflected in the political arena, the fallouts are visible even in trade, business and sports, especialy, hockey and cricket and also at meetings of the international forum like the UN General Assembly and SAARC. It is clear that the events that are now unfolding in Pakistan hold grave implications for continuance of peace and security in the South Asian region.

The other contrasting feature of the security scene in South Asia is the state-centric and inward-looking approach based on certain assumptions relating to domestic political processes. These assumptions are abstractions from the experience of states mainly in Europe, which have had a long history of national consolidation, and state-formation. In South Asia, where the international forces have played an important role—which has not always been positive—in state-building processes, these assumptions are short on empirical validity. Yet, the South Asian states exhibit a pronounced commitment to them, relating them as norms of strong statehood, or as a teleological end-point of political development. Either way, they influence security thinking by identifying the parameters for building political system capability through strategies of linking and regulating state-society relations.<sup>7</sup>

India, therefore, suffers from a terrible sense of insecurity. Imagine India's security concerns when an extra-regional power starts playing a role in an already destabilizing ethnic conflict in a neighbouring country; seen in the context of the traumatic lessons

from the 1962 defeat, these insecurities loom large in defence planning. India seems to apprehend a security challenge from all quarters and so feels that concerted effort is needed to meet it.

The existing laws in the South Asian region are insufficient to impose a check on an easy access to 'arms bazaars'. The enemies of the state are able to hold on almost indefinitely because they can always buy arms in international markets over which the state has no control. Hence, there is an extensive disposal of arms. This is partly a cold war legacy. The arms meant for the Mujahideen have found their way to arms bazaars such as Darra Adam Khel near Peshawar, Bara Bazaar in the Karachi slum of Sohrab Goth and some parts of India and Sri Lanka. Even though money to purchase these arms is collected in various ways; remittances from the Diaspora constitute one of the main sources. Recently the menace of drug trafficking is becoming important factor and there is a close relations between drug trafficking and the arms smuggling among the terrorists.

#### NUCLEARISATION OF SOUTH ASIA

For more than 50 years since independence, India has consistently advocated for global disarmament. Unfortunately, the famous five nuclear states, have treated the Indian initiatives towards total disarmament as empty call of a weak nation. What emerged in the form of Non-Proliferation Treaty was not only discriminatory, but heavily favoured the hegemony of the nuclear club. The treaty allowed these countries to legitimize the possession of nuclear weapons. There is no denying the fact in the strategic global environment that nuclear weapons remains key indicators of state power.<sup>8</sup> India successfully carried out three underground nuclear tests on 11 May 1998, followed by two more underground tests on 13 May 1998 at Pokharan, Rajasthan. These five tests ranging from sub-kiloton fission to a thermo-nuclear device amply demonstrated the scientific, technical and organizational abilities of India to the whole world. When Pakistan predictably followed with five nuclear explosions at Chagai hills in Baluchistan, albeit with borrowed technology, the post-cold war strategic balance was rattled. Now, the South Asian region in the new millennium is a universal force to reckon with containing two potential nuclear regimes.<sup>9</sup>

Today, India and Pakistan are nuclear weapon states. This adds to our sense of responsibility as a nations committed to the UN



charter for peace and security. At the beginning of new millennium, South Asia faces new choices. The region has witnessed decades of international unconcern and non-comprehension of its regional security environment. The end of cold war created the myth of unipolarity in international relations. With the nuclearisation of South Asia, the fulcrum of international power is slowly tilting towards the Third world. India, as the largest democracy of the globe, has acted firmly and corrected the post-cold war imbalance of power in international relations. South Asia led by a strong nuclearised India can now contribute towards international peace and security from a position of strength. This position for India in South Asia is further emphasized by her being a politically stable, secular and democratic republic.

The reality that India and Pakistan are nuclear weapon states can neither be denied nor wished away. India stands as symbol for 54-years of stable, secular and democratic rule, while Pakistan's history in the same period is marked with not so infrequent military dictatorships including the present military rule of General Parvez Musharraf. The immediate withdrawal of the Indian Army from Bangladesh in 1971 allowed the blooming of a democratic republic and was a positive indicator to the world that India follows the policy of peaceful co-existence and harmony with her neighbours, without desiring to control the territory of others. We have no territorial claims or ambitions outside our borders.

India spelt out a comprehensive nuclear doctrine within 6 months of its nuclearisation. In the wake of the tests, the Indian government made a number of key statements which, in aggregate, described as a new nuclear posture. This posture comprises the following seven elements:<sup>10</sup>

- (1) minimum nuclear deterrence,
- (2) no first use (NFU) and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states,
- (3) a programme of missile testing,
- (4) a moratorium on nuclear tests and accession to the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty (CTBT),
- (5) negotiating a Fissile Materials Cut off Treaty (FMCT),
- (6) export control; and
- (7) promoting global nuclear disarmament.

With these doctrines, India is committed to no first use of nuclear weapons and the use of nuclear weapon is based on political

decision, so there is a political control over the nuclear weapons. (It is political weapon, not a military one.) In South Asia, Indian foreign policy remains that of harmonic and equal status relationship with her neighbours. In the twenty-first century, the nations of South Asia are poised to actively promote regional co-operation through SAARC. The South Asian peace and security environment is made by restraint openness and equal status relationship of the countries in the region.

South Asia is becoming an area of uniform poverty sustaining extensive armies that it cannot afford: to start a dialogue of peace, the two countries need to open up a dialogue in the non-official sector also (Tract-II diplomacy), with economic and intellectual lobbies whose interests are threatened by the danger of war. Such 'a political' circles as human rights activities and journalists that recognize no national frontiers, condemned in the past as 'fifth column' should be allowed to address important forums on both sides. The countries need to listen to arguments they don't like, they need to listen to neutral views that undermine the rhetorics on which the current bilateral deadlocks is predicted. Pakistan, of course, has all along insisted, that any settlement of the Kashmir issue must be based on the will of the people of Kashmir. Meanwhile, there have existed lobbies advocating varied solutions of the Kashmir issue in a way satisfactory to all parties like India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. No cost is too great for an amicable settlement.

If the ground realities regarding the situation in POK are communicated to the misguided and angry youths in the valley of Kashmir, it would make a tremendous difference on the attitude of those who were trained by Pakistan and sent across the border with guns and money to destroy peace in the valley. The bleeding valley of Kashmir can have peace restored again, if Delhi can make up its mind as to what is to be done under the present circumstances. Delhi had no policy vis-a-vis the people of Jammu and Kashmir and those suffering inside POK. Indian policy had completely ignored around 3 million people living in POK, who are still living in the terrible conditions.<sup>11</sup> New Delhi has to start once again from the date of accession of the state to the Indian Union, i.e. on 27 October 1947, by taking the people of Jammu and Kashmir and POK into confidence, because Kashmir has continued to burn and threaten the peace of the region.

In view of the failures of various attempts towards the

settlement of Kashmir issue and the restoration of peace and normalcy in the region, one can suggest the following measures:

1. Let the people of these two places have a greater say in the peace and integration process.
2. Let us have more of cultural ambassadors side by side the political ones.
3. Trade always cements relations between nations. If the bilateral trade flourishes between Indian and Pakistan, it is bound to improve bilateral relations even at the political level.
4. India and Pakistan should commit themselves towards disarmament and Nuclear Free Zone in South Asia. (Not only South Asia, but the whole world.)
5. Both should also abide by the 'No first use' doctrine.
6. Give greater thrust to health, education, development and other areas.

To conclude, I wish to say that, the peace and security in South Asia can be maintained only when India and Pakistan improve their relations by solving the Kashmir issue to the satisfaction of both the countries, in addition to adopting various confidence building measures (CBMS). A pre condition for this is that Pakistan should stop aiding, abetting and providing all kinds of support to various terrorist organizations in the valley and terrorist should restrain from all violence activities. Then only peace and normalcy can be restored in the valley and also in South Asian Region.

#### NOTES

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