

# Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia



Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)



Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF)

# Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia

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# Acknowledgements

But how do we fashion the future? Who can say how  
except in the minds of those who will call it Now?

‘Of History and Hope’ - Miller Williams

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The conference was financially supported by the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF).■





## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AAGC</b>	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
<b>ABMT</b>	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>ADMM</b>	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>AJK</b>	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>APHC</b>	All-Parties Hurriyat Conference
<b>ARF</b>	ASEAN Regional Forum
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BIMSTEC</b>	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
<b>BJP</b>	Bharatiya Janata Party
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>BRICS</b>	Brazil-Russia-India-China and South Africa
<b>BTC</b>	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline
<b>CARs</b>	Central Asian Republics
<b>CASA-1000</b>	Central Asia-South Asia power project
<b>CBMs</b>	Confidence Building Measures
<b>CENTO</b>	Central Treaty Organization
<b>CFVs</b>	Ceasefire Violations
<b>CICT</b>	Colombo International Container Terminal
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CMD</b>	Credible Minimum Deterrence
<b>CPC</b>	Communist Party of China
<b>CPEC</b>	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
<b>CSCE</b>	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organization

<b>CVE</b>	Countering Violent Extremism
<b>DPP</b>	Democratic Progressive Party
<b>EEC</b>	Eurasian Economic Community
<b>EEU</b>	Eurasian Economic Union
<b>EJF</b>	Environment Justice Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FNOPs</b>	Freedom of Navigation Operations
<b>FPCCI</b>	Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry
<b>FSI</b>	Fragile States Index
<b>FTAAP</b>	Free Trade Area of Asia-Pacific
<b>GB</b>	Gilgit-Baltistan
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GHGs</b>	Greenhouse Gases
<b>GLOFs</b>	Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods
<b>GUUAM</b>	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova
<b>HoA</b>	Heart of Asia
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Center
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INSTC</b>	International North-South Trade Corridor
<b>IO</b>	Indian Ocean
<b>IOK</b>	Indian Occupied Kashmir
<b>IOJ&amp;K</b>	Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir
<b>IOR</b>	Indian Ocean Region
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>IPI</b>	Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline

<b>ISAF</b>	International Security Assistance Force
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>IWT</b>	Indus Waters Treaty
<b>J&amp;K</b>	Jammu and Kashmir
<b>JMSDF</b>	Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force
<b>KPK</b>	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
<b>LNG</b>	Liquefied Natural Gas
<b>LoC</b>	Line of Control
<b>LTTE</b>	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
<b>MTCR</b>	Missile Technology Control Regime
<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NPT</b>	Non-Proliferation Treaty
<b>NSA</b>	Non-State Actors
<b>NSG</b>	Nuclear Suppliers Group
<b>NTSTs</b>	Non-Traditional Security Threats
<b>OBOR</b>	One Belt One Road
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PLAN</b>	People's Liberation Army Navy
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>QCG</b>	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
<b>RATS</b>	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
<b>RAW</b>	Research and Analysis Wing
<b>RECCA</b>	Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan
<b>RSF</b>	Reporters Without Borders
<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
<b>SACs</b>	South Asian Countries

<b>SAFTA</b>	South Asian Free Trade Area
<b>SALT</b>	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
<b>SAPTA</b>	South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement
<b>SAR</b>	South Asian Region
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>SEATO</b>	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
<b>SIPRI</b>	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
<b>SLOC</b>	Sea Lines of Communication
<b>SRF</b>	Silk Road Fund
<b>START</b>	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
<b>SVR</b>	Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation
<b>TAPI</b>	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline
<b>TTP</b>	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
<b>TEU</b>	Twenty Equivalent Units
<b>UAS</b>	Unmanned Aerial Systems
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCIP</b>	United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFCCC-COP20</b>	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change-20 <sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>WB</b>	Working Boundary
<b>WoT</b>	War on Terror

# Introduction

**Ambassador (R) Abdul Basit,  
Dr Muhammad Munir and Maryam Nazir**

**G**eographically, South Asia comprises of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It is contiguously located near the Middle East, Central Asia, China and the Indian Ocean. Apart from geography and shared history, there is little that encourages or compels the region to cohere. In fact, South Asia today is one of the least integrated areas of the world with intra-regional trade merely accounting for five per cent as compared to 58 per cent of the European Union (EU), 52 per cent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) region, and 26 per cent of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Challenges over the years have been compounded by harsh natural calamities, human and food insecurity, mounting economic crunch, changing security paradigms and above all, the birth of transnational terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11.

Socially, the region is diverse and unique as it holds people from different backgrounds and ethnicities together.

**South Asia's political milieu is becoming increasingly grim as the spirit of nationalism among states is getting stronger which, more often than not, overshadows the prospects of and for regionalism.**

The ambitions of economic interaction and interdependence have largely remained unaddressed due to polarisation among regional states. An assessment of social-political trends highlights that the region is facing multidimensional challenges of socioeconomic and political-military nature.

The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is especially relevant for the eight countries as they are home to 37

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per cent of the world's poor, nearly half of the world's malnourished children, and suffer from a number of development and infrastructure gaps.

In spite of having geographical contiguity, many believe that South Asia will continue to be a major conflict prone area on the globe. The two major countries - Pakistan and India - have inherited their core issues, especially the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) dispute, from the days of Partition in 1947.

Despite the presence of a unity government in Afghanistan, the security situation has further deteriorated. In order to build peace, various consulting groups have been established to facilitate negotiations between the Afghan government and all ethnic groups, but so far no major success has been achieved. The situation is further complicated by the growing presence of Daesh. On 21 August 2017, President Donald Trump in his speech on South Asia committed to US engagement in Afghanistan by sending more troops. He announced developing a strategic partnership with India and giving it a bigger role in Afghanistan.

**The situation in Afghanistan has the potential to undermine the prospects of inter-regional connectivity of Central Asia to South Asia and West Asia upto Europe. In this context, security of this country is paramount for security in South Asia.**

The long and persistent influence of external powers in decision-making in South Asia has partly impacted the political evolution of its states. Since the end of the Cold War, the US is aiming to maintain its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (IO) for strategic reasons. This strategic interest is visible from its partnership agreements with India and Afghanistan, and its long-standing engagement in Pakistan.

From a Pakistani perspective, the engagement of Russia in South Asia seems to be more pragmatic in the context of its relations with India and Pakistan, and its efforts towards bringing peace in Afghanistan. Besides maintaining good relations with

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India, Russia is also reaching out to Pakistan. Furthermore, it is engaged in Afghanistan to fight Daesh and resolve the Afghan issue through reconciliation. In another development, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) extended its membership to Pakistan and India in June 2017. The SCO, with its commitment to principles of conflict resolution, may help both countries to resolve their political issues peacefully. It can also play a positive role in regional integration.

The rise of China as an economic power may be an opportunity for South Asia to reap economic benefits from its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in general, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in particular. With the exception of India, South Asian countries view China as a reliable partner who is helping them in economic development in a tangible manner, while respecting their sovereignty.

**Washington's tilt towards New Delhi and the Indo-US strategic partnership seems to be largely driven by China's growing economic engagement in South Asia, West Asia and Asia-Pacific.**

As inter-state realignments continue to evolve, regional dynamics of strategic stability in South Asia would remain matters of concern. The academic community partly believes that given the emergence of China as a global economic power, the US is assisting India in balancing Chinese influence in Asia. The concern is that this geopolitical alignment will make India an even bigger hegemonic power than it already is.

Balance of power in South Asia revolves around the maintenance of the nuclear and conventional military equation between India and Pakistan on the one hand, and interplay of politics between the US, China and Russia in the region, on the other hand. Bilateral strategic partnerships in the context of defence cooperation may well be hindering strategic stability; and disturbing the existing conventional and strategic balance here.



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Pakistan's Strategic Restraint Regime proposal seeks to address the fundamental security challenges once and for all.

This complex politico-strategic situation becomes further aggravated because of the unresolved J&K dispute. The ongoing quest by Kashmiris for their right to self-determination is creating a deep rift, which may only be solved through multilateral efforts, while at the same time hindering rapprochement between the two major stakeholders in South Asia.

**It is disturbing that heavy expenditure on defence in South Asia is being made at the cost of economic progress and regional integration. Major powers must help Pakistan and India in resolving the J&K dispute and the Afghanistan conflict. Countries, also, need to work seriously to avoid an arms race and focus on CPEC-related regional connectivity and economic development.**

This book is based on the proceedings of an international conference organised by IPRI and HSF in Pakistan in November 2017 which explored the above issues. It is organised into two parts. Part I includes the welcome and inaugural address; opening and concluding remarks, along with the policy recommendations. Part II is thematic and consists of the working papers, essays and thought pieces presented by practitioners, academics, decision-makers and thought leaders from Afghanistan, China, France, Germany, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, and the US.

In the session on 'Regional Dynamics of South Asia', **Admiral (R) Dr Jayanath Colombage**, *former Chief of Sri Lankan Navy and Director, Pathfinder Foundation, Sri Lanka* defined the South Asian maritime domain as a region of three 'S'- Strategic Competition; Strategic Convergence; and Strategic Dilemma. He observed that the major conflicting situation in the region is the mistrust between India and Pakistan.

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**The rise of China as a world economic and military power and its focus in this region has resulted in creating a strategic convergence between India, USA, and Japan - a maritime trinity mainly to counter growing Chinese influence and power. This has led to an undeclared 'Maritime Cold War' in South Asia.**

Besides, China's BRI and maritime infrastructure investments in the region are also seen with suspicion by these major players. He warned that this competition for power and influence has put smaller, less powerful states in a strategic dilemma and would hinder future social, political and economic development.

**Dr Boris Volkhonsky**, *Associate Professor, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia* discussed Pakistan and India's Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) membership and its impact on their future relations. He pointed out that with accession to the SCO of India and Pakistan in 2017, the total population of the Organization has reached 45 per cent of the global total, with their collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeding one-third of the global one. He observed that this fact makes the SCO a game changer and an important factor in the new emerging multipolar world order.

**The SCO will have to tackle four major concerns: instability in Afghanistan; regional infrastructure projects not complementing each other; Indo-Pak bilateral differences clouding the SCO agenda; and water scarcity.**

He identified four challenges to the SCO: first, instability in Afghanistan which presents the biggest threat to the security of the whole region; and second, the BRI including its flagship project CPEC and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) (its main participants being Russia, India, Iran, and Azerbaijan) facing challenges in complementing each other. For instance, the integration of Eurasia does not suit interests of outside forces, which see it as a threat to their global dominance. Therefore,

the world is witnessing attempts to undermine these projects through separatist movements in Balochistan supported from outside. Similarly, the first trilateral Russian–Iranian–Azerbaijani Summit in August 2016 strangely ‘coincided’ with aggravation of the situation in Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabakh. Third, one of the risks regarding India and Pakistan simultaneously joining the SCO may lead to their bilateral differences and conflicts being brought to the table of the SCO. He highlighted that until now, Pakistan and India as well as ‘older’ SCO members have been cautious not to threaten the integrity of the SCO by not including conflicting bilateral issues into its agenda. But that does not mean that such issues can be totally excluded, he added. Fourth, water scarcity is posing a security threat to the region, as many experts believe it would be a decisive factor in Twenty-first Century wars.

**Mr Biswas Baral**, *Op-Ed Editor, My Republica National Daily, Kathmandu*, in his paper highlighted the impact of climate change and other non-traditional security (NTS) challenges in South Asia. He stated that in preceding centuries, the gravest security threats a nation-state faced were armies of other states. On the contrary, in the Twenty-first Century, this is no longer the case as increasingly, the threats to modern nation-states are coming from NTS threats. These include changing demography, terrorism, non-state actors, such as terrorist networks, drug cartels, maritime piracy networks, intrastate conflict actors, cross-border crimes, refugees, food and water shortage, growing energy needs, cyber hacking, and cyber warfare. Discussing the challenge of climate change, he warned that it is leading to unpredictable weather patterns, including floods and landslides, which in turn have caused large-scale migrations (climate refugees), resultantly creating grave security challenges. He predicted that a warming climate is also contributing to an acute shortage of water, particularly in the densely populated Indus and Ganges Basins.

**There is now a distinct possibility of ‘water wars’  
between South Asian countries in the near future.**

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He stressed that as climate change contributes to the fragility of nation-states, by undercutting state legitimacy and undermining state sovereignty, it is important that all national and regional plans and policies incorporate climate change. He emphasised that there is a need for a collective response in tackling its effects which should be a top priority of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) agenda. That is why the time has come to mainstream climate change into the SAARC process and to work out regional and sub-regional cooperation frameworks to deal with its transnational impacts.

**Mr Didier Chaudet**, *independent consultant on Eurasia and South Asia; and Editing Director, Center for the Analysis of Foreign Policy, France* in his paper on 'The Rise of China and Shift from Geostrategy to Geoeconomics: Impact on South Asia,' elaborated how the classical analysis of foreign affairs has often been influenced by geopolitics.

**The rise of China reminds the international community that there is another way for a state, in particular, a great power, to achieve its geopolitical goals, and that is through geoeconomics such as the BRI and CPEC.**

He maintained that such a new tool for power projection has the advantage to offer a potential win-win situation between states, and to create better relations, rather than to nurture tensions. He, however, argued that no matter how positive geoeconomics is in theory, great power politics and rivalry always dominate international affairs. He emphasised that the influence of a strong China in South Asia could be positive for the region as a whole. But it cannot dissipate India's fears and rivalry with Beijing. He concluded that geoeconomics can help in power projection of states in a different way, but it is not yet time for a real shift from classical/realist geopolitics to win-win geoeconomics.

In the session on 'Strategic Concerns in South Asia', **Dr Wei Zongyou**, *Professor, Center for American Studies, Fudan University*,

*China*, in his paper on 'China Dream vs. America First: Is the Thucydides Trap Unavoidable?' explained that with Donald Trump elected as the US President and his America First foreign policy mantle, and President Xi Jinping emerging from the 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China even more powerful and vowing to rejuvenate his country, Sino-US relations had entered a period of turbulence and uncertainty. He said as no-apology preachers of China Dream and America First, both President Xi and Trump have vowed to see their policies and agendas set in motion under their watch.

**How the China Dream and America First, with their heavy dose of nationalist flavours, will proceed smoothly against each other, especially in the backdrop of an emerging power transition, is an open question.**

He shared that for all the challenges and alarms, there is still room for optimism about the future of Sino-US relations. First, President Xi's China Dream does not necessarily collide with Trump's America First. He explained that Xi's vision is fundamentally based on domestic development and modernisation, to make the Chinese economy more domestic-driven and consumption-oriented. He concluded that the China-US economic relations are not zero-sum, but a win-win set.

**Mr Andrew Small**, *Senior Transatlantic Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States (Asia Programme), Washington, D.C.*, in his presentation said that the US and China have a multidimensional relationship that cuts across increasingly large swathes of each other's economic, diplomatic, and security interests.

**The US-China relationship is characterised by a mix of competition and cooperation, with the balance of those elements varying by issue and region, and fluctuating according to broader trends in their bilateral relationship.**

Mr Small pointed out that the two sides are deeply embedded in a global economic order that requires the free movement of

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commerce and capital, providing a significant shared interest in the fundamental stability of the international system, from energy supplies to global finance. However, translating these higher-order interests in practical cooperation has proved difficult, given the other ideological and strategic differences between the two sides. He opined that China's primary regional focus was its immediate neighbourhood in East Asia, and recent years have seen intensification in the competitive elements of the US-China relationship there. He explained that Sino-US competition was less acute in other regions, where Beijing's military reach was more modest and its economic activities were often beneficial. He said that South Asia largely falls under this umbrella, and, except during times of exceptional crisis, has been a second-order issue in the relationship.

**Professor Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain**, *Head, Government and Public Policy, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Pakistan* presented his paper on 'Strategic Stability Challenges in South Asia.' According to his analysis, offence-dominant thinking and aggressive Indian-mindset is one of the biggest threats facing the region. He pointed out that Indian commitment to pursue extremist, exclusionary *Hindutva* ideology poses a threat to strategic stability. He said that by propounding and practicing extremist Hindu beliefs, the Bharatiya Janata Party under Modi is cultivating a hostile Indian mindset against Muslims everywhere. He opined that this behaviour by the Indian government not only bodes ill for the rational handling of future crises between India and Pakistan, but also allows free rein to the forces of death and destruction.

**An alarming threat and source of instability in South Asia is India's conventional arms build-up, along with the expansion of its nuclear and missile programme.**

According to him, the other disturbing factors in South Asia are growing population, increasing poverty, power transition dynamics with the rise of India and China, arms proliferation, the prolonged legacy of unresolved disputes, pipelines for transporting

oil and gas, proxy wars, faltering peace processes and absence of peace dialogues. He recommended strengthening and advancement of the political dialogue seeking resolution of the Kashmir situation for a stable South Asia.

**Dr Shabir Ahmed Khan**, *Associate Professor, Area Study Center, University of Peshawar, Pakistan* reflected on Russian engagement in South Asia. He said that recent agreements between Russia and Pakistan confirm that there is an obvious change in Russia's South Asia policy in favour of Pakistan. He highlighted that Russia has stopped viewing India as a counterweight to China in the region, with Pakistan assuming greater importance due to the Afghanistan factor as well as due to access to the Arabian Sea and beyond via CPEC.

**In the contemporary regional geopolitical environment, Pakistan needs to take a positive course of action through diversification of its foreign relations, and developing close ties with the Russian Federation to enhance its bargaining power in international dealings as a response to the latter's shifting policy and tilt towards it.**

In the session on 'Strategic Situation in Afghanistan and its Regional Implications', **Ambassador (R) Rustam Shah Mohmand**, *former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan*, in his thought piece on 'Pakistan's Concerns about India's Influence in Afghanistan' explained that the ongoing conflict has multidimensional implications for Pakistan. They range from a stable border to acts of terrorism; decrease in the volume of bilateral trade to the plight of both refugees and returnees. He opined that ignoring the cost of not inviting attention to the root cause of the insurgency and the continuance of a conflict that has robbed the region of huge economic opportunities, Pakistan has instead remained preoccupied with India's role in the west Asian country, and not formulated a robust approach for peace-making in Afghanistan, though it has made commendable contributions in stabilising it.

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According to the Ambassador, Pakistan must seek support from China, Iran, and Turkey for Afghan reconciliation process and mainstreaming the Taliban.

**While Pakistan's apprehensions about India's increasing role in Kabul are natural, there should be no compromise on Islamabad insisting that Afghan soil should not be used covertly or overtly against its territory or people.**

He stressed that at the same time, Afghanistan's right to formulate its own policies, both internal and external, must also be acknowledged and respected. No policy that creates space for any force or country to operate against Pakistan's interests should be tolerated.

**Dr Attaullah Wahidiyar**, *Senior Advisor from the Ministry of Education, Kabul* presented his views on 'Countering Ingress of Daesh in Afghanistan: Regional and Global Perspective.' He was of the view that Daesh or the Islamic State (IS) are all part of the same terrorism industry. However, he said that while the entire globe hosts such agar plates like the IS, Asia in general and Central Asia specifically seems to be more generous where IS has over 8000 recruits. He added that IS focus on conquering weak states is weakening strong states and to address this challenge a two-dimensional approach is needed. The first thing is to reform the social architecture of societies; and secondly, popular Muslim scholarship needs to come forward and reinforce the true message of Islam by clarifying the true meaning of *Jihad* (martyrdom).

**Investment in violent, non-state actors for achieving state objectives has historically failed; and any state which pursues such policies will suffer sooner or later.**

He emphasised that Pakistan should not be concerned about Indo-Afghan relations because while Kabul welcomes economic



assistance from any side, relations with India will never be at the cost of Pakistan's security.

**Mr Vladimir Potapenko**, *Deputy Secretary-General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)* shared his views on 'Reconciliation Process in Afghanistan and Role of SCO' and opined that the armed confrontation in Afghanistan, which, despite the efforts of the country's Central Government and external forces supporting it (including the SCO members) remains the main destabilising factor in South Asia. He said that the SCO member states are interested in Afghanistan as a peaceful and neutral country that respects and observes human rights and freedoms, and maintains friendly relations with its neighbours. Outlining SCO's vision, Mr Potapenko highlighted that the Astana Declaration resolutely supported the efforts of the Government and the people of Afghanistan aimed at asserting a peaceful and stable state free of terrorism, extremism and illegal drug trafficking. He observed that Kabul was being provided wide-scale assistance in areas such as defence, law enforcement, transport development, energy, anti-drug operations, training national experts, etc., both on bilateral and multilateral basis. He also shared that SCO members are taking an active part in a number of important international, regional projects that involve Afghanistan. However, the presence of the IS militants in Afghanistan, many of whom are originally from SCO member states, causes additional concern.

**The return of IS militants to their home countries (including SCO member states) can add to regional instability.**

In the final session 'Addressing Security Concerns in South Asia: A Way Forward' of the two-day conference, **Professor Dr Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema**, *Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Sciences, National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, Pakistan*, in his paper on 'Resolving the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute: An Imperative for Regional Peace' discussed the historical background, nature of the dispute, perceptions about Kashmir, internationalisation of the

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dispute, human rights violations by Indian forces and the attempts to resolve the dispute. He asserted that since the martyrdom of Burhan Wani, the Kashmiris' movement has intensified. Unfortunately, the Modi government has abandoned the policy of engagement and emboldened the reign of terror in the IOK. He emphasised that for the last 71 years, the people of J&K have been inflicted with mass atrocities which is a reflection of United Nations (UN) helplessness as well. While defining the nature of the dispute, Dr Cheema added that for Pakistan, Kashmir is a symbol of Indian high-handedness and broken pledges. Pakistan's stance is resolute that Kashmiris should be able to exercise their right of self-determination under an UN-supervised plebiscite. He highlighted that the slow progress of the composite dialogue and backdoor diplomacy between Pakistan and India reflects the intractable nature of the dispute.

**Re-vitalising SAARC, involvement of Kashmiris in addition to Pakistan and India, governmental as well as non-governmental engagement are a few of the options to address the Kashmir dispute.**

**Dr Christian Wagner**, *Senior Fellow, Asia Division, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs), Germany* in his paper on 'The Role of Global Powers in Building Cooperative Security Order in South Asia' analysed the prospects of a regional security cooperation framework and underlined that global powers will have limited role, as they are likely to pursue their national interests. For example, Kashmir dispute is a classic example that underlines this problem.

**South Asian countries will have to rely on themselves, and work on an issue-specific security order to mitigate regional differences. However, in the long-term, states that have points of convergence should focus on cooperation, as global powers' interest and presence will continue to change in the region.**



# Part I

- **Welcome Address**
- **Opening Remarks**
- **Inaugural Address**
- **Concluding Remarks**
- **Policy Imperatives: Lessons for the Future of South Asia**



## Welcome Address

**Ambassador (R) Abdul Basit,**

*President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Islamabad*

**I**t is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute. We are particularly grateful to our Chief Guest, General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, for joining us. We are keenly looking forward to his keynote address.

IPRI is also thankful to all the distinguished Guests, Chairs and Speakers at this conference. I have no doubt that we will have very stimulating discussions at all sessions, and that this is going to be a very engaging and interesting conference.

IPRI is one of the oldest think-tanks in Islamabad. We take great pride in our constructive work and initiatives. This conference is yet another testimony to IPRI's strong commitment to promoting frank and focused discussions on topical issues. Our objective remains to contribute meaningfully towards enhancing understanding of the challenges facing this region and exploring middle grounds for peace and prosperity.

One of the primary objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy is to have peace in the region and beyond. We fully realise that unless we have normal and mutually beneficial relations with all our neighbours, Pakistan cannot fully realise its economic potential and development agenda. Therefore, we are trying our best to help achieve reconciliation in Afghanistan. It is simply disingenuous to hold Pakistan responsible for terror in Afghanistan, especially when 40 per cent of the Afghan territory is not under the Kabul government's control. However, it is time that both Pakistan and Afghanistan seriously engage in reconciliation efforts. At the end of the day, it is Kabul that must lead this process, effectively and irreversibly.

Pakistan, as you all know, has also been trying to have a normal relationship with India. We would like to resolve all our problems through dialogue, especially the long-standing Jammu

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and Kashmir dispute. Though, India is trying, through procrastination and prevarication, to avoid dialogue, talks are, in our view, inevitable. Sooner or later, India will have to come to the negotiating table as there is no other way to resolve our mutual problems but through dialogue.

Pakistan is also fully aware of its responsibilities as a nuclear power. We are not interested in an arms race with India. However, Pakistan is bound to take any step that is necessary to maintain the credibility of its deterrence. This is absolutely imperative to maintain strategic balance in the region, lest India is tempted to resort to any misadventure.

We expect the international community, especially the major powers, to appreciate Pakistan's legitimate concerns and interests in the region. Pakistan stands for peace and will continue striving for peace. I hope that our deliberations at this conference will help put things in their correct perspective and formulate tenable recommendations and solutions to the many complex challenges which South Asia is facing.

Let me conclude by once again thanking you all for being part of this conference. We particularly wish our foreign friends a most comfortable and productive stay in the beautiful city of Islamabad.

Thank you very much. ■

## Opening Remarks

**Dr Jens Jokisch**

*Chargé d'affaires,*

*Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany*

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to deliver the opening remarks, and I am equally honoured to be part of this conference. Unfortunately, Ambassador Martin Kobler regrets his absence since he is in Germany.

I would begin my remarks by saying that I am impressed by the organisation of this conference. The subject is the most pertinent one of our times, and the list of speakers is promising in terms of generating fruitful discussion. I will be looking forward to the recommendations and policy deliberations taken out from the speeches of the worthy speakers who have come from various countries.

The conference is a striking example of how valuable the work of German political foundations is in Pakistan. The opening remarks were to be made by the Country Representative of the Foundation who is not here primarily due to registration and visa issues. But our Government and people hope for speedy resolution of these issues and encourage foundations to continue working and getting valuable input.

The scope of this conference is very large as it caters to different regions of Asia such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Central Asia, as well as different perspectives of major global powers including the United States, Russia, and China. At the same time, the conference will touch upon a wide variety of subjects including the War on Terror, bilateral rivalry, the nuclear threat, economic opportunities and shifting political, economic and strategic dynamics in the region.

I will be giving a little input from the German point-of-view, specifically on regional security. For this, I would like to go back to German history during the Cold War. Obviously, German



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experience is not fully comparable to the West, South or Central Asia but some lessons can be drawn from it. During the Cold War, the world was bipolar with two superpowers with a fundamental rift between the US and the then-Soviet Union. Several proxy wars were going on all around the world. But it was Germany which was at the culminating point of the Cold War. At the Berlin Wall, the super powers actually faced each other. That Germany had to find a way out as it was seriously threatened in the middle of the Cold War. From this, it drew a very important lesson which is that in spite of all the differences transposed on this region, confrontation can only be reduced by long-term mutual engagement. Mutual allegations and blaming do not help anyone, as rightly pointed by Ambassador Basit before as well. In German, there is a very famous expression *Wandel durch Annäherung*, which can be roughly translated as:

In the end, tensions can only be reduced by constant talking and dialogue, no matter how frustrating that may be in concrete terms.

In the 1970s, Germany was actively involved in constructing an informal security system which aimed at confidence building not only among governments but people as well. The so-called Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was a lot more informal than North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), but it helped to decrease tensions by providing a forum for discussion.

So why not have something similar for Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular? This region desperately needs Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to overcome the 'logic' which was also there at the time of Cold War i.e., the zero-sum game logic. To put it bluntly, it means that if you are my friends, you cannot be the friend of my opponent. In this regard, we should always look back and define ourselves through history and its traumas. We have to create a win-win situation for all sides. We

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have to avoid confrontation and opposition, and put an end to the viewpoint of having one state against the other.

South Asia desperately needs a regional security architecture. There are already different formats of it, but all of them have different problems. The meetings of Heart of Asia Conference and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) proceedings in recent years are simple examples of it. I support what Ambassador Basit has just said that Pakistan is very right in approaching its neighbouring countries to establish an effective dialogue process. And this is what this region desperately needs.

At the same time, the role of civil society is very important in diffusing tensions among people. Only by getting to know each other can long-term understanding between countries work. This is something the Hanns Seidel Foundation has traditionally been very active in not only this country but others as well. I encourage them to keep up the good work.

This conference will also be discussing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and China in perspective as well. Germany supports the initiative as it means stability for the region. Also, other regional cooperation projects in the region like the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) power project and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline are huge and useful because they will help Pakistan in overcoming its energy problems, and they also support the spirit of mutual cooperation and benefit. In the end, these projects can also contribute towards a secure and stable political environment.

This brings me back to my first point regarding the need for a regional security strategy and architecture. To put it bluntly, there can be no stability without prosperity and vice versa. To conclude, I would like to point out that dialogue and cooperation are crucial for any kind of CBMs. I would also like to encourage IPRI and HSF to follow up this conference on this particular topic with more international participation.

Thank you. ■

## Inaugural Address

**General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, NI (M)**  
*Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC),  
Joint Staff Headquarters, Pakistan*

**R**egional dynamics and strategic concerns in South Asia can be better understood with a focus on varying perspectives, that is, geographic, geopolitical, geostrategic, geoeconomic surrounding the region.

On the geographic plain, South Asia is better understood as the region lying south of the Himalayas and extending from Rakhine Mountains of Myanmar and Bay of Bengal in the east to the Hindukush to the west with a vast expanse of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean in the south. While Afghanistan is seen as an extension of South Asia, it is also considered a part of the Central Asian conundrum. This is a moot point. South Asia bridges the energy-abundant Middle East and Iran with energy-desirous China and India.

On a geopolitical plain, South Asia is a region beset in a nuclear cauldron, with a varying religious, cultural, historical, economic and ethnic mosaic. It is also impacted by shifting interests and realignments of power relationships. In fact, global power contestation looms large on the regional context of South Asia. This context defines the power relationships here. However, what the geopolitical thinkers need to factor in is that South Asia may also witness *Non-Polarity* instead of *Multipolarity*. South Asia is the region where tidal waves of geostrategy and geoeconomics collide. Posturing of states for being 'net security provider' in the region, is geostrategic in essence; whereas old and new trade routes, put South Asia at the 'fulcrum' of geoeconomic cross currents.

From a geostrategic perspective, the region retains enduring and greater importance due to its strategic location, natural wealth, economic opportunities and cultural strength. External powers, whether international or regional, seek to engage South Asian countries in pursuit of their grand strategic interests.

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On the geoeconomic front, South Asia is still economically underdeveloped, but with great potential. It has some of the world's lowest human development indicators. While the world has developed interdependent structures to promote regional prosperity, due to political turbulence South Asia is yet to embark on the journey of mutually beneficial models.

Here, the broad contours of the environment confronting South Asia as a region must be understood. In my view, the current global environment is characterised by a diffusing state-centric international order. There is an increased emphasis on regionalism - geopolitical and geoeconomic interests are being redefined in the same context. There is a shift of balance - both amongst states, and between state and non-state actors (NSAs). Inter-state conflicts are giving way to intra-state conflicts, and NSAs, both benign and violent, are dominating the global and regional scene.

This region is engulfed in inter- and intra-regional 'grey zone conflicts.' Here, the Global Commons<sup>1</sup> are increasingly threatened by human indiscretion, and climate change is emerging as a threat multiplier. As transformation progresses, there is no consensus yet amongst the major actors about the contours of an emerging regional political order; the result is continual erosion of convergence and rise of divergence on various issues. Selective narratives are being used to influence state behaviours. Non-Traditional Security Threats (NTSTs) including climate change, water security and human security issues, have the potential to trigger inter- and intra-state conflicts.

South Asia's regional horizon is mainly defined by the volatile nature of the Indo-Pak relationship. Nuclearisation has added an intense and serious strategic dimension to this region: Kashmir remains a 'nuclear flashpoint'. The region needs practical steps to de-escalate the strategic stress. For this, resolution of the Kashmir conflict is fundamental and critical to reduce the chances of any 'strategic miscalculation.' Post 9/11, South Asia has been under

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<sup>1</sup> International laws identify four Global Commons namely: the high seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica and outer space.

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constant spotlight due to terrorism and extremism, and the enduring conflict in Afghanistan. Apart from the Kashmir issue, South Asia as a region is beset with multiple challenges. The volatility spectrum of the region makes it an 'international hot spot.'

Firstly, a new form of Cold War with hot winds is taking root in the region. Crafting enduring and defining strategic partnerships, alongwith strands of containment policies, are generating cross currents. This has resulted in growing tensions, and is likely to further accentuate the regional geostrategic dynamics.

It is also important to understand the South Asian construct. This is linked to the fact that it is increasingly in Asia that the future prospects of global peace and prosperity will be determined. Asia is now the world's most populous and economically dynamic region. Within the next two decades, most of the world's largest economic and military powers will be here. But Asia also has vast poverty, geoethnic diversity and numerous territorial disputes in the midst of multiple transitions, which make it a volatile and dangerous place.

Although several powers play an influencing role, yet the central role which will affect Asia, for good or bad, will be by and between the United States (US) and China.

Stability in South Asia is stressed by the arms build-up, claims of 'economic anchor', positioning and posturing as a 'Net Security Provider' from Sahel to South Asia and a re-configured 'Indo-Pacific.' This has created a 'permissive environment for our neighbour', emboldening her to resort to 'aggressive posturing' in the region. The 'phantom surgical strikes' claim is a case in point. This pattern is likely to alter the strategic balance in an already volatile region, which will induce further instability and insecurity in South Asia.

Maritime dynamics of South Asia are another driver in the region's stability paradigm. The contiguous waters of the Arabian Sea contain vital sea lines that help feed some of Asia's largest economies, and have immense strategic significance since more than

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80 per cent of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits through these waters.

Afghanistan's strategic location places it at a critical juncture for regional connectivity as a gateway to Central Asia. It has also been central to the traditional 'Great Game.' Continuing instability in Afghanistan has hampered the region from reaping the benefits of regional economic integration. While the Government of Afghanistan claims that the country holds up to USD 3 trillion in proven untapped mineral deposits, the persistent instability can be attributed to number of factors: local counter violent forces; a weak government; deepening ethnic divide; warlordism; drugs; and a faltering reconciliation process. This is not criticism, rather a statement of fact.

Instability in Afghanistan is likely to be further compounded by giving unprecedented and undeserved strategic and operational space to geographically non-contiguous countries. With traditional trade routes and ethnic, religious, historic and cultural bonds, Pakistan will remain central and friendly to Kabul. Conflict in Afghanistan has affected Pakistan in every sphere of life since our country faces the full brunt of terrorism, sub-nationalism and extremism. We seek closure of the Afghan conflict.

On our east, with the largest economic, military and human resources in South Asia, India is affecting the stability paradigm more than any other country in the region. India, today, is witnessing a transition from a secular to a 'saffronised' Hindu state. One can go on to explain, however, I will draw only two examples, that is, Indian atrocities in Kashmir and its belligerent attitude towards Pakistan.

The unresolved Kashmir dispute has been left to fester. There has been a malicious intent to erase and mutate its history by misconstruing the 71-year indigenous freedom struggle as a terrorist movement. India continues to suppress the indigenous Kashmiri struggle by use of brute force of over 656,638 troops (1 soldier for every 20 Kashmiris). The Indian forces have committed massive human right violations, including extrajudicial executions,

rape, torture and deliberate assaults. They have killed approximately 94,767 civilians from January 1989 – 31 July 2017. Post-Burhan Wani *shahadat*,<sup>2</sup> Kashmir's freedom struggle has surged and suffered. Furthermore, there is an unprecedented escalating trend in ceasefire violations (CFVs) by India over the last couple of years across the Line of Control (LoC). Since 2007, Pakistan has suffered 1040 civilian and 318 military casualties across the LoC. In 2017, there have been over 1200 CFVs. Highest in the last ten years.<sup>3</sup>

Under its current leadership, India's attitude is becoming more belligerent manifested through aggressive statements made by its political and military leadership against Pakistan. India continues to engage Pakistan through asymmetric strategies and ploys. It is even making an endeavour to subsume conventional 'surgical strikes' (phantom or otherwise) into the realm of sub-conventional war. It is her 'wishful thinking' to find space for application of conventional forces in the realm of sub-conventional war. There is no guarantee that such a manoeuvre on her part will not (intentionally or unintentionally) escalate into a larger conventional conflict. That is why I maintain that the road to peace in South Asia goes through Kashmir. There is no bypass.

India's indirect strategy against Pakistan is manifested by sponsoring Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan; Baloch and other sub-nationalists, and terrorist groups. Apprehension of an Indian spy belonging to its intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) from Balochistan is the proverbial 'smoking gun' of Indian involvement.

India has set up a Balochistan Operation Cell (under RAW) to devise a radical force for subversive activities in the province. It has launched All-India Radio services and a website in Balochi language. Add to this, the growing Indian force differential, and its 80 per cent Pakistan-specific force potential, is a source of concern

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<sup>2</sup> Martyrdom in Islam.

<sup>3</sup> Editor's note: According to the Foreign Office, India committed 70 ceasefire violations in the first 12 days of 2018 alone; and 1,900 in 2017.

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and is detrimental to regional peace.

Recently, the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has come under stress, due to the rhetoric that 'Blood and water can't flow together.' We, in Pakistan, find it strange that hate, coercion, duplicity, naked direct and indirect aggression can flow like water, but the plain blue water of Indus and its tributaries cannot: indeed a strange logic. Efforts to gradually manipulate the IWT in order to enhance its control over Pakistan's share of water are a disregard to the spirit of obligations, which will have serious repercussions in the region. This is a ticking time bomb.<sup>4</sup>

There is also a deliberate, designed and aggressive anti-China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) campaign being unleashed by our neighbour at various international fora with the aim to scuttle CPEC, and deprive Pakistan of its economic benefits. Effort is being made to create controversies and mistrust among the people in CPEC mega projects, through various means and by exploiting fault lines in society. RAW established a new cell with special allocation of USD 500 million in 2015 in order to scuttle the CPEC project.

South Asia's extended tryst with terrorism and extremism primarily owes its genesis to the non-resolution of the Kashmir issue, and absence of a political solution to Afghanistan. It is a matter of satisfaction that Pakistan is the only country that has fought a successful war against terrorism in the entire region, and has unparalleled contributions in the global War on Terror (WoT). Pakistan has been in a constant state of conflict situation for the last 40 years. The ongoing WoT since the last 16-17 years has resulted in enormous loss of men and material (83,127 casualties, including 28,260 military, 4,184 police and 50,683 civilians), but the morale and resolve of the nation continues to remain unwavering.

Presently, the South Asian region is witnessing emerging

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<sup>4</sup> Editor's note: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 330MW Kishanganga hydropower station in May 2018 in the state of J&Kr, amid protests from Pakistan, since the project will disrupt water supplies to the latter, and is tantamount to violation of the IWT.



challenges to strategic stability such as India's Cold Start/ Proactive Strategy; development of ballistic missile defense system; nuclearisation of IOR; and discriminatory trends in global nuclear politics. In response to these developments, Pakistan's credible minimum deterrence will remain dynamic to ensure that it matches the current level of overall strategic threat. Pakistan will do what it must to maintain 'strategic balance' in this 'uneasy peace' situation. Pakistan has called for a mutual Strategic Restraint Regime to augment the stabilising effects of nuclearisation. So far, there has been deafening silence.

Stability in South Asia can be maintained through a balanced and realistic approach by all stakeholders, especially influential global and regional powers and institutions for conflict resolution, which should encourage and facilitate regional countries to address all interconnected disputes through peaceful means. As I highlighted earlier, these include the Afghan conflict, Indo-Pak relations especially the Kashmir issue, growing Indian force differential, and maintenance of strategic stability.

Although simultaneous solutions are not realistic, progress on all will create a positive synergy. Final solutions can, in due course, be sequentially implemented. Pakistan believes that:

- a. We need to give preference to cooperation over competition for enhancing trust and confidence among the different stakeholders. This will lead to more pragmatic and sustainable solutions to crises.
- b. Only domestically and regionally sustainable approaches will ensure regional peace and stability in South Asia. All current crises merit political settlement.
- c. In South Asia, an imbalance, either in politico-strategic context or defence capabilities will always be destabilising. Therefore, 'Balance' in a wider geostrategic construct needs to be maintained for stability in this conflict-prone region in view of the volatile LoC and Working Boundary (WB), and unresolved Kashmir issue.

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- d. Role of global powers focusing on conflict resolution instead of conflict management, therefore, cannot be overemphasised.
- e. In Afghanistan, reconciliation and peace process through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) is a promising initiative, which must be supported for its desired objectives. Any other mechanism, without the primary stakeholders, is not likely to yield the necessary results.
- f. To combat extremism and terrorism, greater cooperation and collaboration among countries and counter-ideology efforts are required. We need to devise effective counter insurgency, counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) measures.
- g. We need to promote harmony among different faiths for tolerance and deradicalisation with the rationale of religion as a unifying force.

I thank you all.■

## Concluding Remarks

**Omer Ali**

*National Programme Coordinator  
Hanns Seidel Foundation, Germany (Pakistan Office)*

On behalf of the German Hanns Seidel Foundation, and Mr Kristof Duwaerts, Resident Representative Islamabad, who for visa reasons, unfortunately cannot be with us today, I would like to thank you all very much for having joined us at this conference which has the potential to chalk out future trajectories for Pakistan's foreign policy in a highly dynamic geographic and strategic environment. Over the past two days, we have had the opportunity to assess the topic of 'Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia' through the analyses of a galaxy of very learned scholars, shedding light on this important topic from a variety of different angles.

This diversity in assessing issues, looking at all sides of a coin, and thus providing a ground for weighing one's own options, has been the trademark of activities supported and organised by the Hanns Seidel Foundation for many decades. In Pakistan, we have been doing so since 1983, while we have been pursuing the exact same approach in Germany since 1967 by the direct mandate of one of the major parties represented in the German federal parliament. The rationale of our mandate is informed by the very particular German experience, which is to break through traditional perspectives and at times apply innovative, previously unthinkable approaches with regard to formulating policies.

This started off with the Franco-German rapprochement, and has culminated in a number of transnational bodies, the most important of which certainly would be the European Union, which might soon replace the nation-state through continuous supra-national integration. The formerly pariah state of Germany, down to ruins in 1945 managed to completely re-invent itself, and become one of the prime engines of the West. This trajectory has

### *Concluding Remarks*

been accompanied and supported by its political foundations in close consultation with the prevailing stakeholders. Never imposing policies, rather developing them alongside the people who matter, and developing stratagems thereon, always keeping in mind the local circumstances, has been one of our guiding principles.

It is in this context, that I would like to thank the audience for having been with us throughout these two days, and for asking pertinent questions which are circling in the truth. At the same time, we have seen during this conference, that there might well be more than 'one' truth. It is in this context, that I would also like to thank the international scholars for having joined us for breaking up certain paradigms and providing the ground for developing innovative stratagems, factoring in several truths and getting a holistic picture.

There are a number of parallels between the situation in Europe and in South Asia: the overwhelming challenge of climate change outgrowing many other concerns; economic convergence versus divergence elsewhere; and national interests versus regional integration. Faced with such challenges and the lessons learned thereof provides impetus for sharing the experiences which might already have been made in Germany.

Now it will be up to the respected audience, and the concerned authorities in Pakistan to assess all those bits and pieces which have been presented in a very condensed manner during this two-day international conference, and draw conclusions as to where Pakistan can move, and subsequently make a normative move and say where it *should* move. Maybe, certain perspectives have been presented which will allow the subject experts to think out-of-the-box, and find solutions to what so far has been considered an *impasse*. This will certainly not be an easy process, and will require dedicated input, even more scholarly expertise, and plenty of follow-up discussions. Ultimately this will serve the cause, which was outlined by Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah:

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Our object should be peace within, and peace without.  
We want to live peacefully and maintain cordial  
relations with our immediate neighbours and with the  
world at large.

It is in this context, that we will be very happy to accompany such processes in the future, whether it is through partnering with our respected partners, such as IPRI, with whom we enjoy a deep and trustful relationship; whether it is through inviting international experts to Pakistan to provide for external perspectives; or through getting Pakistani experts and legislators in touch with people from across the board, especially in Germany.

I am also glad to announce that this conference's proceedings will be compiled into an edited volume which will provide an easy reference for both the subject experts, and future subject experts. I would also like to thank the students from a number of universities for having been with us, as you will be the ones who will be taking the important decisions tomorrow. You are the prime capital of this wonderful country!

Our gratitude goes to the capable team at IPRI for having put together yet another wonderful conference, and we especially congratulate Ambassador Abdul Basit on the hugely successful conclusion of his first international conference as President of IPRI. May there be many more!

Thank you very much for your attention. ■

# **Policy Imperatives: Lessons for the Future of South Asia**

**Sarah Siddiq Aneel**

*Editor, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad*

*Shared Security is more secure than Ensured Security.*

This book puts forward specific policy implications for South Asia across a wide range of issues. The policy directions, outlined below are important not only because these particular recommendations are well-considered, but also because the authors have years of practical experience in academia, foreign, national and international security policy.

## **For South Asia**

### ***South Asia Cooperative Security Framework- A Possible Stepping Stone***

There are fundamental differences among South Asian states about regional security characterised by inter-state conflicts, resource deficits, citizen exclusion, social discontent and limited internal and external coordination, which are weighing down potential geoeconomic partnerships. Hence, regional states should establish new forms of cooperative security mechanisms in order to tackle common security challenges. Such cooperation would require adept infrastructures underwritten by political commitment. A common and indigenous South Asian security policy architecture could improve coordination with international partners, broaden engagement, and ensure commitment to peace and regional stability.

### ***Commitment to Blue Peace***

The Indian Ocean, an area of crucial geostrategic significance, has become an arena of confrontation in the oceanic designs of various

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super powers. The extensive militarisation of the region poses a serious threat to the stability of the littoral and hinterland states along the ocean's entire reach. It is, therefore, important to ensure that peace and security across its vast expanse (through which 80 per cent of all seaborne trade flows) is maintained so that global commerce can flourish. In this regard, peaceful resolution of disputes, decision-making through consensus, and freedom of navigation and over-flight, is vital.

### *Towards Deeper Regional Cooperation*

To address regional challenges, such as instability in Afghanistan, the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) dispute, Pak-India tensions (including nuclear issues), security of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), climate change and terrorism, it is important to achieve regional cooperation. In the wake of the myriad of changes in global politics and regional dynamics, the significance of strengthening inter-state cooperation has gained greater primacy. In this regard, global powers are likely to have a limited role, as they will pursue their national interests. Therefore, it is imperative for the regional actors of South Asia to find common grounds with each other, and engage in dialogue rather than relying on extra-regional powers to resolve their mutual conflicts and challenges.

### *Think Geoeconomics - Not Geopolitics*

As compared to geopolitics, geoeconomics can offer a potential win-win situation between states, and create better relations between countries, rather than nurturing tensions. Economics and security are highly interlinked. In this regard, CPEC under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can prove to be a vital symbiotic link. The project's security, and the safety of those working on it, should therefore, be an utmost priority.

Projects like the International North-South Trade Corridor (INSTC) are complementary rather than conflicting with BRI. It is, thus, important to understand that all Eurasian countries (the SCO

member states, prospective members like Iran and Afghanistan, observers and dialogue partners like Azerbaijan) are all in one boat, and broad cooperation and integration is something that should not be approached on a zero-sum basis, but rather as a tool serving common interests.

### ***Scourge of the Islamic State (IS)***

With the Islamic State (or Daesh) attempting to gain foothold in Afghanistan, the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in moving towards peace, reconciliation and rebuilding is important. For this, there is an urgent need to adopt a collective approach at the SCO especially since many IS members belong to SCO member countries, and their return to these countries could lead to internal instability.

### ***Towards Reconciliation in Afghanistan***

It is vital to work out a collective approach to the issues of Afghanistan on a win-win basis with the joint participation of India and Pakistan, along with SCO members, despite existing differences between them. Most of these countries have historical ties with Afghanistan and its different ethnic communities. This very fact should be looked upon as a complementary one rather than conflicting. The Taliban are an important and powerful force in Afghanistan representing the interests of considerable factions of the society. Therefore, their inclusion in the future framework of power-sharing in the country is inevitable.

### ***Mainstreaming Climate Change into the SAARC Agenda***

There is a need for a collective response in tackling the devastating impacts of climate change, which should be a top priority of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) agenda. It is critical to work out regional and sub-regional cooperation frameworks to deal with the transboundary effects of climate change (such as climate change refugees and climate



migration), considering that the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the region are at stake.

***Investment in Climate-Resilient Agriculture, Demilitarisation of the Himalayan Glaciers and Regional Water-related Data Sharing***

There needs to be greater investment in climate-resilient agriculture and agro-product diversification; more emphasis on demilitarisation of the Himalayan glaciers which is partly responsible for their rapid melting; and greater sharing of water-related data that is needlessly classified as 'sensitive' among SAARC countries.

***Regional Convention on Water-sharing through the SCO***

Water-sharing of transborder rivers and other water streams and basins is likely to be the most contentious issue of the Twenty-first Century. This dictates the need of working out a collective approach, and the SCO may become a natural forum for discussing such matters. Pakistan, being a country most affected by its 'downstream' status can come up with an initiative together with Russia, Uzbekistan (the 'downstream' Central Asian countries), and other SCO members to work out a regional convention governing such issues. India, as a country knowing the concern of both 'upstream' and 'downstream' countries, may become a co-sponsor of such an initiative, thus, forging an alliance with other SCO members, including Pakistan.

**For Pakistan**

***Rethinking Foreign Policy***

External challenges and risks to Pakistan require a deeper understanding of foreign policy alignments and how they impact regional stability. Policymakers should focus on how the country's foreign policy needs to be harmonised with the foreign policy of great powers to avoid blowback in the form of deteriorating

relations, greater threats in the form of cross-border terrorism, and economic isolation.

### ***Re-envisioning the Pak-Russia Relationship***

With Russia moving to establish defence ties with Pakistan as India diversifies its arms basket beyond the Kremlin, and deepens ties with the United States, Islamabad must come up with innovative approaches to strengthen its working relationship with the former. In this regard, Pakistan should accord priority to re-arrange a visit of President Putin to Pakistan. However, this developing partnership must not stop Pakistan from having cooperative relations with other major powers.

### ***The Kabul Calculus***

Afghan soil should not be used covertly or overtly against Pakistan. While it is Kabul's prerogative to formulate its own internal and external policies, it should not ride roughshod over Pakistan's legitimate interests. Pakistan cannot be oblivious to its security concerns emanating from Afghanistan.

### ***Three-Party Negotiations***

The role of a third mediating party between Pakistan and India may facilitate in addressing the J&K dispute. The United Nations (UN) should also play its role in resolving it since a UN initiative is necessary, not only in terms of reviving its assertive role, but also to make the parties involved realise the urgency of peace in South Asia. Additionally, any negotiations and mediation should focus on logic rather than sentiments. While there are those who feel that an outside observer can hardly advise Pakistan and India about how to solve this dispute, examples from other regions, such as the European Union (EU) can be drawn as a possible model for a solution.

***Maintaining Credible Deterrence***

India's asymmetric military build-up and hostility towards Pakistan has increased under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and with the support of the US as its major strategic partner in Asia to counter the rising power of China. In such an emerging strategic scenario, nuclear deterrence is Pakistan's ultimate assurance against external intervention, aggression and coercion. In this context, Pakistan needs to maintain balance in wider geostrategic constructs and maintain credible deterrence. When the complete credibility of its nuclear deterrence posture is demonstrated, its offers to resolve the Kashmir dispute may lead to a more positive reaction from India and the US. ■

## Part II

### Regional Dynamics of South Asia

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# Assessment of Socio-Political Trends in South Asia

*Working Paper*

Admiral (R) Dr Jayanath Colombage\*

## Abstract

South Asia is occupying a strategically important position in the Indian Ocean, which is fast becoming the key ocean in the Twenty-first Century. South Asian countries have different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds and are considered developing with low human indices. The major conflicting situation in the region is the mistrust between India and Pakistan. The rise of China as a world economic and military power and its focus towards this region has resulted in creating a strategic convergence between India, United States and Japan. China's Belt and Road Initiative and maritime infrastructure investments are seen with suspicion by other major players. This competition for power and influence has put smaller less powerful states in a strategic dilemma, and may hinder future social, political and economic development.

**Key words:** South Asia, Strategic Dilemma, Major Power Rivalry, Economic Development.

## Introduction to South Asia

South Asia comprises of the Indian subcontinent and its immediate neighbourhood. The region has an ancient civilisation and had flourishing maritime trade before the arrival of colonial powers in the Nineteenth Century. It comprises of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal,

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Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. However, South Asia is not a clear-cut region. Most of its countries have connections with other neighbouring regions. For example, Bhutan, India and Nepal share borders with China; and the latter two have connections with Chinese-controlled Tibet. Moreover, Afghanistan is linked to Central Asia and Southwest Asia and is geographically linked to northeast Asia, with a short border with China. Sri Lanka is an island but not far from South India, and only 24 nautical miles away. The Maldives is a chain of islands spreading over nearly 875 kilometres. Pakistan has a physical connection with southwest Asia through its border with Iran. India and Bangladesh share common borders with Myanmar. Furthermore, India could be considered a part of Southeast Asia because of its Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are in fact closer to Myanmar and Thailand than to India (Snedden 2016). Due to this geographical connectivity, South Asia's sociopolitical issues cannot be considered by limiting it only to the borders of South Asian Countries (SACs). These countries are not immune to the dynamics of their neighbourhood, rather are heavily influenced by it.

### **A Look Back: The British Empire and South Asia**

Historically, all SACs have had a connection with British colonialism from 1849-1947. Present day Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were under direct British rule. During the British era, there was only one India, which now comprises of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. When the British left in 1947, they created two states, India as a Hindu majority state, and the Muslim majority state of Pakistan. This separation also created the Kashmir dispute, which is not settled to date. In 1971, Bangladesh with majority ethnic Bengalis with the support of the Indian Army, separated from Pakistan and became an independent country. Bhutan and the Maldives were protectorates of Britain. The British controlled the defence and foreign policy of Afghanistan and Nepal. They imposed many borders which divided people, and are

contested even today. These arbitrarily designed borders have even led to war, and creation of new states such as Bangladesh.

The British Empire left the legacy of English language in this region, which has now become the common and link language. It also left a parliamentary form of governance which is still being practiced with some modifications. There was a wave of independence and emergence of new states at the end of World War II, and the British Empire was compelled to grant independence to the subcontinent in 1947; and finally left the Maldives in 1965. It, however, retained a defence agreement with Sri Lanka and complete independence was given only in 1957. It retained a strategically important territory further south of South Asia in Diego Garcia, which is now a major United States (US) military facility.

### **Religions and Ethnicities of South Asia**

South Asia is also home to many major religions of the world. Hinduism and Buddhism have originated from India and parts of Nepal. Hinduism is the majority religion in India and Nepal, and Buddhism is the major religion in Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Christianity and Islam have arrived from external locations. Christianity is a minority religion in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Majority populations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Maldives are Muslims. Islam links the region with the Middle East, especially to Saudi Arabia. There are many religious connections among the South Asian states, but at times religion has been a cause for violent conflicts as well. India has the largest Hindu population in the world, as well as a large Muslim community.

This region has a significant ethnic mix as well. Afghanistan and Pakistan have large populations of Pushtuns/Pukhtuns across the border. Afghanistan also has ethnic populations from neighbouring Central Asia. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran have ethnic Baloch minorities. Sri Lanka's minority Tamils have close religious and cultural connections with 60 million Tamils living in



Tamil Nadu, who at times have fuelled conflict in both countries. There is a Nepali community living in Bhutan. In northern India, Nagas and other tribal communities are ethnically connected to Myanmar. Indian and Nepalese communities share similar cultures. Then, there is the issue of Rohingyas living in Myanmar, very close to the Bangladesh border. The Rohingyas are considered 'a stateless people', and the world's focus is now on this community as there has been a large exodus of them into Bangladesh due to military operations in Myanmar. There are also Bengali people living in West Bengal in India. There are ethnic Punjabis living in Pakistan and India, and the region is referred to as Punjab by both countries.

### **Populations and Power in South Asia**

India is the largest country in the South Asian region with the world's second largest population. At the other end is the Maldives, a tiny nation of small islands with a small population. Pakistan and Bangladesh are the sixth and eighth most populous nations in the world, respectively. However, India's population is three times their combined populations. This huge population and its size provide India with geostrategic advantages. The country has the largest economy in the region, which is now poised to becoming the fifth largest in the world, from its current seventh spot. Since it is located at the geographical centre of South Asia, it occupies a strategic location in the Indian Ocean with a long coastline of 7500 km. Therefore, it can be said that India dominates South Asia even to the irritation of smaller states surrounding it. Hence, this makes the region essentially India-centric - a reality which cannot be avoided. This geostrategic reality also means that South Asia is 'India Locked' for non-Indians. India's land mass and the ocean around it separate all South Asian nations. They have to either cross Indian territory or meet in a third country. This situation is difficult for landlocked countries like Bhutan, Nepal and Afghanistan. Even India's maritime neighbours, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Pakistan have limited connectivity,

making this the least integrated region in the world. This factor partly explains why regional cooperation through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not been able to deliver its founding objectives.

### **Connectivity within South Asia**

Although SAARC has been in existence since 1985 and formed the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the member states do not enjoy sufficient inter-connectivity or inter-regional trade. It is estimated that inter-regional trade is barely 5 per cent, as compared to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) where inter-regional trade accounts for over a quarter of total trade. Despite cultural and religious commonalities, people-to-people connectivity is also minimal. There is no sense of belonging of being South Asians as compared to people in Europe. There is minimal labour migration within the region since most of it is outside, especially to the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries. Due to differences in geographical size, economies and disparities in influence, region building has become a nearly impossible task. The mistrust and differences of opinion within SAARC countries is reflected even in the charter of the organisation which states 'non-interference in the internal affairs of other states' (Snedden 2016). This clause prevents nations from discussing contentious bilateral or multilateral issues.

The main reason for the retarded progress of SAARC can be attributed to the state of relations between India and Pakistan. People of SAARC countries are gradually losing confidence on its progress. This is the reason why many of these countries are looking to establish trade and economic links outside the region. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) after 20 years of its existence has found a new lease on life mainly due to the ineffectiveness of SAARC. Since SAARC's formation in 1985, regular, annual summit meetings could not be held because either India or Pakistan

boycotted the summits and other countries at times were forced to side with one of them. This situation impacts the economic and social growth of the entire South Asian region. The 19<sup>th</sup> Summit which was scheduled to be held in Pakistan in 2016 could not be held as India withdrew from it alleging that Pakistan was behind a terrorist attack in India.

South Asia is a fractious region and this is one of the main reasons for lack of progress by individual states in economic as well as other social fields. While addressing a workshop on 'Re-energising SAARC Processes', Professor Mitra proposed a theoretical approach to the issue of the SAARC deadlock. He drew attention to the core area of possible cooperation between different actors:

They could come together if pushed to do so by a hegemon, an existing legal framework, or an ideational element binding the respective elites. According to the author R Axelrod, for example, four elements are necessary for cooperation among egoist actors to take place - knowledge, proximity, reciprocity and recursiveness (ISAS 2017: 2).

It appears that SAARC by itself is unlikely to move ahead making the region peaceful and prosperous, and urgent attention by its members is needed to address the issues impacting its progress in order to make regional cooperation more effective.

### **Violent Insurgencies and Terrorism in South Asia**

As of 2016, South Asia had a combined population of 1,766 million, which is nearly 25 per cent of world population (The World Bank 2017). Most of the nations in this region are confronted with development challenges despite enjoying some kind of democracy and political stability. This territory has experienced some of the most violent, prolonged armed conflicts between and within states.

India and Pakistan have fought wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 and a near war situation in Kargil in 1999. Both maintain a huge military

presence at the Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Jammu and Kashmir, which remains a bone of contention.

India and China have fought a war in 1962, which many analysts indicate was a loss for the former. Both came to a military stand-off in Doklam near the Chinese-Bhutanese border as recently as June 2017. In the 1990s, India had to battle with a violent Sikh separatist movement, and Nepal had a Maoist uprising from 1966 to 2006. Even at present, the Eastern parts of peninsular India are experiencing insurgencies with Maoists and Naxalites. The northeastern part of India experiences violence as well. Bangladesh was liberated in 1971 after a war with then-West Pakistan.

Since 1979, Afghanistan is in turmoil having been invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union from 1979-89, and then followed by a brutal civil war and the Taliban rule till 2001. The US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is intervening in Afghanistan and even after 17 years, the situation is volatile, and the country remains unstable. Furthermore, the Taliban are perusing their own objective of establishing power in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. The peace and stability of Afghanistan is a key factor for stability of the entire South Asian region. It should not continue to be a battleground for major powers within and outside the region.

Sri Lanka fought a bitter civil war, and few violent armed conflicts within the country, the longest being the nearly three-decade old civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist terrorist movement. The Sri Lankan conflict came to an end in 2009, when the LTTE was comprehensively and militarily defeated, and now the country is returning back to normalcy.

Pakistan has had to fight with terrorism for a long time, and it appears the military has brought many parts of the country under its effective rule. Currently, however, the major focus area in the region is the India-Pakistan border. Both countries have powerful militaries with nuclear weapons capability. Cross-border terrorism is a common phenomenon. India experienced two terrible acts of

terrorism, when the Indian parliament was attacked in 2001 and a group of terrorists took the financial capital Mumbai under siege in 2008.

However, the good news is the overall level of violence due to insurgencies and terrorism in South Asia is decreasing, although spillover effects of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) need to be monitored by intelligence agencies.

### **The Indian Ocean (IO) and South Asia**

The Cold War-inspired strategic focus on Europe ended with the demise of the bipolar world and the attention on the Atlantic Ocean. The focus, then, shifted more towards the Pacific Ocean with the US being the world's only economic and military super power, and Japan with its developed economy and other developed economies such as South Korea and Australia, all military allies of the US dominating world affairs. This shift towards the Western Pacific Ocean took place during the first decade of the new millennium, followed by the unprecedented rise of China as the world's number two economic power, and enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean (IO) during the beginning of the second decade of the Twenty-first Century. The world could no longer overlook the strategic significance of IO and attention of major maritime powers was now diverted here, together with the Pacific Ocean. Until recently, the world's attention in the IO was focused mainly around issues on land in Afghanistan and Iraq, though there was a heavy involvement of the IO, through the Persian Gulf in both these situations.

The IO is emerging as the centre of gravity in the strategic world. According to Ghosh (2011), what US maritime strategist Admiral Mahan said many years back 'whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters' is particularly true in the context of struggle for gaining maritime influence in the region. There is a new world economic order developing in and around this ocean. The unipolar world dominated by economic and military power of the US is on

the decline mainly due to the rise of Asian economic powers such as China and India. The rise of China to the number two position in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) terms, and India to the seventh position has changed the economic balance, and with it the military balance. There are other major economies dependent on the IO such as Japan, South Korea, ASEAN countries and Australia for obtaining their energy supplies, especially oil and for trade. These changing dynamics have resulted in geostrategic competition between China and India. As their wealth, power and interests expand, they increasingly come into contact with each other (Australia India Institute 2017). This contact is taking place in the IO. Both these countries have unstable relations, mainly due to unresolved land border issues and the war they fought in 1962. New Delhi perceives China's entry into the IO and growing presence in South Asia, East Africa and elsewhere in this region as shaping the strategic environment and forming alignments that could be used against it. This strategic competition will decide the future of this region. How India and China get along in terms of cooperation, coexistence, competition and confrontation could determine one of the key strategic alliances in the region (Ibid.).

One of the most common characteristics of the IO states is that the majority are members of the developing world. Most of these countries have low human development indices. Problems of underdevelopment, poor governance, lack of political stability and conflict are, thus, common. Due to a feeling of insecurity, they focus on military development rather than human development (Dennis and Forbes 2008). It appears that the threat reality and threat perception are not in congruence, and state security is overemphasised.

There is no doubt that the IO with South Asia in the epicentre, and located so close to the busiest maritime trade routes and astride the world 'energy highway' between oil producing Middle East to heaviest oil consuming industrial northeast Asia, is in a most strategic location.

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China also seeks access to the IO through Myanmar. In fact, this geographical proximity of China to the IO is used to justify the claim that it is a resident power, not an outside one.

South Asia is also considered a 'nuclear flashpoint', where a conflict could erupt between the two nuclear weapon states, India and Pakistan. Both are developing their nuclear capabilities, including second strike capabilities with long and medium range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads and nuclear powered or armed submarines equipped with ballistic missiles. India considers this as a need to defend against China and Pakistan. Due to nuclear and ballistic missile capability, both India and Pakistan have the ability to threaten nations beyond South Asia, and that has given an added strategic importance to this region even beyond its geographical and political boundaries (Snedden 2016).

### **Major Powers in South Asia**

#### *China*

China is not a resident power in the IO. However, it considers itself to be part of the IO based on its common borders with littorals and voyages, and presence in the Ocean during the ancient Maritime Silk Route:

China has shown a keen interest in maintaining unimpeded access to the Indian Ocean shipping lanes as it depends heavily on petroleum transport from the Middle East and East Africa. Also, China is dependent on the Indian Ocean to transport their export products to Europe and Africa and South Asia (Colombage 2017).

The Republic is enhancing its strategic outlook in this ocean and wishes to maintain its presence like any other major power. Koh indicates that:

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Energy security remains a perennial concern for Beijing since it underpins sustained economic growth that forms the basis of peaceful development (Koh 2016:148).

Chinese funded development projects in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with a special focus on South Asia, are not viewed favourably by India, Japan and the US. These projects, especially maritime related ones, in India's immediate neighbourhood such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives and Bangladesh, are viewed with great suspicion as attempts by China to have strategic and military footholds in the host countries. China's unilateral and assertive behaviour in the East and South China seas are often cited as its strategic objectives in the IO. Beijing always indicates that these projects are purely economic and much needed by the host countries. No other country has shown such a keen interest in infrastructure development projects. Many developing countries also see the BRI as an opportunity, rather than a threat. However, due to strategic mistrust and perceptions, the full potential of the BRI has not been derived.

### *The US*

The US is still the most dominant maritime power in the IO. The developing situation in the Western Pacific, North Korean nuclear programme and China's assertive behaviour, seems to be the key concerns of the US. The US is carrying out Freedom of Navigation Operations (FNOPs) in the Western Pacific Ocean and aspires to be the global policeman in the IO as well. The US' 'Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power' describes the area of their focus: the so-called 'Indo-Asia Pacific.' The US plans to deploy 60 per cent of their maritime force capabilities to maintain security in this region (US Coast Guard 2015). India, despite having the biggest navy in the region, still depends on the US to act as a guarantor of maritime security. Enhanced cooperation between the two in defence procurements, technology transfers, and formally signing the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement in



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August 2017, after years of negotiations since 2004, are clear signs of this renewed cooperation. This agreement would facilitate access to each other's military facilities for logistics during port calls, joint military exercises, military training, disaster relief operations and humanitarian operations (IDSA 2016). India has now become the biggest buyer of US weapons, and this fact was even appreciated by the US President when the Indian Prime Minister Modi visited Washington in July 2017 (Natarajan 2017).

### *Japan*

Japan is dependent on the IO for energy security and to continue its trade. Nagao (2017:1) indicates that 'a new dynamic is prevailing in Japanese foreign policy' – that a paradigm shift has taken place. In September 2015, Japan amended its constitution to allow its military forces to play a more effective role in maintaining world peace, and a more robust role in the maritime domain to ensure the safety and freedom of maritime commerce. This change has paved the way for the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) to participate in a number of overseas operations in the recent past. This is a move away from the mere protection of the homeland. Prime Minister Abe emphasised the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' of Japan and their determination to shoulder a major role and responsibilities as an important stakeholder in the IOR (Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet 2017). Prime Minister Abe's resounding electoral victory in October 2017 is seen as enhancing Japanese influence in the IOR, and strengthening his country's role overseas with necessary changes to the pacifist constitution. Japan, which is concerned about the security situation in the East China Sea, is increasingly looking at India and the US as key partners in the IOR. It is pledging to develop coast guard capabilities in countries like Sri Lanka, with a view to enhancing maritime security and safety, and also to counter growing Chinese influence in the region. Japan, together with India, has launched a maritime connectivity initiative named Asia-Africa Growth

Corridor (AAGC) to link Asia with East Africa, but mainly to counter China's BRI.

### ***Australia***

Australia has the longest Indian Ocean coastline, and by far the biggest maritime jurisdiction in the IO. Holmes (2014) describes the relationship between Australia and China as follows:

China is Australia's largest trading partner in terms of both imports and exports. Australia is China's sixth largest trading partner; it is China's fifth biggest supplier of imports and its tenth biggest customer for exports. 25 per cent of Australia's manufactured imports come from China; 13 per cent of its exports are thermal coal to China.

Australia values its growing strategic partnership with India, and wishes to maintain it and enhance defence cooperation further. It wishes to see a stable IOR without instability and rivalry leading to increased militarisation in the region.

### **Significant Changes and Trends in South Asia**

The most significant change in South Asia is the rise of China and its influence in the region. China's rise to the number two position in economic standing based on GDP, a position enjoyed by Japan for a long time and the entry of People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) into the IO, especially after 2009 to combat the menace of Somali piracy, has changed the geostrategic balance of the region. As discussed before, China's grand plan for BRI and investment on developing maritime-related infrastructure projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Maldives has created concerns in India's strategic paradigm. India, together with US and Japan, considers these projects as having strategic and military objectives with a view to strangulate India.

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PLAN has an increased presence in this region, and their warships visit these ports for replenishment and on goodwill visits. Now that China has a logistic base in Djibouti, PLAN's presence could be reduced in South Asia.

Former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made a speech on 18 October 2017 in Washington, in which he said that the US' intensified interests in the IO and deepening ties with India is to counter growing Chinese influence (Kurukulasuriya 2017). This was the first time that the US accepted publicly that its rebalancing strategy toward Asia and IO is being motivated by economic and military rise of China. The US is pushing to involve India in maintaining FNOPs in the Western Pacific Ocean as well. The thrust of Tillerson's speech was that China is a common adversary for both. SACs need to pay attention to this developing situation, which could lead to conflict as most of the countries have close relations with China too. This could have ramifications for the military balance in the region as well. It is most likely that smaller and less powerful countries in South Asia could be caught between this struggle for power and influence.

Chinese investment on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has fast tracked economic development of Pakistan. Through CPEC, China will have access to oil and gas produced in the Persian Gulf region through the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Oil and gas can now be pumped to western China from the Gwadar Port after travelling a short distance from the Persian Gulf, rather than travelling across the IO, Malacca Strait and South China Sea. This will reduce the 'Malacca Dilemma' for China, and can benefit Pakistan economically. The latter needs sustained economic development in order to address poverty, major electricity, and water and energy deficiencies within the country. The country will also need to handle the unsettled Baloch elements and ensure security of CPEC; and deal with India, which is becoming stronger economically and militarily. The Kashmir issue needs to be resolved as it is the main conflicting situation, which has been going on for the last 71 years.

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Chinese investment in Sri Lanka has led to much debate within, as well as outside the country. There were many accusations against Chinese funded projects. The Hambantota Port deal, which gave equity for China in lieu of accumulated debts, is seen as a deliberate move to invest large amounts of money not purely on economic viability, but, in order to trap the recipient country for obtaining equity, when that country is unable to service the loans taken. However, Sri Lanka's geographical advantage and the closeness to the busiest shipping lane in the IO, deep water ports and navigable waters augur well for its ambition to be a Maritime Hub. This ambition could not have been achieved without Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on port and maritime infrastructure-related developments, especially from China. The Chinese-operated Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT) in the new Colombo south port has become the biggest port in terms of handling Twenty Equivalent Units (TEU) in South Asia. This is evident by the fact that the biggest container vessel to call South Asia, MV Milan of the Maersk line, with 20,568 TEU capacity, and an overall length of 399 metres, made her maiden call at CICT in October 2017 (Daily Financial Times 2017). With Colombo being the primary trans-shipment market for India and Bangladesh, the CICT is gearing up to play an increasing role in maritime trade. Further, the port of Hambantota can play a major role in the BRI as it is located just 12 nautical miles away from a busiest East-West shipping lane in the region.

Addressing the 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Congress in Beijing in October 2017, President Xi Jinping reiterated his interest in positioning China as a great power. This is a move away from the previous Chinese leaders as they were guarded about the country's true intentions. President Xi is seen as a leader who will place China on the global stage, and make it the most powerful state on earth. He has also indicated his intention of modernising the Armed Forces by 2035. Moreover, noteworthy is the pledge made by the Chinese leader that:

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No matter what state of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion (Vidanage 2017).

Major changes have taken place in India as well. It was maritime blind and neglected the ocean around it as it was focusing more on developing its army, with a view to handling long stretches of disputed land borders. This resulted in creating a strategic maritime vacuum and China was quick to fill it. India is now concerned about the BRI and anticipates that the maritime development projects that China is investing in the neighbourhood are an attempt to strangulate India strategically. India has come up with few new initiatives mainly to offset Chinese presence. India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy coupled with Look/Act East policy has helped it to engage with all its neighbours, except Pakistan. This policy has strengthened ties with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal in the region, and Myanmar and Japan outside the region. India and Bangladesh settled a long drawn maritime boundary dispute through a Permanent Court of Arbitration judgment. India is going ahead with a Regional Motor Vehicle Agreement between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. If successfully implemented, it will boost people-to-people connectivity at least between these four states. India further commenced a major maritime project 'Sagar Mala', which aims to develop large number of Indian ports along the 7500 km long Indian coastline, and to connect them through internal road communication networks. If this project is successfully completed, it will enhance coastal connectivity within SAARC region, except with Pakistan. India is also developing a deep water terminal in Vizhinjam off Trivandrum, a project that would add to deep water maritime capacity of the region.

India is enjoying high economic growth rate and needs to sustain and maintain it to address serious development issues and poverty and provide basic facilities such as latrines to a large number of people. Under its 'Make in India' project and high economic growth, the country is attracting FDI. The smaller, less economically strong nations in South Asia could benefit from this

economic growth. However, suspicion about its 'big brother' behaviour is hampering this process.

In the current strategic environment, a significant change is developing in cooperation and relations between India, Japan and the US - the maritime trinity. This has taken the strategic importance of Pakistan slightly away from the US. However, the US still depends on Pakistan due to its involvement in Afghanistan. The maritime trinity has led to an undeclared 'Maritime Cold War.' This competition for influence and power could be disastrous for the region.

## **Conclusion**

South Asia comprises of the Indian subcontinent and its immediate neighbourhood. It has a strategically important position in the IO, which is fast becoming the key ocean in the Twenty-first Century. SACs have different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds and are prone to internal and external conflicts, despite (or perhaps because of the region's low human indices). The major conflict in the region arises from the mistrust between India and Pakistan.

The rise of China as an economic and military power and its focus in this region by way of BRI have resulted in creating a strategic convergence between India, the US and Japan, mainly to counter growing Chinese influence. India is also developing economic and military capabilities. China and India, with their renewed influence, appear to be vying for power vis-à-vis the IO and South Asia. This competition is putting smaller, less powerful states into a strategic dilemma which is likely to hinder social, political and economic development in the region. SACs need to address regional problems by themselves as they should have shared interests and concerns; and should not allow outside powers to intervene and interfere with the internal matters of the region.

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*Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia*

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# **Pakistan and India's SCO Membership: Potential Hurdles and Need for Political Wisdom**

*Scholarly Essay*

**Dr Boris Volkhonsky\***

**T**he historic decision taken at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan in June 2017 bears a significance reaching far beyond the boundaries of its eight member states. With the accession to the SCO of India and Pakistan, the total population of the Organization reached 45 per cent of the global total, with the collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeding one third of the global one.

This fact, in itself, makes the Organization a game changer and an important (or, even decisive) factor in the new emerging multipolar world order. On the other hand, simultaneous entrance to the SCO of two countries which have serious differences (if not hostility) in their bilateral relations, is fraught with certain challenges and even threats both to the integrity of the Organization itself and the security situation in the whole Eurasian region which, according to many forecasts, is destined to be the centre stage of global geopolitics in the Twenty-first Century.

The step was highly estimated both in Pakistan and globally. Pakistan's media hailed it as a 'historic day' (Dawn 2017a). The UN General Secretary António Guterres congratulated Pakistan for attaining membership in the SCO. Chinese President Xi Jinping made a proposal for a five-year treaty for good neighbourliness among SCO members (Ibid.).

At the same time, many observers pointed out that the simultaneous entry of the two countries into the Organization does not by itself guarantee that their differences will be resolved automatically. Chinese experts expressed concerns that the two

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should not turn the SCO into an arena for their bilateral confrontation, stating that such a turn could impede existing cooperation within the Organization (The Hindustan Times 2017a).

The subsequent turn of events showed that such concerns were well-grounded and that the membership of any two states in the same international organisation does not mean the resolution of their bilateral differences. For example, the India-China border standoff later the same summer over the disputed territory in the Donglang (Doklam) region brought the countries to the brink of an open military conflict. Despite the fact that it was resolved after two-month long exchange of belligerent remarks from both sides, experts do not exclude a possibility of future face-offs (The Hindustan Times 2017b).

When it comes to the decades-long history of tensions between the two rivals in South Asia – India and Pakistan (needless to mention the nuclear status of both), the situation seems to be even more complicated. On the one hand, cooperation within one international body presents new opportunities for easing the existing tensions. On the other hand, the tensions themselves may turn into a factor affecting not only the bilateral relations, but the situation in the whole Eurasian region, prompting other member states (as well as outside actors) to react, thus, aggravating the situation even further.

The following discussion deals with only a few of the crucial challenges facing India and Pakistan as well as the SCO as a whole.

## **Afghanistan**

The situation in Afghanistan presents the biggest threat to the security of the whole region – not only to South and Central Asia, but also to China, Russia and also indirectly (or, maybe directly) to Central and Eastern Europe, north east and south east Asia, and far beyond. This issue is widely discussed in other contributions to this volume, but it would be proper to outline some important moments here.

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Now that the Western coalition despite its previous promises has retained its military presence in Afghanistan not having achieved any of the previously declared goals of the military intervention, the real aims of the 'Global West' and its vanguard, the United States (US), in that country becomes obvious to everyone (even though it had been obvious to unbiased experts long before). The task is neither eradicating terrorism or drug trade (in fact, both flourished as a result of the Western interference), nor bringing peace and stability to the country, but rather maintaining a situation of uncertainty which would enable them to have a foothold in close vicinity to the US' biggest geopolitical rivals, Russia and China.

In such a context, the role of the SCO in the future of Afghanistan rises immensely. Surely, the process of Afghan reconciliation and peaceful settlement should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. This does not exclude constructive assistance and aid from Afghanistan's neighbours and regional powers. At present, Afghanistan is an observer in the SCO, but surely the time has come for the SCO members to consider raising the status of that country (together with Iran) within the Organization to full membership.

The problem, though, is that even among experts, there is no unanimity in approaches to the problem of post-war reconciliation in Afghanistan. Whenever you discuss this issue with colleagues from, say, India, you may often hear that Russia, India and Iran should forge an alliance in order to help Afghans solve their problems. On the other hand, in discussions with Pakistani experts you hear something different - that it is for Russia, China and Pakistan to join hands in order to achieve a similar end.

Of course, it is flattering to hear that in both cases Russia is viewed as an important player, but such suggestions bear an inherent drawback. Both are based on an assumption that a zero-sum game is possible in Afghanistan and either side can attain unilateral benefits at the expense of the other. Indeed, this is a very

dangerous assumption which can only revert the situation back to the 1990s with the all-out war and final triumph of the most unscrupulous, cruel and inhumane force. With Daesh attempting to gain a foothold in Afghanistan, it may result in a situation when we would be longing to see the return of the Afghan Taliban<sup>1</sup> (definitely not to be confused with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan).

This dictates an urgent need to work out a collective approach to the issues of Afghanistan on a win-win basis with the joint participation of India and Pakistan, along with others, despite existing differences between them. Both countries have historical ties with Afghanistan, and even though they primarily maintain ties with different ethnic communities there, this very fact should be looked upon as a complementary one rather than conflicting. So, the ball is currently both in Pakistan and India's court.

There are different views on the role and nature of the Afghan Taliban (my view is not too popular in Russia, and even least so, in India). But, no one can neglect the fact that the Taliban are an important and powerful force in Afghanistan representing the interests of considerable factions of the society. Therefore, their inclusion into the future framework of power-sharing in the country seems to be inevitable. This underlines the crucial role of Pakistan which, using its levers within the movement can help turn it into a civilised political force, rather than a militant group.

On the other hand, the role for India (as well as Iran, whose SCO membership seems imminent sooner or later) can be that of guaranteeing the rights of ethnic and religious minorities and ensuring communal stability.

## **Transport Corridors**

There is no secret that integration on the Eurasian space is often viewed by China as a means of enhancing its economic influence among immediate neighbours and far beyond. This is one of the core reasons why Chinese leadership came up with the Belt and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Volkhonsky 2017.

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Road Initiative (often referred to as One Belt One Road [OBOR]). The land routes of OBOR go across all of Eurasia, some of them crossing Russia to Northern and Western Europe, others going across Central Asia to the Mediterranean. An integral part of OBOR is the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) allowing China to get direct access to the Arabian Sea, the Gulf and the mineral resources (primarily, hydrocarbons) of the region. In this context, it is often stated that the SCO is viewed by China as one of the tools enabling it to enact this Initiative.

It is no secret that the OBOR initiative (both CPEC and the Maritime Silk Road) has created a rather suspicious attitude in India which was manifested in May 2017 when India refused to take part in the Silk Road Summit in Beijing (Dawn 2017b). One of the reasons for such a negative approach to the Initiative as a whole, and CPEC as an integral part of it, is the fact that the latter goes through the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir which, in India's eyes consolidates the status of the territory as a split one.

On the other hand, India (together with Russia and Iran, later joined by a dozen other countries of West and Central Asia, Transcaucasia and even East and Northern Europe) has come up with another integrational initiative in this part of Eurasia - that is, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Currently, its main participants are Russia, India, Iran and Azerbaijan.

Again, much more often, one tends to hear statements that the two projects run in conflict with each other. But even a brief glance at the map of this part of Eurasia proves that the two projects may in fact be complementary rather than competing. While most Belt and Road routes are heading from East to West, the INSTC, by definition, goes across the main routes which may enable solving the currently existing logistical problems, such as the circulation of containers.

Surely, the integration of this part of Eurasia does not suit the interest of the outside forces which see in it a threat to their global

dominance. Therefore, we see attempts to undermine these projects. Thus, the separatist movement in Balochistan is obviously supported from outside (Congressional hearings in the US being one, but not the only proof of such support). The aim is clear – creating a state of uncertainty in this Pakistani province would inevitably diminish the importance of the Gwadar Port which is located there.

Similarly, the first trilateral Russia–Iran–Azerbaijan Summit in August 2016 in Baku was almost totally dedicated to the INSTC. It is hardly a coincidence that a new aggravation of the situation in Nagorny (Mountainous) Karabakh and military clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia took place both shortly before the Summit (in April 2016) and about half a year after (in February 2017). Again, the growing tension in Transcaucasia could impede the implementation of the project, thus, affecting the whole process of Eurasian integration.

This underlines the importance of understanding that all Eurasian countries (the SCO member states, prospective members like Iran and Afghanistan, observers and dialogue partners like Azerbaijan) are ‘in one boat’, and broad cooperation and integration is something that should not be approached on a zero-sum basis, but rather as a tool serving common interests.

## **India–Pakistan Bilateral Relations**

One of the risks regarding India and Pakistan simultaneously joining the SCO lies in a possibility of their bilateral differences and conflicts being brought to the table of the Organization. Despite the fact that bilateral relations between the two sometimes show signs of ‘thaw’ (Narendra Modi’s presence at Nawaz Sharif’s granddaughter’s wedding being just one such sign), by and large, the situation remains worrisome sometimes balancing on the brink of an open conflict.

Until now, Pakistan and India as well as ‘older’ SCO members have been cautious not to threaten the integrity of the Organization by including the conflicting bilateral issue into the

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agenda. China specifically warned the two countries on the eve of their accession to full membership not to bring their bilateral disputes to the table. But that does not mean that such a turn of events can be totally excluded.

Definitely, an outside observer can hardly advise Pakistan and India how to solve the Kashmir problem – it has not been solved within the 71 years of both countries' independent existence, and is not likely to be solved in any foreseeable future. But examples from other regions can be drawn as a possible model for the solution.

One model is Alsace which in the past served as a pretext for numerous wars between Germany and France, including World War I and, indirectly, World War II. Today, the whole Western Europe is united under the 'umbrella' of the European Union (EU), with Strasburg being one of its main centres. The current ongoing crisis within the EU definitely raises doubts about its future as a whole, but the very fact that no one in Western Europe currently regards the territorial disputes as a *casus belli*, shows that one way or another, the Kashmir problem may be solved along similar lines.

Probably, it is too early to say that the SCO may turn into a Eurasian analogue of the EU, but it is worth remembering that 60 years back, the EU itself started as a minor agreement between six countries aimed at the regulation of coal and steel production. The current state of the SCO by far surpasses the level of European integration in the 1950s. The broader the integration on issues where all countries can find benefits for themselves without affecting the legitimate interests of the others, the more likely it is that bilateral differences become smoother.

The other example is a very recent one – that is, the already mentioned Chinese-Indian standoff over the territorial dispute between China and Bhutan in the summer of 2017. The belligerent statements both in New Delhi and in Beijing prompted some observers to say that the world is balancing on the brink of an open military conflict between the two nuclear powers, both harbouring



leadership ambitions. Of course, there is a saying that 'history does not have subjunctive or conditional mood', so we do not know how things would have gone if the two countries *were not* SCO members. But the fact remains that both are, and the standoff *did not* result in a war between them.

## **Water Resources**

Last but not least, it is worth drawing attention to an issue presenting a non-traditional security threat to the region, but looked upon by many experts as the main reason of any wars in the Twenty-first Century: water-sharing of trans-border rivers and other water streams and basins. Brahma Chellaney (2008) writes:

The battles of yesterday were fought over land. Those of today are over energy. But the battles of tomorrow will be over water. And nowhere else does that prospect look more real than in Asia.

South Asia was listed among the most risk-prone areas in the report by the office of the Director of US National Intelligence in 2012 (Quinn 2012).

Until now, international law does not have a universal code regulating this issue. The two conventions most often referred to, are the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention adopted by the UN Economic Commission for Europe in March 1992; and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses adopted by the UN General Assembly in May 1997.

The problem with these and other such conventions and treaties is that none of them is binding for the signatories, and do not envisage real mechanisms for solving possible conflicts. In most cases, the issue is dealt with on bilateral basis, with the 'upstream' country tending to act as a monopolist disregarding the interests of the 'downstream' state.

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For many years, the Indo–Pakistan Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 has been looked upon as an exemplary one despite all the problems and differences in the two countries' relations. Only recently, India's activity on the Indus River's tributaries started to test the durability and the very essence of the treaty (Wirsing and Jaspardo 2006).<sup>2</sup> Attempts to solve the problem on a bilateral basis (and even mediation by the World Bank) have led nowhere. The unresolved Kashmir problem only further aggravates the situation.

Some authors even state that the root of the Kashmir conflict lies in the issue of water-sharing which for Pakistan is a matter of survival, while other issues like self-determination, human rights, etc. only distract attention from the main problem (Waslekar 2005).

The issue of water-sharing acquires a new aspect in the context of post-war reconciliation in Afghanistan. India has emerged as one of the main foreign investors in the country, and one of the projects sponsored is the Kama hydroelectric project on the Kabul River (which is one of the main tributaries of the Indus). This project may further affect the water flow coming to Pakistan already suffering from water shortages (Iqbal 2010).

On the other hand, being an 'upstream' country with regard to Pakistan or Bangladesh (when it concerns the Ganges), India itself becomes a 'downstream' country affected by China's activity on the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo) River.

The Brahmaputra River flows into Eastern India from the Chinese territory, therefore, India together with Bangladesh becomes dependent on Chinese activity on its upstream. Chinese plans concerning the transfer of water resources from the South to

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: India began construction of the USD 864 million Kishanganga hydroelectric project (KHEP) in 2009. The Kishanganga, as the river is known in India, becomes the Neelum when it enters Pakistan, and is a tributary of the Jhelum River which flows into the Indus. With 80 per cent of its irrigated agriculture drawing water from the Indus, Pakistan relies on the river for its food and water security. On 19 May 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally inaugurated the plant, despite protests by Pakistan.

the North (especially to Xinjiang which is designed as the main hub of OBOR) are viewed by India as a threat to its national security. Although China has denied that the hydro-technical projects on the Brahmaputra are part of this 'South-North' project, India has little trust in such statements (Jha 2011).

At the same time, China is not a signatory to any international (or, even regional) conventions regulating the use of trans-border water resources, and enjoys the status of a natural monopolist in this matter controlling the sources of most great Eurasian rivers. Therefore, it always attempts to solve existing problems on a bilateral basis with its immediate neighbours. As for India, China does not even have a bilateral agreement on water-sharing (Tsering 2011). This only adds to the mistrust already felt in India:

China's unique status as the source of transboundary river flows to the largest number of countries in the world and its water disputes with virtually all riparian neighbours has serious implications for its major south-westerly neighbour, India (Chellaney and Tellis 2011).

Such an attitude is not limited to the China-India relationship. China is not a signatory of the agreements concerning the main river of Southeast Asia, the Mekong, and participates in the discussions over it only when it does not affect its own interests.

Likewise, when discussing its activities on the tributaries of the great Siberian River, the Irtysh, China is ready to talk only to its immediate neighbour, Kazakhstan, but not to Russia, although it is the latter which is most affected by such activity. As many experts point out, China's activity on the upstream of the Irtysh and its tributaries threatens to turn the midstream of this great Siberian River into a series of shallow lakes and muddy swamps.

This, again, dictates the need of working out a collective approach to the problems of water-sharing, and the SCO may become a natural forum for discussing such matters. This definitely

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raises the status of Pakistan, which, being a country most affected by its 'downstream' status can come up with an initiative together with Russia, Uzbekistan (the 'downstream' Central Asian countries), and other SCO members to work out a regional convention governing such issues. India, as a country knowing the concern of both 'upstream' and 'downstream' countries, may become a co-sponsor of such an initiative, thus, forging an alliance with other SCO members, including Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

India and Pakistan's accession to the SCO as full members is definitely raising the authority of the Organization as a whole. But it demands that all member states - old ones as well as the 'newcomers' - demonstrate political wisdom so that the bilateral differences do not undermine the emerging centre of power in the new multipolar world order.

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# Climate Change and its Threats to the Sovereignty of South Asian States

*Working Paper*

**Biswas Baral\***

## **Abstract**

The greatest threat to nation-states today comes not from the armies of other countries, but from a range of other factors or Non-Traditional Security Threats (NTSTs). These threats include changing demography, terrorism, cross-border crimes, refugees, food and water shortage, growing energy needs, and cyber hacking. This paper deals with arguably the most pressing NTST to all eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member states: Climate Change.

**Key words:** Climate Change, Security Threat, Food and Water Shortage, South Asia, Adaptation.

## **Introduction**

In earlier times, the greatest threat to nation-states came from the outside, i.e. from the armies of other countries, and this is how, traditionally, the security threats of a country came to be defined. But, increasingly, threats to modern nation-states are coming not from the armies of other countries, but from a range of other factors, which, collectively, have come to be studied under the rubric of NTSTs.

Non-state actors (NSAs), such as terrorist networks, drug cartels and maritime piracy networks, as well as intra-state conflicts, have assumed greater importance as new-age threats to national security (Srikanth 2014). Apart from such non-state and

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transnational actors, global climate change has emerged as a credible and serious threat to the existence of nation-states (Ibid.).

Since it is not possible to deal with every non-traditional threat, this paper will focus on climate change because not only has it emerged as perhaps the most important issue in South Asia, directly impacting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, it is also closely linked to other NTSTs. General (R) Stephen Cheney, while speaking to the Environment Justice Foundation (EJF), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working on environmental issues in the Global South, said that:

If Europe thinks they have a problem with migration today ... wait 20 years. See what happens when climate change drives people out of Africa—the Sahel [sub-Saharan area] especially—and we're talking now not just one or two million, but 10 or 20 [million] (Taylor 2017).

Sir David King, the former chief scientific advisor to the United Kingdom (UK) government, told the EJF:

What we are talking about here is an existential threat to our civilisation (Ibid.).

Globally, governments are also increasingly accepting that climate change is a serious threat to national security. For instance, in a recent Pew Global Survey (2017), from the 38 countries that were polled, people identified the Islamic State and climate change as two leading national security threats. While the terrorist organisation was labelled the biggest security threat in 18 countries, respondents in 13 countries said that climate change was the biggest national security threat their country faced.

Similar surveys have been carried out in South Asia. But people here respond a little differently. For instance, in a 2016 survey carried out in Nepal, which covered over 5,000 households in the entire major ecological regions of the country, over half the respondents said they had 'no knowledge' of climate change



(Koirala 2017). But when they were probed further, nine out of ten households said that they had witnessed progressively weaker monsoon over the past 25 years. Around 89 per cent reported increased temperatures in this same period, while nearly 100 per cent said incidents of droughts had increased in this time. So the impacts of climate change are all too real in South Asia. The problem is even more acute in coastal states like the Maldives and Bangladesh, which have seen dangerous rise in sea levels in recent time.

A tenth of the world's population—634 million—live in coastal areas that lie between zero and ten metres above sea level; and 75 per cent of them live in Asia (Busby 2007). Bangladesh has 46 per cent of its population in low elevation areas. Devastating floods could decimate the livelihoods of millions there and send tens of thousands of refugees across the border to India, potentially leading to tensions between the refugees and recipient communities (Ibid.).

A warming climate poses other risks as well. A 'wet-bulb temperature' of 35°C is considered the upper limit for human survivability. The extremes of 'wet-bulb temperature' in South Asia are likely to approach and, in a few locations, exceed this threshold by the late Twenty-first Century (Im, Pal and Eltahir 2017). The most intense hazard will be concentrated around densely populated agricultural regions of the Ganges and Indus river basins (Ibid.). In many of these places, the climate will be so hot that people will not be able to survive and they will be forced to migrate.

The pattern of the Indian monsoon will also change under global warming. Scientists found that a 4-12 per cent change of daily monsoon rainfall in India is to be expected with 1° Celsius of warming (Sinha 2013). There is a chance of 13-50 per cent change if Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) continue to be emitted unabated (Ibid.).

In this era of fast-changing climates, the influence of rapid climatic change on natural resources must be factored into our understanding of state fragility and state sovereignty (Femia and

Werrell 2017). This includes increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather events, which will in turn increase stresses on the critical resources underpinning national security—water, food, transport, and energy systems (Ibid.). If unmanaged, these pressures can decimate livelihoods and contribute to a broad range of destabilising trends, including population displacements, migration, political unrest, state fragility, internal conflict, and, potentially, state collapse (Ibid.).

Though rapid economic growth is predicted to continue throughout South Asia, a number of challenges will dominate policy agendas till 2030, chief among them, ensuring food and water security for an expanding population (Walsh 2017). These challenges will also be exacerbated by rising temperatures, receding groundwater levels, rainfall variations, flooding and glacial melts (Ibid.).

The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that the most food insecure populations are in South Asia. Agriculture is one of the region's biggest employers, contributing 18 per cent to the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Extreme temperatures are likely to badly affect production of wheat, rice and other crops in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (Ibid.). It is anticipated that wheat production in South Asia will decline by 50 per cent by 2050 (Fraiture, Smakhtin, Bossio, McCornick, and Hoanh et al. 2014). The region's population is 1.86 billion and is expected to grow by 25 per cent by 2030 and 40 per cent by 2050. More people means the need for more housing, energy and water for crop production, industry and drinking, and climate change will make all these challenges worse (Ibid.).

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) estimates that 7.9 million people were displaced in 2015 due to sudden-onset disasters in South Asia, which alone accounted for 36 per cent of the total global displacement (IOM 2016). Heightened food and water insecurity and displacement of people will in turn directly affect state sovereignty and security. This is because state

sovereignty, in the modern sense, is built on a state's output and input legitimacy (IOM 2016).

Output legitimacy involves a state's ability to meet its citizens' demands for basic resources (food, water, energy, employment), while input legitimacy involves a state's ability to offer its citizens a say in how they are governed (a vote and legal recourse). Climate change, by compromising a state's ability to provide basic resources, can erode its output legitimacy. This erosion can contribute to state fragility and state failure, which, in turn, has implications for regional and international insecurity (Ibid.).

To evaluate how climate change impacts state sovereignty in South Asia, this paper studies the problem under a formulation provided by Femia and Werrell (2017). They offer six variations of how the sovereignty of modern nation-states is compromised by climate change. Each of these six variations, with particular focus on South Asia, is discussed below:

### *Catch-22 States*

'As natural resources are strained, modern states often turn to the global market to meet the difference between their capacity to provide food, water, and energy, and the demands of their populations. However, the global market is increasingly vulnerable to price fluctuations driven by an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, presenting a catch-22 for resource-stressed nations. Prior to the country's ongoing civil war, the al-Assad regime in **Syria** produced a significant percentage of its wheat locally, as well as lucrative cash crops such as cotton, despite the water-intensity of those pursuits. However, these crops were challenged by phenomena linked to climate change: multi-decade winter precipitation decline and the worst drought in Syria's recorded history, from 2007 to 2010. These dynamics contributed to agricultural and pastoral devastation across Syria, and the displacement of nearly two million people. The al-Assad regime's ideal of greater self-sufficiency, which diminished the

country's dependence on the global food market, was ultimately unsustainable due to local climatic, natural resource, and infrastructural conditions' (Femia and Werrell 2017: 12-13). Syria presents a perfect case of how state sovereignty can be undermined by effects of climate change. But what is true of Syria is also true of South Asia.

When India decided to blockade the Indo-Nepal border in 2015-16, **Nepal** had just witnessed one of its poorest monsoons, a phenomena directly linked to climate change (Paudel 2010). In that year, the production of paddy in Nepal, the country's main crop, had decreased by 9.95 per cent compared to the five-year average, and by 10.22 per cent compared to 2014-15 (GoN, WFP and FAO 2016). But since Nepal imports most of its food either from India directly, or through the land route via India, due to the blockade, it could not import anything. Thus, the Indian blockade, coupled with Nepal's new vulnerabilities due to climate change, brought the country a step closer to a state of famine. Thanks to its overdependence on food products from other countries, Nepal these days has the priciest food in South Asia (WFP 2017). As Nepal struggles to feed its people, the legitimacy of the Nepali state is being undermined.

Like Nepal, **Bhutan** also depends on India for its food, as it spends over USD 77 million to import food products every year. Bhutan's dependence on India for food has increased, even though 64.4 per cent of its population relies on agriculture. A study by RNR Research Development Center in Wengkhari, Mongar, in 2009 showed that 51 per cent of the total rice consumed in 50 out of 69 gouges in the six eastern *dzongkhags* (districts) was imported from India (GPI Atlantic 2012). As Nepal's example shows, it is dangerous to rely on any one country for your vital needs.

The situation is not very different in **Bangladesh**, which in 2017 imported 600,000 tonnes of rice to replenish reserves and rein in prices. The world's fourth-biggest producer of rice (more than 30 million tonnes a year), Bangladesh consumes almost all its production to feed its population and requires imports to cope with

shortages caused by natural disasters such as floods and droughts (Reuters 2017). Growing impacts of climate change will make these shortfalls worse, and with it the role of outside actors in Bangladesh will greatly increase.

Likewise, food imports in **Pakistan** increased by 2.32 per cent in the first ten months of 2017-18 (July-April) compared to the same period in 2016-17. The new imports were worth USD 5.21 billion, compared to imports of USD 5.1 in the same period last year (The Nation 2018). With the fertile Indus valley hit by recurring droughts and floods due to climate change, Pakistan's reliance on foreign actors to meet domestic needs will also increase.

Interestingly, even **India**, which supplies food to its smaller neighbours, increasingly relies on food imports. This is happening due to back-to-back droughts, lack of long-term investment in agriculture and increasing demands from a growing population. India recently made its first purchase of corn in 16 years and has been increasing purchase of other products, such as lentils and oil meals. Wheat and sugar stocks are depleting fast, and some traders predict the need for higher imports next year as well (Reuters 2016).

So nearly all the countries in South Asia are becoming food insecure and have to rely on foreign markets to meet the shortfall. But climate change is ravaging crop productions around the world, which in turn is increasing the prices of agriculture produce. As Syria's case illustrates, not everyone can afford these higher prices. Nor will there be enough for everyone to import. Without enough to feed their population, and given the variability of global supplies, civil unrest in South Asia, resulting from shortages of food and water could, get progressively worse. In some cases, they will directly threaten state sovereignty.

### ***Brittle States***

These countries look stable from the outside, but are in fact 'brittle' for many reasons. Climate change can add to a state's 'brittleness':

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In brittle states, as opposed to fragile ones, the appearance of stability—due to either the imperviousness of such states to outside inquiry or ignorance of the role of natural resource vulnerabilities in contributing to political unrest—can lead analysts and policymakers to fail to anticipate fragilities and make ill-informed political, economic, and natural resource management choices (Femia and Werrell 2017:13).

Take the case of **Bhutan**. The country's development is highly dependent on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, hydropower and forestry. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP n.d.):

Climate change is resulting in formation of supra-glacial lakes due to the accelerated retreat of glaciers with increasing temperatures. The risk of potential disasters inflicted by Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOFs), which threatens lives, livelihoods and development, is mounting as the water levels in several glacier lakes is approaching critical geostatic thresholds.

Even though Bhutan may appear stable from the outside, climate change makes its security 'brittle.'

### *Fragile States*

These states face the double-whammy of poor governance and lack of resources. In South Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh are consistently ranked as among the most fragile in the world. Climate change only adds to their fragility.

**Pakistan** is mired in challenges of governance and security, be it education, safe drinking water, healthcare, law and order, refugees, brain drain, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), grievances of smaller provinces, ethnic and sectarian divides, deteriorating political culture, weak minority rights, honour killing

and terrorism (Tasleem 2016). Climate change abets and exacerbates all these challenges.

In **Bangladesh**, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government assumed office in 2009, which was preceded by a period of intense domestic turmoil (2006-08) under the military caretaker government (Rahman 2016). This period saw extreme political polarisation and violence in the country, and fractured polity. Moreover, climate change in Bangladesh has started what may become the largest mass migration in human history (Ibid.). In recent years, riverbank erosion has annually displaced between 50,000 and 200,000 people. The population of what the Bangladesh government calls 'immediately threatened' islands exceeds four million (Glennon 2017).

In **Afghanistan**, insecurity is high. The army is stretched, and experts have warned that the army runs a real risk of collapse if circumstances do not change. Election reform has been shelved; the writ of the state is weak; outside interference is at an all-time high; and outbound migration of Afghans is next only to that of Syrians (Krishnamurthy 2016). Crop failure, and widespread flooding and landslides due to variable rainfall, only adds to these woes of common Afghan people.

**Sri Lanka** was ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> (out of 178 countries) in the 2016 annual Fragile States Index (FSI). It was one of the 78 countries to show improvement in ranking. But these uplifting numbers belie the actual changes taking place in the country. Group grievances remain largely unchanged, as the rift between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority widens. Climate change adds to this cleavage (Rajasingam 2016).

The outlook for **Nepal** appears bright after the recent three tiers of mandated elections being held under the constitution that was promulgated by the sovereign Constituent Assembly in November 2015. This marked the formal end of the more than a decade-long political transition that started with the overthrow of monarchy and signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord between the government and the warring Maoists in 2006. But,

climate change continues to present a very real threat to the country's long-term stability and prosperity.

In the absence of significant adaptation efforts, a slowing of the rate of climatic change, or significant improvements in natural resource governance, these South Asian countries are likely to become even more fragile, increasing the chances of state failure (Femia and Werrell 2017).

### *Disputed Zones among States*

Climate change can also increase the possibility of tensions between major powers over zones subject to competing territorial claims. Two clear examples of this disputed zone/climate change nexus are the South China Sea and the Arctic Ocean (Ibid.:15).

Of more direct consequence for South Asia is melting of Tibetan glaciers due to climate change. China and the lower riparian countries could end up in increasingly bitter disputes over management of the river systems that originate in the Tibetan glaciers. An average of 247 square kilometres of Tibetan glacier is disappearing annually, and 7,600 square kilometres of glacier, or about 18 per cent of the total, has disappeared since the 1950s (Dorje 2015).

The apparent changes in the **Tibetan Plateau** have raised concern about the potential for water-related conflicts in the region, particularly between China and India. To mitigate the environmental impact, China has stepped up construction of dams along rivers flowing down from the Tibetan Plateau, despite complaints from downstream nations that need the water. The Salween remains the only Tibetan river that has not yet been interrupted by major dams. Tibet's Yarlung Tsangpo River, which feeds India's Brahmaputra River, recently saw construction of its first dam.

These water-related disputes will get more and more intense in the days ahead as climate change eats into China's vital



resources and hastens the melting of Tibetan glaciers. With major areas bone-dry and China trying to divert water from these glacial rivers to meet the needs of these parched areas, its relations with South Asian countries could get more strained, perhaps even leading to the much-feared 'water wars.'

### *Disappearing States*

Rising sea-levels will also lead to the eventual disappearance of certain low-lying states. This includes island states, such as the Maldives, and large swaths of countries, such as the low-lying coastal zones of Bangladesh. For small island nations, climate change and sea-level rise present an existential threat (and thus, the possibility of a total loss of sovereignty). Moreover, the international community has no experience in managing the disappearance of nations as a result of environmental processes. In fact, there are no international legal norms designed to account for such an eventuality— including no formal recognition of 'climate refugees' or 'environmental refugees' (Femia and Werrell 2017: 16).

The people displaced from Bangladesh due to water-induced disasters linked to climate change have been trying to cross over into India and by 2010 over 1,000 had been shot dead by the Indian border security forces (Shing 2010). This, again, highlights the paucity of understanding about climate-related refugees.

### *Non-State Actors (NSAs)*

As climate change contributes to water and food insecurity and increases the likelihood of state failure and conflict, it is likely that NSAs with grievances against the state will take advantage of the loss of state legitimacy and the expansion of ungoverned spaces to gain power and leverage. These expansions of ungoverned spaces may include an increase in organised criminal entities that engage in natural resource provision and a potential increase in the

number and strength of NSAs who may ideologically reject the legitimacy of the states they operate in (Femia and Werrell 2017: 16).

Following the massive floods in Pakistan in 2010, in which 2,000 people lost their lives and at least 20 million were affected, the Pakistani state was slow to react and reach the affected communities. People reported that they had received no aid from the government, or any visits from officials since they were driven from their homes (Kazim 2010). In the eyes of flood victims, Islamabad was found wanting. The government at the centre was seen as uncaring of the helpless flood victims. But, while the government was absent, the Pakistani Taliban made its presence felt in the post-crisis scenario, basically giving out the message to the flood victims that even if the state was absent, there was someone else looking out for them (Ibid.). Thus, the Taliban was able to win many hearts and minds.

Following the 2017 floods in Nepal, the dormant extremist elements in the Tarai belt that was most heavily affected by the floods—the extremists who had been campaigning for secession of the belt into a separate country—became active. They were at the forefront of the post-disaster relief and chided the government for its ‘inaction’. This is yet another instance of climate-change induced events helping extremists spread their influence.

Thus, we see that there are at least six different ways the sovereignty of modern nation-states can be compromised by the adverse effects of climate change.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change is linked to insecurity both at the human as well as national level. In particular, it can trigger violent conflicts, and contribute to vulnerability and inequality (Ratna 2015). The time has come for South Asia to treat climate change as the most pressing regional issue that needs to be urgently dealt with to save the lives and livelihoods of 1.8 billion people of the region. It also has to be seen as a direct, and growing, threat to the security of the eight

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countries in the region. Since climate change is a common problem, it has become vital for these countries to develop common strategies to adapt to it.

There have been some initiatives at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) level. For instance it adopted a three-year action plan on climate change in 2008. Then, at the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit in 2011 held in the Maldives, an Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters was signed. There was a glimmer of hope, again, in 2014, when at the COP20 in Lima, the SAARC bloc emerged as a united force with ministers and representatives of all eight countries presenting South Asia as a common entity that was acutely vulnerable to climate change. This was a rare show of unity by SAARC countries that helped them put up a strong and united front in climate change negotiations before the rest of the world.

Later in 2014, the 18<sup>th</sup> Summit held in Kathmandu adopted the Kathmandu Declaration where the SAARC heads of government stressed on effective implementation of the SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment and Thimphu Statement on Climate Change, including taking into account the existential threats posed by climate change to some SAARC member states (Mohan 2014). This was another landmark achievement in battling the vagaries of climate change in South Asia, together.

This unity did not last long. On 17 March 2016, the 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC Council of Ministers failed to capitalise on the Kathmandu Declaration, and could not agree on any issue related to climate change. The continued bad blood between India and Pakistan also led to the cancellation of the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit that was to be held in 2016 in Islamabad, which was supposed to develop further plans to operationalise the Kathmandu Declaration. It had emphasised greater preparedness. One estimate from the US Geological Survey and the World Bank suggest an investment of

USD 40 billion would have prevented natural disaster losses of USD 280 billion in the 1990s (Busby 2007).

Individual governments could also act on their own. It is telling that between 1960 and 2000, the Chinese spent USD 3.15 billion on flood control—and averted losses of an estimated USD 12 billion (Ibid.).

Floods could cost South Asia USD 215 billion each year by 2030. Already floods affect more than 9.5 million people in the region each year, with GDP worth USD 14.4 billion and USD 5.4 billion at risk in India and Bangladesh, respectively (WRI 2017). India, Bangladesh and Nepal are currently investing more than USD 32 billion on building 78 water projects to combat flooding (Ibid.). This is wise. The Chinese example shows that investing in flood-control pays off multiple times.

This is just one way to make South Asia more resilient to climate change and better able to tackle the great risks that a changing climate poses to the sovereignty and national security of the eight SAARC member states. There is little SAARC member states, perhaps with the exception of India, can do on their own to mitigate climate change. But there is a strong case, both in terms of securing people's livelihoods and monetary returns, to invest more in adaptation measures.

For instance, there ought to be greater investment in climate-resilient agriculture and agro-product diversification, more emphasis on demilitarisation of the Himalayan glaciers that is partly responsible for their rapid melting, and greater sharing of water-related data that are needlessly classified as 'sensitive' among SAARC countries.

Climate change and the direct threats it poses to national security are common challenges to all of South Asia, and there is, thus, a strong case for collectively dealing with it, preferably inside the SAARC process, but even outside it at the sub-regional levels. Business as usual will put both the sovereignty of SAARC countries and the livelihood of hundreds of millions on the line.

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# The Rise of China and Shift from Geostrategy to Goeconomics: Impact on South Asia

*Working Paper*

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## **Abstract**

Geopolitics is ‘the study of the outside environment faced by every state when determining its own strategy; that environment being the presence of other states also struggling for survival and advantage’ (Kaplan 2013). Of course, contrary to the rather harsh definition given by Morgenthau (1978)<sup>1</sup>, it does not mean to see geography as an absolute. It is rather an acknowledgement of the influence of the physical, but also human geography, and what it means for a state’s strategy, for the defence of its national interests. If geopolitics is rather a neutral term, ‘geostrategy’ is the use of knowledge related to geopolitics to defend one’s interests. The study of Western History, and contemporary United States (US) policy, reminds us of two obvious tools to obtain geopolitical advantages: diplomacy and the military. But the rise of China, first and foremost an economic story, reminds us that there is a need to associate geopolitics and goeconomics when studying international diplomacy, even more when a great power is concerned. Goeconomics is ‘the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Geopolitics is a pseudoscience erecting the factor of geography into an absolute that is supposed to determine the power, and hence the fate of nations’ (Morgenthau 1978: 164).



geopolitical results (Blackwill and Harris 2016). China not only uses 'classical' tools to gain geopolitical advantages, it has also been a forerunner in using geoeconomic policy to succeed as a great power. This has an impact on its regional environment - East Asia, but also other areas, in particular Asia. This paper will focus on South Asia.

**Key words:** China, Geostrategy, Foreign Policy, USA, Geoeconomics, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indian Hegemony, CPEC, BRI.

### **China: Understanding its Foreign Policy and Use of Geoeconomics**

**T**his analysis will focus on South Asia as a good example of what China's rise means for the world. But in order to understand this 'rise', one needs to define it, in order to see what it means, and what future it implies when Beijing uses geopolitics and geoeconomics.

#### *Avoiding Unfair Prejudices and Pessimistic Forecasts*

In order to understand China's rise, it is important, first, to dispel some unfair prejudices and predictions one can read, even at an academic level, about this issue. Such misguided approach is, most of the time, fed by two kinds of intellectual misconceptions: on international relations nowadays, and on China itself.

The problem with Western analysis on China is based, first and foremost, on its vision of international relations that predicts an unavoidable clash between the United States of America (USA) and China, in the name of the Thucydides Trap. This term refers to the equally unavoidable war between Sparta and Athens, as 'it was the rise of Athens and the fear that it instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable' (Allison 2017: VII). Of course, such analysis should not be caricatured: it does not say that war between China and the

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USA would necessarily happen, but that it is highly probable. This Thucydides Trap mentality partly explains the negative tone one can generally find about China's rise, in particular in the US.

But, there are intellectual weaknesses associated with such a pessimistic analysis. First, a contradiction: the Thucydides Trap is linked to a realist approach of international affairs, one that makes sense once we admit that all states, influenced by the traditional Westphalian system, born in Europe, think and act the same. But it seems that actually, the pessimistic analysis of China's rise is linked to the supposed fact that it sees the world in a fundamentally different way than the West. Europeans and Americans follow the classical view of states being all equal no matter what their size, and China sees the world according to its own history, as an unequal system, where a hierarchy would give it primacy.<sup>2</sup> One has to wonder, how could China be a problem as a state supposedly seeing the world like Bismark's Prussia, but at the same time being a danger as a state fundamentally alien to the Western realist tradition that it is supposed to follow? One could question the academic and ideological analysis presenting China as 'prisoner' of its history (this same intellectual analysis in Western analysis explains some alarmist and simplistic views on the Muslim world or on Russia). Besides, the idea of a fundamentally egalitarian approach between Western states is very theoretical: from the French Empire under Napoleon and Bismark's Prussia/Germany to Bush's America, great powers do see themselves as superior to other nations, no matter the legal equality associated with the international system influenced by Europe and the US. One might add that if China was following its traditional, tributary-related, hierarchical approach of international affairs, it would not be bad for its Asian regional environment, contrary to what some US analysts tend to think. After all, one should remember that between China and the states traditionally

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<sup>2</sup> See, for an example of such an approach, Ford 2010.

influenced by its culture, like Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, there were only two wars from 1368 to 1841 (Kang 2010: Preface).

But of course, such an approach to China is in fact too theoretical: a country is more likely influenced by its recent history and needs, rather than by what it was centuries ago. In fact, the parallel too often made between China and the USA and the European situation between the UK and Germany pre-World War I is,<sup>3</sup> at best, simplistic. Indeed, economic evolutions between Europe in the first decades of the Twentieth Century and the world today would make a search of geopolitical and financial influence through war, counter-productive: indeed, for China like for any other advanced nation, to win some 'booty' (lands, some monopoly for access to limited resources) is much less interesting than the possibility of having the best access possible to innovation and international markets (Christensen 2016: 41). Of course, some subjects are of primary importance for Chinese national interests and are not really negotiable. For example, for Beijing but also for any Chinese citizen, in the name of patriotism, there is a clear desire, since 1949, to see a reunification between Taiwan and the mainland (Holslag 2015: location 559). The South China Sea is also associated with the same desire to regain lost territories. China's prosperity is deeply associated to the security of shipping lanes, and the Chinese position on the South China Sea has this fundamental need in mind (Bisley 2016). Beijing understandably has fears about the security of its shipping lanes at a time when US/Western analysts and politicians do not hesitate to present it, openly, as an adversary (Nathan and Scobell 2012). Hence, far from being an anti-*status quo* country, China has an interest in supporting international stability, and appears inflexible only for legitimate/patriotic reasons.

The idea that Beijing would want to reinstate the traditional 'tributary' system is also ludicrous and does not take into account

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<sup>3</sup> Still, a widely used idea. See, for example, Friedberg 2012: 46.

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facts in Asia itself.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the Chinese leadership will be tempted to become a regional hegemon, or at least a major influence in its regional environment, since this is what every great power wishes to be: it needs to influence its regional environment to assert itself as an international force to be reckoned with. This approach can also be found in Russia's foreign policy<sup>5</sup> as well as the US' history (Kinzer 2006: 9-108). One cannot fault China to do what other great powers do. But more importantly, Beijing knows that it has to focus on its internal development first, to protect its stability. The Chinese leadership knows all-too-well the risks related to its situation: its need to bring prosperity everywhere in the country, in particular in the impoverished West, while avoiding becoming old before getting rich (Wee 2011). This is a difficult task because of its 1.3 billion people, even with an economy the size of the US, it would mean having average living standards only one-fourth of the ones enjoyed by the US (Weisbort 2014). Hence, China's challenge is important enough to cast away any fantasy of world hegemony, despite what theoretical analysts might say.

Indeed, as compared to other Western great powers in history, Chinese leadership, shows a rather rational and moderate attitude. Far from being truly aggressive as it grows, China has shown true capacity to choose pragmatism in its relationship with other countries. This extensive quote from Edward N. Luttwak is very telling in that regard:

Chinese leaders (...) have conceded territory, or at least given up long-asserted territorial claims, rather liberally in recent years to settle frontier disputes with neighboring countries. In bilateral negotiations, the Chinese side conceded 100 per cent of the Afghan claim, 76 per cent of the Laos claim, 66 per cent of

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<sup>4</sup> With the cooperation between Asian nations suspicious of China's rise given US support. See, French 2017: 269 and 275.

<sup>5</sup> Which sees the post-Soviet space as its area of influence *par excellence*. See, for example, Grignas 2016: 8-9.

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Kazakhstan's, 65 per cent of Mongolian's claim, 94 per cent of Nepal's, 60 per cent of North Korea's, 96 per cent of Tajikistan's, and 50 per cent of Vietnam's land claim (in sharp contrast to Chinese intransigence over its maritime claims). With the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation, successive negotiations were also concluded successfully on a roughly 50/50 basis (Luttwak 2012:15).

This does not look like the designs of an aggressive state some in the West imagine, but a pragmatic one, understanding its strengths and weaknesses, eager to be an influential part of the international system rather than a radical anti-*status quo* power.

### *Understanding China's Rise and Use of Geoeconomics*

Once alarmist or negative preconceptions are put aside, an impartial analysis of China's rise shows us an incredible economic success story, not one that could appear dangerous for international stability in the future, even from a US/Western point of view. Indeed, China's economic rise can be considered unprecedented in world history. As reminded by Christensen (2016: 13), the country's growth rate has doubled every seven years since 1979; official per capita income has been rising from only USD 220 in 1978 to USD 9,300 in 2012. Since 2010, China has become the world's second largest economy, before Japan, mainly due to Deng Xiaoping who reintegrated market incentives in China's economic life, and opened the country to foreign investments and trade.

Of course, China has considerable military assets at its disposal. Its military ranks third in the world after Russia and the US (Moak 2018a). However, a deeper analysis shows that its military approach is mostly defensive: after all, it has 22,000 kilometres of borders with 14 states to defend, with neighbours as well as western Chinese territories that are sometimes threatened by separatist/terrorist elements. Besides, its military spending is no more than a quarter of that of the US (Fenby 2017: chapter 5,

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location 1563). While US analysis is sometimes alarmist because of a possible military parity in the future (Majumdar 2016), when one looks not just at quantity but also quality, it appears clearly that China being the world's second-largest military spender should not be source of concern: it has to replace obsolete vehicles and acquire some that are needed by its army (helicopters, for example) (Bitzinger 2018).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, while one cannot imagine real equality between the Chinese and US forces in the near future, one can argue that even if China's rise would mean a much stronger military than it actually has, contrary to what has been sometimes declared, it has not been an aggressive power. As reminded above, it has shown a desire to settle territorial disputes through compromises. If one takes into account the United Nation's definition of what an 'aggression' truly is in international affairs,<sup>7</sup> it is possible to say that even in the South China Sea, China has clearly not been as aggressive as it is sometimes portrayed in the Western media (Etzioni 2017: chapter 3, location 1009- 1388). In fact, the USA<sup>8</sup> or Russia<sup>9</sup> can be seen as much more aggressive than China.

Besides, as China is looking, first and foremost, to make sure the country stays stable, and that the job market stays healthy, as reminded earlier, it is extremely unlikely that aggressive/nationalist sentiments would come to dominate its foreign policy, as a consequence of its rise. Of course, as explained before, on some subjects, Beijing will most probably be inflexible: like any other country it will defend its national interests when they appear in jeopardy. As reminded by scholars like Joseph Nye, to treat a country as an enemy is a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ibid.). But if not

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<sup>6</sup> Although this article worries about Chinese military modernisation as if it would be a source of problems, it comes from the negative and alarmist vision of China's rise which the author of this paper has tried to counter.

<sup>7</sup> 'The use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations' (A/RES/29/3314, December 1974).

<sup>8</sup> The Iraq War, for example.

<sup>9</sup> The war with Georgia in 2008, or the situation in Ukraine.

confronted by unreasonable policies by other powers (in particular by the US), cooler heads will prevail in China's foreign policy because in order to produce jobs and protect its economic development, the outside world is necessary. Indeed, in 2012, the US and the EU, together, represented 54 of the country's overall trade partners. In 2008, half the Chinese exports were done by foreign investment firms. This foreign investment/ownership is often Asian, coming, in particular, from allies of the West. For example, South Korean investment is comparable to the one coming from the US, since the end of the 2000s. Indeed, it is not only the link with the West that is of importance for China's economy: now Asian regional trade is so important that Takashi Inoguchi, a Japanese scholar, did not hesitate to compare East Asia to Western Europe, as an area where regional community building makes sense because of the economic realities. Any aggressive tendency from local nationalists anywhere in East Asia would destroy what is now a shared prosperity (Christensen 2016: 43-44). This need for peace and cooperation linked to economics, despite some disagreements associated with history or geopolitics, is clear when one thinks about the Chinese need of making sure it keeps its capacity to export products as well as import energy supplies, safe. Hence, China's rise is not a problem for Asian stability. Rather, it can preserve the region from destructive great power politics in the longer term.

The distinctive characteristics of China's rise explain its choice of geoeconomics to defend its interests: the use of aggressive, militaristic great power politics would be counter-productive and would not make sense nowadays. Post-Cold War US militaristic approach has been proving until now that focusing on using military force for geopolitical or security-related gains has had limited success. But with the importance of the markets in the destiny of nations, and with the return of state capitalism, the use of geoeconomic tools (trade, investments, energy-related or financial policies, for example) appears to be the most efficient way to have an impact in geopolitics (Blackwill and Harris 2016: 34-37).

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Last, but not least, one could argue that the consolidation of the actual leadership of Xi Jinping confirms this analysis of China's rise and its use of geoeconomics. On 24 October 2017, the Chinese Communist Party adopted amendments to the Constitution eliminating the terms limits for president and vice-president. This will give the President the time and political influence needed to sustain the reform process associated with the notion of the 'Chinese Dream', fighting corruption inside,<sup>10</sup> and promoting China's national and economic interests abroad.<sup>11</sup> Such a confirmation of Xi Jinping's political influence also means the confirmation of the use of geoeconomic tools, in particular the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to promote China's influence. Indeed, it is no surprise that the revised Constitution includes the call to 'pursue the Belt and Road Initiative (YingHui 2017). It needs to be pointed out that a more confident political leadership in Beijing has not meant a more muscular foreign policy, contrary to what some foreign analysts have predicted, but, on the contrary, a softer touch in foreign affairs, taking into account the fears of regional partners (Xiangwei 2017). In such a situation it will, again, be the use of geoeconomics, rather than the classical use of force to obtain geopolitical gains, that will prevail.

### **Chinese Geoeconomics: What it Means for South Asia**

Now that the rise of China is clearly defined, as well as its use of geoeconomics, China's geoeconomic impact in and on South Asia can better be understood by focusing on what the BRI means for the region.

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<sup>10</sup> This is an important issue to deal with from a geoeconomic point-of-view as regional leaders are also involved in such projects. The fact that more than one million officials have been targeted by this anti-corruption policy proves that it is genuine, and not a way to target political opponents, as some analysts have thought. See Chi-yuk 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Besides, there are imperfect but real checks and balances in the Chinese political system that makes the foreign accusations of a one-man rule in China rather simplistic. See, Jin 2018.



***The BRI and South Asia: A General Analysis***

To understand China's geoeconomics in South Asia, one must understand first what the BRI is. It can be seen as a natural continuation of Chinese policies adopted under President Jiang Zemin to develop the country's western provinces. It is based on the idea of interconnectivity between China and the rest of the world, and focuses on developing cross-border infrastructure projects. Chinese investments are destined to focus on transport, but also energy (pipelines, for example), telecommunication, and special industrial zones. The project is thought as a win-win proposal for other countries, and as a tool for Chinese influence in the world: indeed, it is supposed to be useful for China economically, but also geopolitically (IFRI 2017). The BRI has sometimes been compared to the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Western Europe after the World War II, but it is actually much more ambitious: the Marshall Plan provided 'only' USD 140 billion,<sup>12</sup> while Chinese investments could reach 4 trillion or more (Hillman 2018).

Some critics have presented the BRI as a 'debt trap' for countries in South Asia like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, but also for the Chinese financial system. If this fear is often expressed by analysts, it is not the case and can be explained by a few simple reasons: developing nations need foreign investments and certain infrastructures to develop, and this is exactly what China is offering, without non-economic conditions like Western powers (Moak 2018b). Besides, a project of such a size is more than likely to have issues to deal with along the way. However, it would be a mistake to follow some analysts, eager to see the end of the BRI behind each setback or impossibility to reach an agreement. Broadly speaking, to consider that any deficiency in the Initiative will not see China and its partners react is to understand nothing of the flexibility that is at the core of the BRI.

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<sup>12</sup> If converted to USD in 2017-18.

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Hence, without being necessarily perfect, the BRI could be a godsend for South Asian countries. Indeed, New Delhi's economic growth did not have a spillover effect on other states in the region: China's geoeconomic strategy and rise is an opportunity to take advantage of. The country's impressive economic growth could be emulated by working more closely with it (Kelegama 2016: 196). It is, for example, the logic of the city of Colombo in Sri Lanka, that wants to fast track its development, taking as examples Chinese cities like Shenzhen (Lo 2018). Besides, the geoeconomic influence of this important neighbour on South Asia can help local states to protect their independence from the Indian giant. This is very clear with a country like Nepal, dominated by New Delhi, which did not hesitate to blockade the common border because of its displeasure towards a Nepalese internal matter (the promulgation of a new constitution) in 2015-16 (Baral 2018). Such independence is now possible as 60 per cent of foreign direct investments received by Nepal are coming from China (Chowdhury 2018a). Opposing pressure from New Delhi, the new Nepalese Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli wants to increase infrastructure connectivity with China and restart a hydropower project criticised in India (Chowdhury 2018b).

Hence, it is no surprise that the BRI has to deal with strong opposition from India. In May 2017, India refused to send a representative to Beijing for the BRI Summit organised there, despite China's invitation. However, it released a statement accepting the benefits associated with BRI's connectivity, at the same time criticising the project as a way to create 'unsustainable debt' (and hence, client states) or having a possible negative impact on the environment (Jaishankar 2017). It appears curious that New Delhi would worry about the independence of South Asian states, in particular of a country like Pakistan, still very much an enemy

from an Indian geopolitical point of view.<sup>13</sup> Its foreign policy is still pretty much inspired by the 'Indira Doctrine', i.e. a Monroe Doctrine for India, making South Asia its exclusive 'backyard', excluding the influence of any other great power. Strikingly enough, the said doctrine implies that the Indians would be ready to use military force to deny a foothold in the region to any other power. Even if the country's foreign policy has evolved since Indira Gandhi, the spirit of this doctrine is alive, in particular its 'nervousness' when it comes to any intrusion to what it considers 'its natural area of influence' (Chaulia 2016:Introduction). With such facts in mind, the idea of India fearing for its neighbours' independence appears disingenuous, to say the least. As for pollution, unfortunately, it is futile to blame the BRI, and not see that it is a global issue in Asia, and India knows it all too well, because of the pollution it has to deal (Irfan 2017).

In fact, India's opposition to China's geoeconomic project has less to do with fears for South Asia than with classical geopolitical concerns. Despite rather good economic relations, India has continued to see China as an adversary since the Sino-Indian War of 1962. A war born of the tensions at the border between the two countries: far from being a Chinese betrayal that would have taken advantage of Indian 'naivety', it seems that New Delhi has had more than its share of responsibility for this conflict (Lu 2017). Still, it defines the way China is seen in India from a geopolitical point-of-view, as well as from a geoeconomic one, as China is blocking India's influence on smaller regional economies, from an Indian perspective of course (ICG 2011). It explains the peculiar analysis made by many in India, seeing legitimate and geoeconomically understandable investments in South Asia as sinister projects to counter its own rise. One can see an example of that with the Colombo South Container Terminal, 85 per cent owned by China Merchants Holding International, known to be an experienced port

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, an analysis of India's foreign policy towards Iran or Saudi Arabia proves that its diplomacy is guided by the desire to block Islamabad's geopolitical influence or development. See, for example, Da Lage 2017: 84-85.

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operator, active in Sri Lanka to make a profit through growing trade volumes made possible through the Maritime Silk Road associated with the BRI. India sees this as an effort to use Colombo as part of the 'string of pearls' to encircle it (Miller 2017). If there is ever a militarisation of the Maritime Silk Road in the future, it will most probably be to protect sea lanes, as it would be rational for China (like for any independent great power) to wish to protect its oil imports. There is no concrete proof that the BRI is linked to any desire to oppose India in particular. It seems that here, some Indian analysts and policymakers express mostly their geopolitical opposition to the Chinese geoeconomic project.

But can India offer an alternative to China's BRI? It does not appear to be the case, making an Indian success in countering this project very unlikely. The idea that the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)<sup>14</sup> could be used as a competition to China's BRI, in particular its Pakistani part, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is a popular view only for some Indian analysts.<sup>15</sup> But Iran has no interest to follow India in its opposition to China, as Tehran's interest is to be part of the BRI. Besides, nothing can stop Pakistan from connecting to the INSTC over time: it would be actually the only way to make it a true South Asian project, and it would be supported by important INSTC actors like Iran or Azerbaijan (Sputnik 2018). Recently, the US, Australia, Japan and India have also discussed the possibility to promote together an infrastructure development scheme which is nothing more than a copy of the BRI in order to oppose China's geoeconomic influence in Asia (Holland 2018). Such an idea is based on the theory that these four states would have the same geoeconomic and geopolitical interests, which is less than certain. Japan is not as radically opposed to the BRI as India (Johnson 2018), and the US under the Trump administration is not the most

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<sup>14</sup> A 7,200 km sea, road and rail network between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia, and Europe.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Singh 2018.

stable of partners. Last but not least, as it is a not-so-subtle attack against China (Watts 2018), it might provoke tensions, in particular in South Asia, that would not be in the interest of anyone in the subcontinent.

*The BRI as a Godsend: Example of Pakistan and Afghanistan*

The best example of the positive impact of Chinese geoeconomic policy towards South Asia is to focus on two crucial countries for the stability of the region: Pakistan and Afghanistan. Those two states have been suffering partly from geopolitical games, in particular after 2001. What the War on Terror (WoT) without end, supported by the most important military force in the world, has been unable to offer Islamabad and Kabul (peace, stability, a chance for economic growth), China might be able to bring without firing a shot.

At first sight, such a view can appear too optimistic. Afghanistan and Pakistan have both been suffering from a WoT that has not always seen them as a priority. In many ways the 'war of choice' decided by the Bush administration in Iraq can explain the difficult situation the area is in nowadays. In 2018, according to a recent analysis by the BBC, the legal government in Kabul controls only 30 per cent of Afghanistan: in 70 per cent of the country, where 50 per cent of the Afghans live in an area where the Taliban are openly present and can organise attacks (Sharifi and Adamou 2018). The US policies have been unable to bring peace to this country, and have actually created more regional tensions by targeting Pakistan as a scapegoat to explain Washington's and Kabul's inability to stabilise Afghanistan. The Afghan economy is clearly affected by the political and security-related uncertainty, as well as by bad governance (Joya 2018). As for Pakistan itself, its security situation is, of course, much better, particularly following the Army's decisive counterterrorist campaign 'Operation Zarb-e-Azb' in 2014 (Mujtaba 2014). In terms of security, 2015 was a turning point for the best from a security point-of-view. Still, from an economic perspective, Pakistan has deeply suffered from the so-

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called 'WoT': it appears that the country lost the equivalent of USD 123.1 billion in terms of loss of life, destruction of infrastructures, as well as loss of economic opportunities (Khan 2017). The damaged image of the country because of the Afghan chaos nearby, the WoT, and the difficult relationship with the US, has not helped to promote Pakistan to foreign investors.

Despite such a difficult situation, China has made Pakistan a key state for its BRI, through CPEC. Beijing plans to invest USD 62 billion in this flagship project, that encompasses several energy-related and infrastructure projects. It links Kashgar, in Xinjiang, a western territory China wants to develop in order to better battle separatist sentiments, and the Gwadar Seaport (Rafiq 2017). Contrary to what has been said, it clearly appears that CPEC is a perfect example of a win-win situation associated with a geoeconomic project.

Pakistan will make significant gains: CPEC brings to the country investments that would have not come from the West or any other first-world country at this time. CPEC can attract investors from other countries by making apparent to them the economic opportunities they could find here, e.g., the visit of representatives of French companies in April 2017. This was the first time in 12 years that an important economic delegation (16 French companies) came to the country with a clear desire to invest. This visit was related to the interest born from CPEC, a project the head of the French delegation, Thierry Pflimlin<sup>16</sup> lauded (APP 2017). CPEC also means access to Chinese expertise and possible cooperation between business sectors, as well access to the Chinese market and the possibility to be an important economic corridor in Asia (Monnoo 2017: 26-28). The importance of the Chinese investment also means that Beijing will continue to be supportive of Pakistan's security interests in the future, even when it is linked to disagreements with India, as CPEC goes through

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<sup>16</sup> Chairman of the France-Pakistan Business Council of MEDEF International; and President of Total Global Services.

Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory that is Pakistani but that New Delhi claims (Chandra 2016: Chapter 3, Location 952).

China will also make important geopolitical gains: most importantly, CPEC offers a backdoor to the Middle East if international tensions lead to a blockade of the Strait of Malacca. It also gives to the Chinese Navy the possibility of access to a strategic port. Moreover, it could find nearby, in Karachi, already present, a maintenance facility for its submarines.<sup>17</sup> In difficult times, for example, because of future tensions with the US, such assets could be particularly useful. Pakistan's cooperation is also of tremendous importance to fight Uyghur separatism/terrorism (Sumbal 2013). Last but not least, it strengthens a relationship that has already been built on a diplomatic mutual trust that has lasted for decades (Hussain 2016: 143). With a US ally that acts less and less like a friend to Pakistan, it is natural for the latter to see its future strongly associated to China rather than to the West. Of course, a US and Western lack of support for Pakistan's economic development will mean more challenges for China on this front (Hongmei 2018). However, this should make the sceptics about CPEC in Islamabad realise that Pakistan's future lies with China. The strength of such an alliance will confirm the capacity of the latter to influence South Asia with the guaranteed support of an important regional state.

China's geoeconomic policy towards Pakistan is not merely driven by economic gain alone: a long-term approach is associated with CPEC, as well as with BRI as a whole when it concerns China's neighbourhood at least. As expressed by President Xi himself, infrastructure is seen as the best tool for development, and development is what can bring security. Hence from a Chinese point-of-view, radicalisation and civil unrest as seen sometimes close to its borders, are associated with poverty (Ghiasy and Zhou 2017). Of course, unfortunately, radicalism, extremism or terrorism cannot be limited to an economic issue. However, it is clear that

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<sup>17</sup> China has sold diesel-electric attack submarines to Pakistan, and has built some of them in Karachi. See, Miller 2017: 178-9.

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opportunities for development can make the idea of violent rebellion against the state much less attractive than a place with little economic opportunities.

Afghanistan could also truly benefit from China's geoeconomic policies, as in Pakistan, one of the Chinese leadership's goals is related to security. Indeed, Beijing desires stability on its western borders, and Afghanistan has been the very representation of a failed state in South Asia for decades, with a border shared with China. It is also with the centrality of Xinjiang in mind that Beijing worries about Afghan stability (Tiezzi 2016). One can find proof, through propaganda videos, of the activities of the Uyghur *jihadist* movement called the Turkestan Islamic Party until recently (Roggio and Weiss 2018). This is proof that as long as Afghanistan is not stabilised, there is still a risk of terrorist violence coming from its western neighborhood to Xinjiang in the foreseeable future. One of China's answers to such a risk is geoeconomic: it supports the idea to link Afghanistan to CPEC. Such a possibility would be highly beneficial as it would strengthen Kabul's trade links with Pakistan, China and the other regional countries connected through BRI (Chandran 2017). Chinese involvement could also mean an appeasement of the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, a possibility that would be a win-win situation for South Asia.

## **Conclusion**

Chinese geoeconomics in South Asia, especially through the BRI, can truly be a chance for the region: by its economic might, Beijing can help it to develop but also to stabilise over time. Indeed, it confirms what has appeared clearly to anyone following Asian geopolitics for the last few years: China is not only an East Asian power, but also, to some extent, a South Asian one. The classical but also obsolete vision of a South Asian region isolated from the rest of Asia-Pacific, and necessarily dominated geopolitically by only one power, i.e., India, does not reflect contemporary realities.



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The idea of any Asian region being dominated by only one unique great power or prospective great power controlling its neighbourhood is a fiction that can only be a source of dangerous conflicts in the years to come. With the BRI and the use of geoeconomics, China can be considered a greater power in South Asia than India in the future. It confirms a geopolitical equilibrium between New Delhi and Beijing that is the best guarantee of peace and freedom for the other countries in the region. Hence, for South Asian people, China's rise and geoeconomics projects should not be a source of fear. On the contrary, they might be the best chance for a better regional future.

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# **China Dream vs. America First: Is the Thucydides Trap Unavoidable?**

*Scholarly Essay*

**Dr Wei Zongyou\***

**F**rom 3-13 November, the United States (US) President Donald J. Trump made his first 12-day trip to Asia since entering the White House, the longest such trip by a sitting US President after more than 25 years. Although North Korea and trade remained dominant topics of focus, China was undoubtedly the most crucial part of the Asia debut for President Trump, where he discussed bilateral trade, North Korea, and possible cooperation in Afghanistan, among others, and reached trade deals worth more than USD 250 billion.

Despite his apparently successful China trip, China-US relations have been on a path of strategic rivalry in recent years, especially in the Asia-Pacific, with each viewing the other with growing suspicion and concern. Whereas, the US accuses China of trying to undermine the order the former helped to establish after World War II, and of trying to displace its leadership, Beijing complains Washington is aiming to contain its rise and denying its rightful place in the emerging Asia-Pacific order. With Trump elected as US President and his 'America First' foreign policy mantle, and Xi Jinping emerging from the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) ever more powerful and vowing to rejuvenate and make his country even stronger, their bilateral relations have entered a period of turbulence and uncertainty. People on both sides of the Pacific Ocean are beginning to talk about the Thucydides Trap - when rising power and an established power are locked into a collision course and end in tragedy (Allison 2017; Canrong 2015).

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## **Same Mindset, Different Dreams**

At the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC in October 2017, President Xi Jinping was re-elected and began his second term as President, the Commander-in-Chief, and Party Secretary. Besides, his 'Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' was written into the Party constitution (Xinhuanet 2017) effectively raising his status to that of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, and making him the most powerful leader since Xiaoping more than two decades ago. Compared to his two immediate predecessors, Xi is much more vocal in asserting and defending China's interests and vows to rejuvenate and make China great again.

In 2012, when visiting an exhibition featuring 'China's Road to Rejuvenation', Xi first put forward the idea of the 'China's Dream.' He said:

People around are discussing about China's Dream. In my view, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of Chinese people since the modern times.

He further added that:

We are confident that the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time of CPC's 100 anniversary, and building China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious, by the time of PRC's 100 anniversary, is within our reach, and China's Dream of the grand national rejuvenation will surely come true (Ibid.).

Basically, there are two dimensions of the 'China Dream': one is a prosperous society, and the other is a strong army commensurate with its economic power and able to defend its increasing interests, forcefully if necessary. To build a prosperous

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society means that domestic economic development is still a top priority for the Chinese government. Building a strong army means China should have the hard power to defend its legitimate interests, and should not be seen as a spineless economic animal that can be looked down upon and taken advantage of. Ever since then, the China Dream and the two 100 anniversary goals have become important topics for the average Chinese, and the overarching guidelines of the government's domestic and foreign policy agendas.

When Trump ran for President, he vowed to 'Make America Great Again' and America First was his foreign policy vision. In his opinion, for too long, the US has put others' interests whatsoever above its own, been greatly taken advantage of, in fact the country does not even know where its interests lie, and how to defend them. In April 2016, at a campaign rally, he delivered his first ever 'America First' foreign policy address. He claimed that the US foreign policy is a complete and total disaster, with 'No vision, no purpose, no direction, no strategy.' As a result of this failed policy, he argued, the US resources are overextended, allies are not paying their fair share, friends are beginning to think they cannot depend on the US, and rivals no longer respect America. He declared: 'It is time to shake the rust off of America's foreign policy'... that he will view the world through 'the clear lens of American interests,' and 'America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration' (Peters and Woolley 2016).

After the election, in his inaugural address delivered on 20 January 2017, Trump reaffirmed his 'America First' foreign policy vision to the American and foreign audience. He bemoaned that:

For many decades, we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military; we've defended other nations borders while refusing to defend our own.

He vowed to put an end to this situation and declared:

From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First.

For Trump, this means above all two things: protecting American security from terrorism; and defending American economic interests from being taken advantage of by others, especially through foolish foreign trade deals. In other words, defending American security and prosperity will be the two guiding principles of the US foreign policy.

As no-apology preachers of the 'China Dream' and 'America First', both Xi and Trump vow to see their policy and agendas set in motion under their watch. How these two different visions, with their heavy dose of nationalist flavours, can proceed smoothly against each other, especially in the backdrop of an emerging power transition, is an open question.

### **Changing Power, Conflicting Interests**

The rise of China over the past 40 years is one of the greatest success stories in modern international history. China's overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased more than 60 times, from USD 174.9 billion (current USD) in 1977 to more than USD 11.1 trillion in 2016, overtaking Japan as the second largest economy in the world in 2010. Its GDP per capita also increased more than 40 times, jumping from USD 185 (current USD) in 1977 to USD 8123 in 2016 (The World Bank 2017), effectively lifting millions of people out of poverty and boasting the largest middle class in the world. It has also become the largest net foreign currency reservoir in the world, and the largest US government creditor, with more than USD 3 trillion reserves, and holding USD 1.15 trillion US government debts in June 2017 (Mullen 2017). China has also been the world's leading trading state since the second decade of this century, with annual trading volume of USD

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3.68 trillion in 2016 (Hara and Harada 2017), and the largest trading partner of more than 120 countries (Hucheng 2014).

As China's economy grows by leaps and bounds, its demand for goods, energy and resources also multiplies. It has become the second largest importer of goods after the US, importing more than USD 1.67 trillion worth of goods in 2015 (NBSC PRC 2017). It has also become the largest importer of oil and many of the raw minerals in the world. These huge demands and increasing market for foreign goods and services have made this country the most powerful engine of world economic growth, especially since the global economic meltdown in 2008.

As China's economy integrated more closely with the outside world and its foreign reserves multiplied, it began to look outside for investment. Since the beginning of this century, Chinese leaders have talked about 'going out' on various occasions, and promoted it to the level of national strategy in the Tenth Five-year economic plan in 2001, and then it was formally written into the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC report in 2002. Since then, investing abroad is not only undertaken by individual entrepreneurs, but also greatly encouraged by the government as a policy. This 'going out' policy is widely seen as the harbinger of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which was formally put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013.

National interests follow goods, services, people, and investment flows. In the past, when China's economy was basically self-reliant and inward-looking, with its outside links far and few between, it did not have to take its interests abroad seriously. But as its economy fully integrates with the outside world, and becomes a world-class trading nation, its overseas interests greatly expand and have to be taken good care of. With multibillion dollar investments abroad, millions of people travelling and working overseas, factories, pipelines, and economic corridors under construction overseas, China has to make sure its people and their economic activities are safe and secure from attacks.



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Given China's huge demand for energy and heavy dependence on foreign oil, the bulk of which is shipped through Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), it has also begun to pay attention to maritime and energy security. To safeguard the security of SLOC, it has joined the international anti-piracy actions along the Bay of Aden, to escort merchant ships through the sea lines. On the other hand, it has begun to build up its navy capable of safeguarding its maritime interests and rights.

To diversify its oil imports and avoid a possible Malacca Dilemma, China has signed numerous energy deals with Russia, and countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, and built multiple oil and gas pipelines through Central Asia, Pakistan, Burma, and other neighbouring land countries to safeguard its energy security.

With increasing naval power and awakening energy security consciousness, China has been paying more attention to defending its maritime interests and rights, especially in the East and South China Seas, which are deemed by many Chinese as taken advantage of by other claimants when the Republic was focused on domestic economic development and stuck to a 'low profile' foreign policy portfolio. If maintaining stability was the foreign policy currency concerning the maritime disputes in the past, now it has to be balanced with more forcefully safeguarding its legitimate interests (Wangsheng and Luoxiao 2013).

With increasing power, resources, and expansive foreign interests, China has also started to put forward its own version of international initiatives and institutional frameworks. In 2013, Xi proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, or BRI, to better connect the Asian economy with that of Europe and Africa via overland routes and maritime routes respectively, by means of 'five connections' – policy consultation, infrastructure connectivity, free trade, free circulation of local currencies, and people-to-people connectivity (Jinping 2013). Based on this ambitious vision, China established a first-ever infrastructure institution - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

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(AIIB) - to provide financial services for the construction of infrastructure in Asia and beyond. Besides, it also established the Silk Road Fund (SRF), particularly for the BRI, and together with Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa, Beijing established the New Development Bank for the infrastructure development of Brazil-Russia-India-China and South Africa (BRICS). In 2014, at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, Xi argued for the kickoff of the Free Trade Area of Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) to further strengthen economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region (Jinping 2014).

The US has great concerns about China's increasing power, expansive interests, and growing ambitions. Since 2000, the United States Department of Defense has published an annual report concerning China's military development, highlighting the threatening nature of its growing military development and capabilities. When the maritime disputes in the East and South China Sea worsened post-2010, the US was alarmed by the 'assertive' behaviour of China, and took a series of steps to strengthen its alliance system in the Asia-Pacific; reaffirmed its treaty obligations to allies; expanded security partnerships with Vietnam, Singapore, and India; enhanced the maritime capabilities of Southeast Asia countries; and conducted aggressive freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. All those activities were part of a greater strategy implemented by the Obama administration, namely 'Pivot to Asia' or 'Rebalancing to Asia', which were viewed by many as a counterbalance to China's growing power and ambitions in the Asia-Pacific.

The Obama administration also viewed with great suspicion China's BRI and the accompanying AIIB. From the US perspective, this is not a pure economic or development initiative, but a larger geoeconomic and geopolitical scheme in disguise, which aims to dislodge US influence and replace it with a China-centric order or influence over the Eurasia landmass and the Indo-Pacific maritime corridor (Perlez and Huang 2017; Rolland 2017). The AIIB was viewed as a tentative challenge and competitor to the US-

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dominated international institutions such as The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Asian Development Bank (ADB).

On numerous occasions, government officials have talked about the five challenges the US faces today, namely Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and the terrorism and extremism in the Middle East. In its security calculations, China has jumped from a 'responsible stakeholder' to one of the main and long-term security challenges to the US (O'Rourke 2017: 8-9). As Green (2017: 5) observes in *By More Than Providence*:

If there is one central theme in American strategic culture as it has applied to the Far East over time, it is that the United States will not tolerate any other power establishing exclusive hegemonic control over Asia and the Pacific.

Trump in many ways is the opposite of Obama. But, at least in one area, they have much in common: viewing China as a competitor to be dealt with seriously. In the presidential campaign, he constantly talked about Chinese challenges in the economic area, and vowed to rebalance the economic and trade relations, even suggested naming China a currency manipulator, and imposing as much as 45 per cent tariffs against its goods (Talley 2016). After entering the White House, he has become a bit moderate in his criticism, but still complains about the unfair and unbalanced trade relations, and threatens to take unilateral actions if China does not take steps to seriously deal with the imbalance.<sup>1</sup>

On the issue of North Korea's development of nuclear and ballistic missiles, Trump has claimed that China has much more leverage than others over Pyongyang, and has not done enough to influence it (Erickson 2017). On the South China Sea issue, he has

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: The latest round of trade talks between the US and China ended in June 2018 (while this book was going to print), with the latter warning that all progress between the two economic superpowers could be lost if the US pushes ahead with trade sanctions, including tariffs announced by the White House.

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given the Defense Department much more discretion and authority in its freedom of navigation operations. In his first longest foreign trip to Asia, Trump articulated a tentative strategic framework to the Indo-Pacific: a free and open Indo-Pacific, spanning from the Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean, with India as one of the guardians in the West end of this expansive geographic area (Nelson 2017). Using India as a counterbalance to China is the pivotal factor of this strategic framework, as was Obama's rebalance to Asia.

### **Is the Thucydides Trap Unavoidable?**

Graham Allison, Director of Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, after examining the 16 power transition cases for the last 500 years, found that 12 of the cases ended in war, with only four of them transiting peacefully. He argued:

When the parties avoided war, it required huge, painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged (Allison 2015).

Based on his observation, he cautioned that:

War between the United States and China in the decades ahead is not just possible, but much more likely than recognized at the moment. Indeed, judging by the historical record, war is more likely than not (Ibid.).

The analysis above seems to confirm Allison's arguments. Xi's nationalist 'China Dream' does not fit well with Trump's nativist 'America First' agendas. China's growing power and expansive ambitions are eclipsing and eroding the US leadership in the Asia-Pacific, and China's initiatives are competitors or even alternatives to the US programmes, institutions and even order in the region. An increasingly assertive rising China bent on realising

its dream seems doomed to collide with a watchful, grudging US nostalgia for its power and prestige.

However, for all the challenges and alarms, there is still room for optimism for the future of China-US relations. First, Xi's 'China Dream' does not necessarily collide with Trump's 'America First.' In a nutshell, Xi's idea is fundamentally based on domestic development and modernisation, and he is bent on reforming China's economic structure to make it more domestic-driven and consumption-oriented. And as China's middle class grows in numbers and wealth, it is becoming a huge consumption market for US goods and services. China-US economic relations are not zero-sum, but a win-win set. Furthermore, Xi's aspiration of a powerful China capable of safeguarding its national interests is basically a defensive posture, not a call for outside adventure or hegemonic ambitions, which is explicitly ruled out and opposed in Xi's 19<sup>th</sup> Congress report.

Second, China does not seek to displace US power and influence in the Asia-Pacific. On numerous occasions, its leaders have signaled to US counterparts that Beijing is not aiming at displacing US influence in Asia-Pacific, instead, the Republic respects the US' traditional interests in the region. In his 2015 visit to Washington, Xi reiterated China's position in the 'Outcome List of Xi Jinping's State Visit to the United States,' which reads:

China respects the traditional influence and practical interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific and welcomes the United States to continue to play a positive and constructive role in regional affairs (MoFA PRC 2016).

Third, China does not seek to export its version of development or governance model. While the country is proud of successfully pioneering a new way for developing countries to catch up and emphasises the importance of fostering stronger confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, nevertheless, China has never sought

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to export its model to other countries. On the contrary, China even hesitates to describe its way of development as a kind of 'model', which implies maturity or rigidity, for it thinks that its way of development is still an experiment in process, though very successful so far. Furthermore, China thinks that every country should explore their own way of development, which may fit well into their own particular national history, stage of development, and national characters. And in this way, China can be an example for them to learn from, but not a model to be imposed upon.

Fourth, China actively seeks to live peacefully with the US and constructively manage differences. In his first summit with Obama in 2013, Xi formally put forward the concept of building a new model of major country relations between China and the US based on 'no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation,' to strike a new way for rising power and ruling power to live peacefully together and manage constructively differences between them. Though the Obama administration was lukewarm and grew watchful of the concept, it showcased China's attempts and eagerness to build stable and peaceful relations with the US.

Lastly, for all the complaints and worries, the US has not so far aimed at containing China. It realises that to try and contain Beijing will impose unacceptable cost to itself given the intimate economic interdependence between the two countries. Besides, the US allies and partners in Asia and around the world will not follow suit given their interests in developing more close economic relations with China. What's more, containing a China which is not bent on conquering or displacing the US influence in Asia and beyond will not command the moral high ground as it did in the Cold War and will attract few followers. Partly for those reasons, the US government and strategic circles have not advocated the containment of China, instead called for seeking a clear-eyed, and result-oriented relations, to cooperate where their interests overlap, and balance where American interests dictate so.

## **The Challenges Ahead**

The Thucydides Trap may not be the destiny of China-US relations, but it does not mean the way ahead will be smooth or conflict-free. For the near future, there are at least four challenges lying ahead.

### *How can China and the US reduce their trust deficit?*

It goes without saying that there is increasing mistrust as China grows wealthier and stronger. While the US worries about China's revisionist ambitions, the latter suspects the former of encirclements and containment. The on-and-off bellicose words from both countries' hawks only exacerbate the worry and concerns.

### *How can China and the US rebalance their economic relations?*

For the past several decades, China has grown into a manufacturing hub in the Asia-Pacific, and even the world. As a foreign-oriented economy, China exports large volumes of its manufactured goods around the world, especially into the huge American market. The US views with great concern this growing trade deficit, and Trump has made it the defining issue in his dealing with China. If Xi and Trump cannot find a practical way to deal with the issue, it will be a constant thorn in their relations.

### *Can China and the US cooperate on the North Korea issue?*

North Korea is a top priority in Trump's foreign policy consideration in the Asia-Pacific. The essence of Trump's emerging North Korea policy is to forge a united diplomatic front and cut off its oil import and financial connections with the outside world. The underlying logic is that a diplomatically isolated, and especially financially strangled North Korea will finally be forced to come to the negotiation table seriously. And the key to success is China, which Trump thinks has much more leverage and has not done enough in this regard. From the Chinese perspective, however,

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China does not have the kind of influence as the US thinks it has and has done what it can. What's more, China thinks that the US also bears some responsibility for the current situation on the nuclear issue, and should try face-to-face dialogue.<sup>2</sup> That said, in recent years, China has been more willing to work with the US to impose much harsher sanctions, which may lead to fruitful cooperation between the two countries.

*How will China and the US manage the issue of Taiwan, and to a lesser degree, the South China Sea?*

With Taiwan's pro-independent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in power and its leader Cai Yingwen elected, and the controversial telephone call between Trump and Yingwen, the once cooled-down issue of Taiwan raised its head again. For China, the Taiwan issue is its core interest and cannot be negotiated away; any signs of change of policy on the part of the US, or Yingwen's potential pro-independence activities will be viewed with great concern and met with harsh responses. The good news is that Trump has realised the sensitivity of the issue and reaffirmed the US 'One China' policy, and Yingwen is relatively moderate in her tone and activities concerning the issue of independence.

The issue of South China Sea has steadily calmed down since the summer of 2016, and China and the Philippines have conducted talks on the issue of joint development of resources in the disputed area. Besides, China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reached a framework concerning the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which is a crucial step forward in implementing the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea signed in 2002. These steps will contribute to stability and peace in the region, and be conducive in resolving disputes.

One remaining issue is the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FNOPs) of which China and the US have different

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: As this book went into print, Singapore was gearing up to host a historic summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.



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interpretation. So far, the Trump administration has conducted five rounds of FNOPs, and China sent its Navy to monitor and accompany these each time, and expressed dissatisfaction. But given the known positions of both countries concerning these operations and the agreements on avoiding unplanned encounters, the possibility of clashes at sea or accidents has reduced.

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## **Accelerating Competition: The Risk of Regional Blocs in South Asia**

*Thought Piece*

**Andrew Small\***

**D**espite various tilts and alignments, despite the rivalry between India and Pakistan, despite various crises, there was a degree of stability to the framework of relations between the other major powers in South Asia over the last decade. China, despite its friendship with Pakistan and support for its capabilities, played a relatively balanced role on security issues in the region, and had implicit lines where it avoided antagonism with India. The United States (US), despite deepening strategic ties with India, and frustrations over Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan, still saw a critical stake in the relationship with Islamabad, and was unwilling to take certain risks with it. Between India and China, border issues were contained and relatively well managed, while trade functioned as a mitigating factor, with closer economic ties taking the edge off the two sides' growing strategic competition. Both the Chinese and Indian side took care not to allow the competitive elements of the relationship to accelerate.

South Asia was also an area of limited, but expanding cooperation between the US and China. This had been true most notably in the two sides' coordination on crisis management when the region was on the brink of war, but more recently the two sides had also cooperated increasingly closely on Afghanistan, focused on attempting to assemble a reconciliation process with the Taliban. Almost as importantly, this was not an area of serious US-China competition. Even as dynamics were becoming more adversarial in East Asia, various forms of cooperation in South Asia were kept alive, reflecting the very different hierarchy of concerns in the two regions for the two sides. Traditional forms of

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military competition and issues of historical sensitivity divided the two sides in East Asia; shared concerns about terrorism, stability, and development in South Asia brought the two sides into closer accord.

Equally, despite closer ties between the US and India, the two sides were not always aligned so closely in South Asia. India did not want an especially active US role in its traditional area of influence, while Washington trod carefully in its support to a larger Indian role, particularly in Afghanistan, and attempted to take a relatively balanced stance in mediating between India and Pakistan during near-conflict situations. As a result, there were certain limits to great power competition in the region.

Now instead, lines are hardening, and competitive dynamics are accelerating. Indo-US relations are being seen by other powers as more of a settled strategic fact rather than something that could be overturned with a new administration on either the US or the Indian side. China had hopes that Narendra Modi's election victory – given his close links with China and poor relationship with the US during his time as Chief Minister of Gujarat – might be another opportunity to reset the India-China relationship. Instead, US-India ties have been further consolidated, with the Prime Minister even more forward-leaning. The result has been a reaction not just from China, but from Russia, which has embarked on a process of building a new relationship with Pakistan, having for so long been aligned with India in the region. US-India cooperation is also taking place to a greater degree in South Asia itself. This is partly because India is more open to an enlarged US role as a counterbalance to China – where it had been hesitant before, India has been increasingly welcoming to other like-minded outside powers, including Japan. The US has also wanted to show that a closer relationship brings political benefits, and that, when India expects US support in its own region, it will not show the same kind of neutrality as it did in the past. This was subtly in evidence in the aftermath of the Uri attacks, and less deftly over US calls for a greater Indian role in Afghanistan.

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China-Pakistan ties are becoming stronger, with CPEC representing arguably the biggest shift in the relationship since the 1990s, as it broadens out from its traditionally security-centric focus to become broader-based. Meanwhile, Sino-Indian relations are undergoing a very marked deterioration, epitomised by the Doklam episode in 2017, which was the closest the two sides have come to war in decades. Rising Chinese power and presence in South Asia has become India's biggest strategic concern, while tensions over issues ranging from the UN Security Council sanctions committee to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) have been further symptoms. With reduced US presence in Afghanistan, US-Pakistan relations have been in a steadily downward arc. This is now seeing a sharper decline under the Trump administration in the period since the South Asia policy review, but the pressure to adjust the trajectory of the US' Pakistan policy has been there in Washington for some time.

At the same time, economics and connectivity are currently functioning as an exacerbating rather than a moderating factor for security trends in the region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is being viewed through the prism of geopolitics, particularly by India, with the result that the latter is looking not just to counterbalance China's security role but its economic role too. The final, more nascent element is that there is the prospect that US-China competition moves from being defined almost exclusively by the Asia Pacific to bleed into what is now being described by the US as the 'Indo-Pacific.' Part of the US policy review has also included thinking about a US response to the Belt and Road Initiative, and what the Trump administration has described as Chinese 'predatory economics', which formed the focus of much of the discussion at the reformed the US-India-Japan-Australia quad. This does not mean US-China competition accelerating across South Asia as a whole - the two sides have remained keen to cooperate in Afghanistan, and the US remains quietly supportive of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). But the Indian Ocean is becoming a new theatre for rivalry, and if US-Pakistan

tensions worsen, it will have a significant effect on the scope for US-China cooperation in continental Asia too.

All of these dynamics have become mutually reinforcing, further speeding up trends that were already underway. The complicated causality also means that countries are more inclined to see developments through the prism of reaction, competition and zero-sum calculations – India, for instance, sees CPEC as another move on China and Pakistan’s part directed at it, even if the objectives are only marginally informed by India-driven calculations.

There are some mitigating factors, in addition to the fact that no party wants a slide into outright US-India/China-Pakistan bloc politics in the region.

First – the US goals in Afghanistan are still focused on counterterrorism, forcing a stalemate with Taliban, reconciliation, and ultimately to leave under the right conditions. This is not a theatre of competition with China for the US, and there is still an alignment of objectives with Beijing. This was illustrated in the remarks by Xi Jinping and Donald Trump about Afghanistan during the latter’s Asia tour. In principle, there is also still a path that could thread together the US and Pakistan’s objectives too, if a genuine reconciliation process could be set in motion. Afghanistan could become the final nail in the coffin for any hopes of restricting regional competition between major powers, but it has not happened yet.

Second – it should still be possible to find areas of positive sum cooperation on connectivity, investment, and infrastructure. This is not an area that needs to be seen in solely competitive terms. The US position on the BRI will look more like Japan’s current position than India’s current position – although there will be efforts to offer economic alternatives to countries, there will also be areas of cooperation. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Trump administration has been privately clear that they still see Chinese investments as more complementary to the US objectives. For its part, China has no objection to the US, Japan or others providing



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additional infrastructure to the region, which can rebound to Beijing's economic benefit too. It is even possible that China may find a way to reach an accord with India over the BRI, even if that is not close.

Some recent developments represent a genuine deepening of competitive dynamics; others reflect misperceptions. In principle, there is still scope for well-managed competition. Nonetheless, the mitigating factors are less potent than they used to be; there is more scope for misinterpretation of intentions; and the relative balance of competitive and cooperative elements has shifted. As a result, we're now seeing a transition phase in great power politics in the region, in which contingencies are more complicated, there is greater risk of miscalculation, and it is less and less clear that we can take the previous parameters of geopolitics in South Asia for granted. ■

# Strategic Stability Challenges in South Asia<sup>1</sup>

## *Scholarly Essay*

Dr Syed Rifaat Hussain\*

The discussion in this essay is divided into two broad sections. The first section begins by noting the significance of the concept of stability, and then delineates the meaning of strategic stability as a Cold War construct and its evolution. The second section applies this notion to the regional context of nuclear South Asia and identifies key challenges posed by it.

### **Stability: A Contested Construct**

Stability is a contested intellectual construct with no consensus on its precise meaning. Structural realists equate stability with peace, and instability with war. However, this definition tells us little about how to treat periods of crisis that fall between two extremes of peace and war. To address this lacuna, John J. Mearsheimer, defined stability 'as the absence of war and major crises' (quoted in Zagare and Kilgour 2000: 4). Largely as a result of the 'intellectual inheritance of the Cold War', stability has been associated with peace. Yet, this can be misleading. As noted by McCarthy (1996):

It is overly simplistic and, more than not, inaccurate to label a changing system unstable or to label an unchanging system stable.

It has also been argued that strategic stability must be linked with geography to help create a 'more nuanced idea of strategic stability.' Loo (2003) defines strategic stability as a condition:

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...where policy-makers do not feel pressured into making reactive changes from existing non-violent to violent strategies involving the large-scale use of military force in the pursuit of particular state interests. The concept of strategic stability does not rule out the use of military force. What it does rule out is accidental or inadvertent war, as well as knee-jerk reactions of policy-makers who feel that they are being pushed or pulled, almost against their will, towards decisions about the use of military force without prior consideration of other non-violent policy options (Loo 2003).

## **Defining Stability**

In his influential work, *System and Process in International Politics*, Kaplan (1957) discusses that 'stability may refer either to a state of a system, that is, to its state of equilibrium' or to the system itself. Equilibrium and stability are not the same concepts, for equilibrium may be unstable. Stable equilibrium is one that fluctuates within given limits. The stable system remains within specified limits for arbitrarily defined variables. In considering the stability of a political system, it is important to distinguish between the stability of a given state of equilibrium, and the ability of the system to find such a state. Political equilibrium may be dynamic in the sense that the system keeps changing its internal arrangements in order to maintain its stability.

Kaplan distinguishes between two levels of, or of two ways of thinking about stability. First, one may describe a system as being stable if it is capable of finding equilibrium. Second, one may then look more closely at that equilibrium, and determine whether it in turn is stable, i.e., whether or not it 'fluctuates within given limits.' For him, a stable system is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the existence of stable equilibrium. On the other hand, a stable equilibrium is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for the existence of a stable system (Kaplan 1957). He argues that a system in equilibrium will remain there until

disturbed. If, however, a disturbance of sufficient magnitude to move the system away from its equilibrium point does not exist or is not likely to occur, then, one may conclude that the system's equilibrium is stable. If such a disturbance does exist 'but its effects are dependent upon its strength, the equilibrium has local stability' (Kaplan 1957: 8). If a system is disturbed, it either changes its equilibrium or, if it fails to do so, will cease to exist. If a system manages to find a new equilibrium point; i.e., if it manages to execute 'equilibrium change', it is 'ultra stable.' If, when the disturbance subsides, the original equilibrium is not restored in the system, it has undergone 'system change' - as opposed to equilibrium change. Such a system is also ultra stable, but it has the characteristic of having been irrepressibly altered. He also identifies another type of stability that he calls 'steady state' or 'homeostatic' stability. This type of stability is epitomised by systems characterised by negative feedback or the way in which a system uses information about its present and desired states to keep it on track to its goal (Ibid.: 6-7).

### **Why is Stability Important?**

The stability issue is directly **related to the polarity debate** in international politics, namely, the debate regarding the optimal international structure for the preservation of stability. Taking an institutional perspective, George Liska argued that stability will be best maintained when the 'coveted values' [of security, welfare and prestige] authoritatively distributed by institutions remain in line with the ever-changing *de facto* distribution of capabilities in the system. Rosecrance (1963) concentrated on the domestic standing of elites and their attitudes towards the *status quo*, on resources available in the system, and its ability to offset disturbances to its equilibrium. Morton A. Kaplan, Karl W. Deutsch, David J. Singer, and Kenneth N. Waltz, on the other hand, all agree that system structure is the main determinant of stability; although they disagree fundamentally on which structure makes for most stability. Kaplan, Deutsch and Singer defend the thesis that

multipolarity best preserves stability. Waltz argues the opposite: that bipolarity is more stable.

### **Why Should Multipolarity Support Stability?**

Deutsch and Singer (1964) advance two lines of argument to answer this question. Their first line of argument focuses on 'interaction opportunities' and runs as follows:

The greater the number of independent actors in the international system, the higher will be the number of possible pair-wise interactions (dyads). When these interactions display crosscutting tendencies and tend to undermine deep lines of cleavage, as would be the case in a normally functioning multipolar system, negative feedback will function to provide for stability through flexibility of interaction (Ibid.: 392-396). Their second line of argument centres on the allocation of attention between independent actors in the system. Based on the assumption that a certain, relatively large, percentage of one actor's attention - the critical attention ratio - needs to be focused on another actor before a conflict between them can escalate, they argue that the more actors exist in the system, the less attention any one actor can afford to direct at any other actor. As a result of the reduction in the average attention ratio below the critical attention ratio, fewer conflicts will escalate. In short, their argument is based on the assertion that stability is causally linked to the quantity, diversity and qualities of interaction opportunities (Ibid.: 390-406).

Drawing on the best elements of each system, Rosecrance (1963) outlined the most stable international structure, 'bi-multipolarity': a system in which two almost preponderant powers exist in an external multipolar environment. This system is stable, according to him, because:

...the two major states would act regulators for conflict in the external area; but multipolar states would act as mediators and buffers for conflicts between the bipolar powers (Ibid.).

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Deustch and Singer (1964) offered a probabilistic definition of political stability as:

...the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur...A more stringent definition of stability would require also a low probability of the actors' becoming engaged even in limited wars (Ibid.: 390-91).

Waltz suggested that international stability should be measured in terms of the 'peacefulness of adjustment within the international system and by the durability of the system itself.' Adjustment has two connotations: on the one hand, it may mean change in response to exogenous stimuli leading to evolution. On the other hand, it may mean the adjustment necessary in order to move the system back to its original state of equilibrium after a disturbance has been experienced. The first approach suggests an evolutionary view of stability, while the latter meaning points towards a more *status quo* conceptualisation. In his 1967 article, 'International Structure, National Force, and the Balance of World Power,' he defined stability as:

The perpetuation of that structure [defined as the pattern according to which power is distributed] without the occurrence of grossly destructive violence (Waltz 1967).

Taking a more dynamic view of stability, Liska (1957) saw the participation of states in 'routinized sets of interactions' as the criteria by which international stability or instability may be established. His understanding of institutional stability centred on the correspondence that must exist between the influence exercised by individual states within an institution, and their actual capabilities relative to other members of the international systems:

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A composite organization is in structural equilibrium if there is an overall correspondence between the margins of restraints it imposes on members and their willingness to tolerate them; if the ratios between the influence exercised by individual members and their actual power are not too unequal; and if the respective powers of the different organs correspond to the composition of their membership (Liska 1957: 13).

He argued that states pursue levels of security, welfare and prestige that are in excess, whenever possible, of their share as suggested by their relative power position in the international system. However, in an international system characterised by effective structures of international organisation, a state's prestige and influence are determined not primarily by competition under anarchy but by 'an authoritative distribution of the coveted values by international institutions. When all states feel that the current distribution of coveted values (security, welfare and prestige) corresponds with their relative position in the systems, the system is in an "ideal state of equilibrium"' (Ibid.).

Thus, according to Liska, the laws governing the authoritative distribution of prestige within international institutions play a major role in determining its stability, and of the system within which the institution operates. When these laws create a hierarchy of prestige within the institution that corresponds broadly with the hierarchy of capabilities actually in existence in the international system, they provide for an ideal state of equilibrium. However, just as the laws operating in institutions can provide for its stability, they can also provide for its instability. He argued:

When formal law fails to keep in touch with changing social forces, the result is a legal disequilibrium which makes the law dubiously normative and ineffective (Liska 1957).

The result of this disequilibrium is 'lawless evasion' of the institutions by states dissatisfied with their position within it.

## **Deterrence Stability**

What is stability in the nuclear context? In broad terms, nuclear stability refers to all those factors or conditions that work to ensure against the breakdown of nuclear deterrence. Kissinger and Scowcroft (2012) defined strategic stability as a condition...

...that requires maintaining strategic forces of sufficient size and composition that a first strike cannot reduce retaliation to a level acceptable to the aggressor...We need a sufficient number of weapons to pose a threat to what potential aggressors value under every conceivable circumstance. We should avoid strategic analysis by mirror-imaging.

Deterrence stability is crucial to war prevention between nuclear adversaries:

A balance of deterrence - a situation in which the incentives on both sides to initiate war are outweighed by the disincentives - is stable when it is reasonably secure against shocks, alarms and perturbations. That is, it is stable when political events, internal or external to the countries involved, technological change, accidents, false alarms, misunderstandings, crises, limited wars, or changes in the intelligence available to both sides, are unlikely to disturb the incentives sufficiently to make deterrence fail (Schelling and Halperin 1961).

It comprises of three essential elements: **crisis stability**, **arms race stability**, and **political stability**. The first refers to absence of incentives to strike first with nuclear weapons in a crisis; the second to absence of incentives for rapid qualitative or quantitative expansion of a state's nuclear arsenal vis-à-vis that of an adversary; while the last one refers to the effectiveness of deterrence in reducing incentives for major coercive political changes. Nuclear deterrence is, thus, as much a product of politics as it is that of



perceptions and technology.

The objective of stability can be divided into two separate and, sometimes conflicting, concepts: 'arms race stability' and 'crisis stability.' **Arms race stability** is achieved by stopping or moderating competition in a nuclear arms race. This competition increases the risk of war by introducing more threatening weapons, and by making more nuclear weapons available for expanded roles and missions. Agreements that establish mutual constraints on the size and quality of nuclear arsenal or ban certain activities completely contribute to arms race stability. **Crisis stability**, on the other hand, is achieved by eliminating the incentive for either side to launch a preemptive counterforce attack in an effort to obtain military advantage by significantly blunting the other side's capacity to retaliate. The danger of such a counterforce attack would clearly be greatest at the time of a major political crisis or military confrontation, when escalation to nuclear war might be judged a real possibility. Crisis stability, or the reduction of the risk of nuclear war in a crisis, can be increased by measures that assure the survival and effectiveness of retaliatory strategic forces in the face of a preemptive counterforce attack. Both the deployment of more survivable retaliatory systems, and the elimination of highly vulnerable strategic systems that are tempting targets contribute to crisis stability. This objective can also be supported by constraining strategic offensive forces that threaten the survivability of retaliatory forces, and by constraining strategic defensive forces that threaten to prevent retaliatory forces from reaching their targets. A high level of crisis stability does not eliminate the possibility of military engagements escalating into nuclear war, but it does reduce pressure to preempt if nuclear war appears imminent by reducing the perceived need to use vulnerable weapons before they are destroyed.

### **Deterrence Stability in South Asia**

South Asia's passage to overt nuclearisation in 1998 has led to the formation of 'two camps of deterrence theorists...over whether a

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nuclearized subcontinent will prevent a major conflict and foster escalation.’ These two camps might be called *deterrence optimists* and *deterrence pessimists*. Embracing Winston Churchill’s observation in 1953 that in a nuclear-armed world ‘safety would be the sturdy child of terror and survival the twin brother of annihilation’, *deterrence optimists* maintain that nuclear weapons by making war catastrophically costly generate incentives for war avoidance between nuclear rivals, and therefore, create stability between them. K.N. Waltz, the intellectual architect of deterrence optimism, attributed four benefits to military postures based on nuclear deterrence:

First, deterrent strategies include caution all around and thus reduce the incidence of war. Second, wars fought in the face of strategic nuclear weapons must be carefully limited because a country having them may retaliate if its vital interests are threatened. Third, prospective punishment need only be proportionate to an adversary’s expected gains in war after those gains are discounted for the many uncertainties of war. Fourth, should deterrence fail, a few judiciously delivered warheads are likely to produce sobriety in the leaders of all of the countries involved and thus bring rapid de-escalation (Waltz 1981).

Drawing upon these core Waltzian assumptions, *deterrence optimists* have put forth the nuclear peace thesis which states that wars between nuclear-armed countries will be unlikely, and, if they do, the conflicts are likely to be limited because the belligerents will stop fighting short of the intensity needed to bring about the resort to nuclear weapons. The position of these *deterrence optimists* is firmly rooted in the structural strand of the intellectual tradition of *realpolitik* which finds the key to interstate instability in the structure and distribution of power in the international system. In essence, it argues that when a ‘parity relationship is combined with the enormous absolute costs of nuclear war, a deliberate (i.e., a ‘rational’) war is at once unthinkable and virtually impossible.’ As

pointed out by Zagare and Kilgour (2004):

Every deterrence theorist believes that the high cost of war in the nuclear era has rendered states more prudent and, simultaneously, raised the provocation level necessary for outright conflict. When these effects are combined with the pacifying tendencies of a bipolar system, a world order is produced that, when properly managed, is unlikely to be characterised by major interstate war.

Following this logic, it has been argued that Pak-India deterrence is more stable than it is given credit for:

The prospects for deterrence stability are ...high because no South Asian state is currently committed to securing any political objectives through the medium of major conventional and, by implication, nuclear war. This condition is only reinforced by the high levels of 'defense dominance' obtaining at the military level, and thus it is not at all an exaggeration to say that deterrence stability in South Asia derives simply from the Indian [and] Pakistani ... inability to successfully prosecute quick and decisive conventional military operations, especially with respect to wars of unlimited aims...what makes this situation meta-stable is the fact that neither India nor Pakistan ...has the strategic capabilities to execute those successful damage-limiting first strikes that might justify initiating nuclear attacks in a crisis (Tellis 2001).

The intricate relationship between system structure, the cost of war, and the characteristics of weapon systems is reflected in the following tenets of Structural Deterrence Theory:

- Parity relationship, when coupled with high war costs, is especially peaceful. This assumption lies at the heart of

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the notion of mutually assured destruction. By contrast, when the cost of outright war is low, even parity may be insufficient to preclude confrontation, suggesting, 'war is always possible among states armed only with conventional weapons.'

- Asymmetric power relationships are associated with crises and war. The most dangerous form of asymmetry is a situation when neither state can deter the other, that is, when costs are mutually low, but one of them calculates an advantage in attacking first.
- As the absolute costs of war increase, *ceteris paribus*, the probability of war decreases. As Mearsheimer put it: 'the more horrible the prospect of war, the less likely it is to occur.'

Questioning the analytical and historical validity of these precepts of Structural Deterrence Theory, *deterrence pessimists* argue that notwithstanding their enormous destructive potential, nuclear weapons fail to produce stability because of a range of political, technical and organisational factors. Some of the specific problems that trump stability between nuclear states include risk acceptant or irrational leaders; command-and-control difficulties; and preemption incentives for small arsenals. Applying these concerns to nuclear South Asia, Katsouris and Goure (1999) have highlighted the following dangers:

...An Indo-Pakistani nuclear-arms race presents several distinct areas of concern. Nuclear weapons could be stolen. They could be launched by accident or without the authorization of senior political leaders. Political extremists on either side could use nuclear weapons for coercive purposes or simply launch an ill-advised conventional war that escalates unpredictably. If a conventional war does begin, or is looming, one side plausibly could decide to launch a strike first. Or poor communication and early-warning systems could

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mislead one party into believing that it is subject to a missile attack when it is not...Present circumstances in South Asia represent a security challenge without historical parallel (Katsouris and Goure 1999).

Sagan (2003) argued that:

India and Pakistan face a dangerous nuclear future...imperfect humans inside imperfect organisations...will someday fail to produce secure nuclear deterrence.

Concurring with Sagan, Chari (2001) states that South Asian proliferation undermines a 'widely held, *a priori* belief...that nuclear weapons states do not go to war against each other' (Ibid.). In the same vein, Krepon, a self-proclaimed *deterrence pessimist*, has identified a number of 'conditions' that tend to undermine processes of escalation control and stability of nuclear deterrence between Pakistan and India. These destabilising factors include: 'uncertainties associated with the nuclear equation' between India and Pakistan; 'India's vulnerability associated with command and control'; Pakistan's 'nightmare scenario of preemption' due to India's 'move toward a ready arsenal'; the shifting of the 'conventional military balance in India's favour'; 'the absence of nuclear risk reduction measures in the subcontinent'; the tendency by both governments to 'resort to brinkmanship over Kashmir'; and, 'the juxtaposition of India's nuclear doctrine of massive retaliation with a conventional war-fighting doctrine focusing on limited war' (Krepon 2001).

Bowen and Wolvén (1999) highlighted the destabilising impact of the inherent tension between imperatives of survivability and dynamics of escalation that beset the emerging Pakistan-India deterrent equation. They wrote:

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Stable deterrence requires, among other things, a safe and reliable command and control system that can assure neighbouring countries both that an accidental or unauthorised launch in a time of crisis is next to impossible, and that retaliation in the event of nuclear attack is possible...Our analysis shows that the process of making a deterrent survivable presents problems for making it controllable. *The conclusion we draw, therefore, is that as things now stand on the subcontinent, a decision to make a nuclear capability 'survivable' is apt to make that capability provocative.* Therefore, even if India and Pakistan meet the requirements of credibility and survivability of their newly acquired nuclear forces, it is very unlikely that these forces will not be provocative in one way or another. If this Catch 22 produces a seemingly reasonable deployment plan to assure survivability, the very unreasonable outcome of regional instability may occur as a result [emphasis original] (Bowen and Wolvén 1999: 33-34).

Kraig (2003) summarised the following drivers of nuclear instability between India and Pakistan:

- 'The dangers created by geographical proximity between India and Pakistan, in contrast to the Cold War, in which the US and Soviets had political-strategic, but not territorial proximity to each other.
- The lack of stable boundaries, or at least of stable, tacit agreements on *de facto* boundaries where disputes about territory still exist.
- The presence of ethno-religious cleavages which are integral to the two states' founding national identities, in contrast to the more abstract Cold War divisions that were based upon broad political-economic philosophies.
- The existence of violent internal exigencies, which are connected to the above three situational factors, and which are also persistently linked to the overarching

state-level strategic threats between the two countries.

- The persistent lack of feasible and reliable early warning sensors (due in part to technological barriers and in part to geographic proximity).
- The lack of reliable nuclear safety and warhead access devices (such as Permissive Action Links that ensure that only authorised personnel can arm or launch weapons, and environmental sensors that will allow detonation only when the warhead is actually at its target).
- The relative absence of dedicated command and control architectures that allows reliable civilian control during heightened tensions (an absence that is connected to the above factors of nuclear access devices and early warning systems)' (Kraig 2003).

Similarly, Sir Michael Quinlan questioned the 'robustness' of the Pakistan-India deterrent equation on the following grounds:

There lies between them the unsettled core issue of Kashmir which has been the cause of three wars and many near-war situations. Both countries share a long territorial border, not just in Kashmir, and their capitals and heartlands are much closer together than Moscow and Washington. Neither country seems able to base its nuclear capability primarily in submarines to avoid pre-emption risk; similarly the task of constructing a deployment mode based on hardened underground silos placed far back from the common border is almost an impossible one, at least in the near future. Neither side has an advanced early warning system against missile attack. It is not clear that either side has had a command and communication system of the sophistication achieved in the East-West setting. Also, it is not clear if either side had developed a system of political control of operations that combines the necessary rapid responsiveness with thorough involvement of advice and prudent safeguards. It also

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cannot be assumed that either side, at least initially, will have the safety procedures, standards and devices, like electronic locks, progressively developed in the East-West setting (Quinlan 1999).

After comparing the East-West Cold War model of deterrence stability with the Pakistan-India deterrent relationship, Quinlan concluded that:

Overall, the underpinnings of war-preventing stability seem less solid than they had become in at least the later years of East-West confrontation.... the risks look higher than in the East-West confrontation, both in the political dimension (above all because of Kashmir), and in the military one, because of close proximity and the long-time scale and heavy costs, if operational deployment does go ahead, of reaching the standards of control, invulnerability and safety eventually reached - after much learning and expense - during the Cold War (Ibid.).

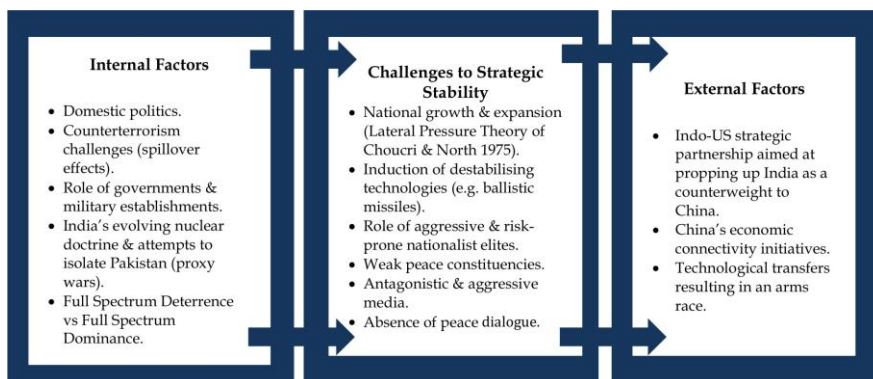
He went on to observe that 'unless one side or other grossly neglects prudent defensive dispositions, neither temptations nor "use-or-lose" fears need be plausible.' To ensure crisis-stability, he recommended:

If deployment is to proceed at all, neither country should stop at a very low level (for example in single figures) because of risks to crisis stability and confidence if there are perceptions of severe vulnerability, and so of pre-emptive danger or opportunity. In addition, an armoury so small that has plainly to offer only a single strike option may be bad, both for credibility and for proper focus upon war termination, if grave conflict does break out (Quinlan 1999).

As the foregoing discussion suggests the Pak-India nuclear deterrence equation, while seemingly stable, is liable to experience



severe jolts due to their enduring rivalry, changing patterns of regional alignments, and changing interests of extra-regional powers. A mix of global, regional and domestic trends in domestic politics of each of the two nuclear-armed states that would negatively impact South Asian strategic stability is presented in Figure 1:



Source: *Author's own.*

Figure 1 reveals that South Asia is undergoing a remarkable structural change that would ultimately lead to a power shift in favour of India as a dominant power.

Ever since the advent to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government under Modi in 2014, India's domestic environment has undergone a radical rightward shift. As part of its aggressive pursuit of *Hindutva*, the Modi administration has consciously cultivated forces of Hindu extremism, and has provided them the space to carry out their violent campaigns against minorities, including Muslims, Christians and others. As a consequence, civic space has drastically shrunk and India today has become a most intolerant society. The 2017 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders (RSF), 'ranked India 136<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries...placed below Afghanistan, Palestine, and Myanmar (ADRN 2018: 27). The March 2018 report on *Civic Space in Asia* concluded that:

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In recent years...there has been pushback against the progress made in terms civic engagement...the authorities have used repressive laws to curb freedom of expression and silence critics. Human right defenders and organizations continue to face harassment and intimidation, and vigilante cow protection groups have carried out several attacks. Thousands have protested against discrimination and violence faced by minorities. Millions of people have opposed changes to labor laws. Jammu and Kashmir witnessed months of curfew and a range of human rights violations by authorities. Such events reflect India's trend away from constitutional democracy toward a populist democracy, where majoritarian views are upheld (Ibid.: 34).

This domestic trend towards violent extremism has been accompanied by state-sanctioned 'hate' campaigns against Pakistan in which Islamabad has been painted as the 'poster child' of '*Jihadi* terrorist' violence in India. To punish Pakistan, India claimed in 2016 that it had successfully waged 'surgical strikes' along the Line of Control in the disputed territory of Kashmir. These outlandish claims have been met with disbelief even by rational circles in India, and have been vehemently denied by Pakistan. Simultaneously, India has been working on the theory of Full-Spectrum Dominance. It is now developing conventional war-fighting options to dominate all rungs of the escalation ladder, including limited nuclear use options. This evolving strategy is fraught with dangerous consequences. According to Montgomery and Edelman (2015):

...a competition for escalation dominance is now taking place in South Asia. This has, at least, two worrisome implications. First, the likelihood of a regional nuclear conflict could increase sharply. India, for example, might conclude that it can invade Pakistan without inciting nuclear retaliation, while Pakistan might believe that it can use nuclear weapons without triggering a nuclear

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exchange...Second, this competition could be the catalyst for a major expansion of India's nuclear weapon program, including the development of its own limited nuclear use options (Ibid.: 160).

In this attempt for escalation dominance vis-à-vis Pakistan, India is relying on its strategic partnership with Washington, which is worried about the rise of China. In the post-September 11 world, drastic modifications were made in the framework of Indo-US engagement:

A number of sanctions imposed earlier were removed; the door for high-tech cooperation was opened; political support was granted to India's own war on terrorism; the Kashmir issue was reconsidered with a positive tilt towards India (Banerjee 2011).

In 2005, a ten-year Defence Pact was signed followed by an Indo-US nuclear agreement, described by Carter (2006) as openly acknowledging India as a 'legitimate nuclear power.' Since then, India and the US have broadened and deepened the scope of their defence cooperation.<sup>2</sup> At present, India is among the top ten military spending countries in the world. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), during 2006-10, India accounted for 9 per cent of all global arms imports, making it the world's largest weapons importer. New Delhi's strategic modernisation drive and its huge arms build-up is widening the gap in conventional military capabilities with Pakistan, and forcing Islamabad to rely more and more on its nuclear option to offset India's conventional force advantage.

The current high economic growth of 7 per cent or more displayed by India should be a source of concern to its entire neighbourhood because a significant portion of this new wealth is

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<sup>2</sup> In April 2018, the US announced a new policy on the export of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) which will allow New Delhi to purchase a large number of armed and surveillance drones. See, TNN and Agencies 2018.

being spent on defence, and not on the social needs of the people. As suggested by Choucri and North in their seminal study, *Nations in Conflict: National Growth and International Violence* (1975):

Growth can be a lethal process.... a growing state tends to expand its activities and interests outward – colliding with the sphere of interest with other states – and find itself embroiled in international conflict, crises, and wars that, at least initially, may not have been sought or even contemplated. The more a state grows, and thus, the greater its capabilities, the more likely it is to follow such a tendency (Choucri and North 1975).

They posit that economic growth and expansion lead to conflict of interest which lead to higher demand for military capabilities and alliances as a means to augment a nation's military capabilities which ultimately results in 'violent action directed toward all other nations' (Ibid.).

## **Conclusion**

Washington under Trump has enthusiastically accepted India as its strategic partner, and both are working closely to contain China since they are opposed to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which they see as offering Beijing a historic opportunity to win 'hundred years marathon race' against them. As a declining hegemonic power, the US is desperately searching for regional allies to shore up its crumbling empire. New Delhi is playing a smart game of maintaining economic and trade links with Beijing, while tapping into technological resources of the US.

However, because of its strategic geography, important demography and strategic alliance with China, Islamabad cannot easily be outsmarted by India. So ultimately India and Pakistan, as nuclear-armed neighbours, would have to revert to a process of dialogue to sort out their difficulties. This is necessary to stop violent non-state actors from holding the reconciliation process

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hostage to the pursuit of private agendas. A good starting point would be the revival of the stalled Pak-India peace dialogue with a focus on resolving the core Kashmir dispute.

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# Russia's Changing Policy towards South Asia: Options for Pakistan

*Working Paper*

**Dr Shabir Ahmed Khan\***

## **Abstract**

Foreign policy is not tangible and is reflected in the diplomatic overtures and agreements between states. Such developments between Russia and Pakistan as well as research confirm that there is an obvious change in the former's policy towards the South Asian Region (SAR) in favour of Pakistan. Russia recognises Pakistan's importance for peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan and linking the Eurasian Union with South Asia, Indian Ocean and beyond; and has stopped viewing India as a counter weight to China in the region. The rift between Russia and the United States-led West has intensified in the post-Crimea period and the US-India strategic partnership is yet another factor responsible for a new Russian approach towards South Asia. Pakistan needs to take advantage of this by working on finding practical, tangible ways and means for improving its relations with the Russian Federation. This will enhance the country's bargaining power in international affairs.

**Key words:** Russia's Foreign Policy Phases, Former Soviet States, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Regional Geopolitics, the US.

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## **Introduction**

**D**uring the Tsarist and Soviet eras, the foreign policy of Russia was framed and implemented by a highly centralised and authoritarian state. During the Tsarist period, foreign policy was confined to the imperial court, while during the Soviet era, the Communist Party played the central role (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 122). In the post-Soviet era, the Constitution gave the President the leadership role in foreign policy formulation and implementation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs directly reports to the President. The Defense Ministry and Intelligence agencies also play important roles in the foreign policy realm. The most important intelligence agency in the foreign policy domain is the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) which has a direct impact on foreign policy. Parliamentary influence, on the whole, is quite limited, and likewise, public opinion and the role of political parties in foreign policy formulation are in infancy (Ibid.: 146). The sale of military hardware to other countries significantly influence Russia's foreign policy, while energy resources also play an important role in shaping foreign relations. One can observe that during the Nineteenth Century, Russia used its massive army as a weapon of foreign policy; while during the Twentieth Century, it applied rocket and nuclear science and arms sales to influence friends and enemies; while during the Twenty-first Century, it has vast energy tools and technology to influence friends and foes (Khan 2008: 96).

Policy is not tangible. It is evaluated and by the statements, actions and agreements between states. Four important levels or degrees of change in foreign policy can be identified:

- i. Adjustments which are refinements in efforts, but the policy remains unchanged.
- ii. Programme changes i.e., methods or means change (instruments of statecraft), while the purpose or policy goal remains the same.

- iii. Problem or goal changes i.e., initial problem or goal which the policy addresses is simply lost or eliminated.
- iv. International (and regional) orientation changes which requires basic shift in redirecting the actor's role and activities towards international and regional affairs (Hermann 1990).

These levels or degrees of change are inter-related and not mutually exclusive. Sometimes minor adjustments can include determining steps towards fundamental changes in policy (Jonson 2004: 3). Keeping in view Charles Hermann's theory, this paper argues that the last two level changes, that is, changes in policy goals, and changes in international and regional orientations, have caused a shift in Russia's policy and engagement in South Asia.

The recent actions and agreements between Russia and Pakistan as well as research confirm that there is a clear modification in Russia's policy of South Asian region in favour of Pakistan, where traditionally India occupied a central position. Recent developments in Pak-Russia relations such as lifting arms embargo; talks on selling of SU-35 and SU-37 fighter jets and Mi-35 attack helicopters; joint military exercises; accommodating Pakistan's views on stability in Afghanistan; arms deal; and energy agreements demonstrate that Russia is moving closer to Pakistan, while drifting away from its India-centric approach in South Asia. In this regard, Russia's engagement should not be seen in isolation from its overall foreign policy initiatives.

## **Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation**

Russia's foreign policy can be categorised and explained in two main phases:

### ***Phase I (1991-2000)***

This period was characterised by change in the global system of international relations from bipolarity to unipolarity due to the

demise of the Soviet Union; the decline in Russian economic and military capability due to the politico-economic transition; and therefore, an obvious tilt in Russia towards the West i.e., United States of America (US) and Western Europe. It can be termed as a policy of bandwagoning vis-à-vis the US-led West in search of economic and financial assistance. The immediate post-Soviet Russia had two main groups i.e., the Atlanticists and the Eurasianists, in the realm of foreign policy and its direction. There were divergent views on the direction of foreign policy amongst the Foreign Ministry, Defense Ministry, academic community and parliamentary circles. The Atlanticists included First Foreign Minister of Russian Federation Andrei Kozeriev; Deputy Prime Minister Egor Goidar; and President Yeltsin who were in favour of close relations with the West. The Atlanticists were in clear ascendancy over the Eurasianists, and there were even talks of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because transition circumstances, and the dual cause of democracy development and economic reforms necessitated greater focus on the US-led West (Khan 2008: 97). Boris Yeltsin has been termed as a liberal Atlanticist, while Putin is popularly known as Eurasianist (Hussain and Sangay 2012: 21). In the mid-1990s, Evgeni Primakov replaced Kozeriev as Foreign Minister and stated that Russia had no permanent enemies, rather permanent interests (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 121). The Eurasianists or 'pragmatic nationalists' included academicians and government officials who advocated a special role for Russia in the former Soviet space and to play the role of a bridge between Asia and Europe because of its distinct bi-continental geographical location in Europe and Asia (Ibid.: 119). Russia during the 1990s could neither pay attention to its near abroad nor play any important role in world affairs mainly because of her economic, political and military weaknesses attached to the transition.

***Phase II (2001-17)***

This period witnessed economic revival in Russia mainly because of the high price of oil in the global market and leadership role, resultantly a relatively politico-economic stable Federation started pursuing a policy of balancing the West and re-asserting herself in world affairs, in general and in former Soviet space, in particular. Russia, as the world largest oil exporter, has amassed the fifth largest world foreign exchange reserves. In 1991, it had just USD 12 billion in forex reserves which amounted to USD 524 billion in 2013 (Ibid.: 10). Since the foreign policy of any state cannot be predicted nor can it be static because it is an outcome of many constantly changing variables at the national as well as international level, the same has been the case with Russia during this second phase. Even the end of Cold War could not end the historical rivalry and suspicions between Russia and the West and the former's 'look west' policy remained severely challenged. NATO incursions into the former Soviet space and US' denial of Russia's privileged role in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) ignited new tensions between the two. The US explicitly rejected its notion of a privileged role and right to dominate this space (Lo 2008:97). In the post-Crimea period, Russia is looking towards Asia, particularly China, for close economic and strategic cooperation. Russia's policy of balancing the West and the quest for shaping multipolarity makes China the natural option for Moscow. Russia, since 2001, has been clearly pursuing balance of power theory to enhance power in order to protect national interests, particularly when its national security is threatened.

The Kremlin has been asserting itself in the former Soviet space where it seeks a privileged role, and considers it as the near-abroad and historical sphere of influence. Various institutional and organisational arrangements are being set up with CIS, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Custom Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and peacekeeping forces.

## **Russia and the Former Soviet States**

Since the adaptation of foreign policy concepts in the years 2000, 2008 and 2013, relations with the states under the former Soviet Union gained top priority (Ibid.: 283). Russia considers the security of its outer border a necessity for her own security. Economic gains is also a main motive behind Russian foreign policy towards CIS as these states can serve both as a consumer goods market for Russian products as well as a raw material or semi-processed material source.

In Caucasia, Georgia faced severe Russian response as a result of its backing to the Western-supported energy project i.e., Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in 2008 (Russia-Georgia War) which resulted in cessation of Ossetia and Abkhazia. Azerbaijan joined a Western-backed bloc known as GUUAM i.e., Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova in the 1990s and Moscow, therefore, carries a soft corner for Armenia and supports it in its conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Similarly, the case of Crimea in Ukraine which is a main conduit of Russian energy to Western Europe was dealt harshly by Moscow. The Crimea seceded and gas deliveries stopped to the gas-starved Ukraine as well as to Western Europe.

The US-led Western military presence made the Central Asian Region (CAR) Putin's first foreign visit destination in 1999 as Prime Minister, and 2002 as President. Hydrocarbon resources and significant geographical location in proximity to China and South Asia also make Central Asia important for Russia. Russia considers Central Asia as its backyard and traditional zone of influence. Here, Russia seeks to achieve a number of objectives including a leading role with a compliant China, particularly in the realm of security, absent or least interested West and no threat from Islamic fundamentalism.

Russia has traditionally followed a policy of having buffers on its peripheries. It sees Central Asia as a buffer to the Islamic South. According to a Russian scholar, Russia's current foreign policy objective is 'Eurasianism' and the emergence of a Eurasian

Union is strategically important to successfully compete globally (Torbakov 2016: 251). The Eurasian Union i.e., Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) includes Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while Tajikistan has yet to join the Union, replaced the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) on 1 January 2015 (Vinokurov 2017). Russia desires to use the Eurasian Union as an efficient link between Europe and Asia. Importantly, strong influence in the CAR will be instrumental for Russia in furthering its strategic and economic interests in the rest of Asia. Without having established control here, Moscow cannot effectively operate as a major Asian power (Torbakov 2016: 253).

### **Russia's Changing Policy towards South Asia**

During the 1990s, the economically declining Russia faced with catastrophic transitional shocks, found itself unable to frame any effective foreign policy towards South Asia because of divergent views and lack of direction. South Asia had no attraction as both the US and Russia had almost abandoned the region in face of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Russia's Foreign Ministry published the 'Concept of Russian Federation's Foreign Policy' in January 1993 in which South Asia was listed at seventh place in its top ten priorities (Singh 1995). A complication in Pak-Russia relations during the 1990s was the issue of Chechnya which was perceived as supported by the Taliban with the blessings of Pakistan. Though the entry of Aslan Maskhadov, Chechnyan President was denied by Pakistan in 1998, a year later in 1999 his aide Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was allowed to enter the country (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 341). Pakistan's political elite had a cold shoulder response to Russia due to the latter's traditional tilt towards India. Its stance on Kashmir and unwillingness to facilitate any dialogue undoubtedly contributed to Pakistan's position on Chechnya during that period. However, in 2003 former President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow, declared Chechnya as Russia's domestic problem, and

gave assurance that Pakistan's territory would not be used to support terrorist activity (Ibid.: 341-42).

Russia's recent policy towards South Asia has attracted attention because of radical alteration in its traditional approach due to the changed regional geopolitics. It has stopped viewing India as a counterweight to China in the absence of ideological and geopolitical struggles between Moscow and Beijing. Instead both have become close strategic partners and resolved their border dispute by dividing equally the disputed islands in the Amur River of Khabarovsk Krai in 2004 (Ibid.: 283). So this is not a 'programme change', that is, change in methods and means while the goal remains unchanged in its policy, rather the problem or goal which its policy was addressing in South Asia is simply lost.

Likewise, the historical Russia-India convergence on Afghanistan is not there as Russia considers the Taliban as part of the solution. It considers the Islamic State's (IS) presence in Afghanistan a bigger threat to CA's stability. India, on the other hand, also looks at Sino-Russian strategic cooperation and warming Pak-Russian ties with suspicion. India remained an important arms market for Russia, however, the US-India nuclear deal and growing strategic ties have threatened Russia's foothold in the Indian arms market. These are changes in regional orientation causing a change in Russia's policy goals.

Sensing the warmth between India and US and close collaboration between Russia and China, Primakov the then-Prime Minister of Russia presented the idea to form a 'strategic triangle' i.e., Russia, China and India against the US in 1998 in New Delhi (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 337). India's response was not positive in view of the long-standing rivalry with Beijing and warming relations between New Delhi and Washington. Putin had visited India four times as President since 2000 and once as Prime Minister in 2010, but could not succeed in drawing India away from its strategic partnership with the US. It has been acknowledged that Russia's ability to keep India out of the US'

orbit is limited (Ibid.: 339). Consequently, Russia's India-centric approach in South Asia appears to be coming to an end.

Pakistan was listed as a leading South Asian state with which Russia sought to further develop strategic and economic cooperation under President Medvedev's Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 (Zia 2017). However, the two foreign policy concepts of 2013 and 2016 do not carry any official statement about Pakistan (Topychkanov 2017). Since 2008, Russia's former President Medvedev and Pakistan's former President met four times on the sidelines of multilateral meetings. In 2011, both countries underscored joint efforts for peace and reconstruction of Afghanistan and signed many agreements on cooperation in areas of energy and agriculture when the then-President of Pakistan visited Moscow (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 342). In 2014, Russia lifted the embargo on arms supply to Pakistan, and in the same year, the Defence Minister of Russia visited Islamabad, and signed agreements on expansion of defence and military relations along with an agreement for the sale of Mi-35 helicopters (Abbas 2017).

In the post-2014 period, Russia desires to manage security in Afghanistan in close cooperation with Pakistan as shown by arranging meetings about Afghanistan with Pakistan and China in December 2016 and February 2017 (Pant 2017). Since 2009, Russia has sought to increase its diplomatic footprint in Afghanistan, and has been attempting to reach out to elements in the Taliban (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014: 335). In 2010, Russia wrote-off the USD 12 billion loan to Afghanistan, and began work on several infrastructure projects in the country (Ibid.: 335). In 2011, it agreed to a northern supply route via Russia and Central Asia to Afghanistan for NATO supply which proved to be very costly in comparison to the supply route via Pakistan. Russia's main objectives in Afghanistan seem to be manageable chaos in order to bleed the US financially; to prevent any spillover of instability into CA; and to have control over CA-SA integration via Afghanistan and Pakistan.



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With the US in relative decline, while China is growing more assertive, rules of the game are undergoing transformation (Pant 2017). An economically growing Asia is the focus of great powers as the centre of global power shifts from the West to Asia, and new alignments and re-alignments are in gestation.

In 2010, Russia declared that 'Pivot to Asia' is an extremely important aspect of its foreign policy (Raza 2017). The Western sanctions imposed on Russia and low oil prices in the global markets had held back the Russian economy, and the Federation is looking towards Asia for new markets as well strategic partners due to changes in international orientation. There is a clear shift in Russia's policy of South Asia where Pakistan has assumed greater importance due to Afghanistan and the Arabian Sea and beyond via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Korybko 2015).

Russia's inner eternal character places her on an antithetical course to that of the US (Bolton 2015). It seeks to counter US' influence around the world in various regions and South Asia is not an exemption. The common stance of multipolarity in world affairs has provided ground for Russia, China and Pakistan for closer cooperation. Most scholars believe that multipolarity is more benign and stable because states view each other not as adversaries, but as potential allies also. In a unipolar world system, a hegemon must protect and respect the sovereignty of other states, and when this is not the case within the global system then it gives birth to dissatisfaction, and states try to increase their capabilities and challenges or try to replace the hegemon (Slobodchiko 2013). This is true for Russia, China and Pakistan and their desire for multipolarity:

The Russia-Pakistan-China triumvirate is a reality in the offing and has a far greater convergence of security objectives in Asia than a similar Russia-China-India grouping (Mitra 2015).

These countries have the strategic means to neutralise possible negative impact of Indo-US regional ambitions centred in

Afghanistan. Russia and Pakistan both control the supply routes i.e., the Northern Distribution Network via Russia and Central Asia; and via Pakistan's Chaman, Ghulam Khan and Torkham borders to the US-NATO troops present in Afghanistan. They can shape the outcome of Afghanistan's conundrum if they coordinate their policies effectively (Joshi 2017).

The US-Russia relations have become substantially tense with media reports that US' shipment of military equipment unloaded at the Baltic Sea Port in Poland in September 2017, while Russia has increased its military activities in Belarus. Both powers seek to counter each other around the world wherever opportunity presents itself which places Pakistan at the centre of their core interests.

On the other hand, the US and Pakistan are drifting away from each other due to the former's unrealistic and discriminatory approach towards the region. The recent Russian stance on Afghanistan manifests its desire to deter the US from establishing a long-term military presence there. Pak-Russia close cooperation will give Moscow the chance to gain a real foothold in this region (Hanif 2013: 63-86).

Russia recognises Pakistan's strategic importance in the region, particularly regarding the final political settlement in Afghanistan. The suspicious US role i.e., strengthening Indian influence at the expense of Pakistan's security, while Russia's stance on accommodating the latter's views on stabilising Afghanistan, and countering Washington's efforts to contain Islamabad's influence has further provided ground for close cooperation (Ramani 2017). Russia has also engaged China in its efforts to resolve the Afghan crises, and Pakistan, therefore, supports and welcomes its involvement.

Over the past few years, Russia has been focusing on Pakistan for building long-term military, political and economic relations. Pak-Russia joint military exercises 'Druzba 2016' in Pakistan; and 'Druzba 2017' in Russia signify growing trust between the two states. At the same time, Russia values Pakistan's geographical

location and desires to assist her in its peaceful integration into the multipolar Eurasian framework being constructed under Russia-Chinese strategic cooperation, while the multimodal China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides the best opportunity to link Eurasia with South Asia (Korybko 2015). To materialise this, a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is a prerequisite to provide direct contact between Eurasia, South Asia and beyond.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provides yet another useful platform for Pakistan, Russia and China to deliberate upon regional issues of security and peaceful integration. Pakistan's permanent membership of the SCO is undoubtedly a result of China's support, but it would have been impossible without Russia's facilitation. In 2011, Vladimir Putin as the Prime Minister of Russia endorsed and supported Pakistan's bid for permanent membership. Russia also condemned the Salala check post attack by the US-NATO forces in which more than 20 Pakistani soldiers were martyred. The Foreign Minister of Russia declared it as an unacceptable violation of a state's sovereignty (Abbas 2017).

From the above discussion, it is clear that Russia's 'shift in approach' towards South Asia is caused by a number of factors:

- i. The US' interference in Ukraine (Slavs land).
- ii. The US-EU economic sanctions on Russia in post-Crimea period and tensions over Eastern Europe between Russia and the US.
- iii. Asia is growing rapidly and the world's power centre is consequently shifting to Asia, where Pakistan and China enjoy leverage given their huge armies and nuclear capabilities.
- iv. The US-India strategic deal and India's tilt towards the US at the expense of Russia.
- v. Pakistan can be an important arms market for Russia as it is the world's seventh largest arms importer (Zia 2017), while Russian economy heavily depends on arms

- export as the world's second largest arms exporter (Woody 2016).
- vi. Pakistan can be an outlet to Eurasian Union via CPEC to the Indian Ocean, and beyond as it can only be strengthened towards East and not the West.
  - vii. Pak-Russia interests coincide in Afghanistan as both are real stakeholders in peace there. Russia considers security of former Soviet borders vital for its own security.
  - viii. Russia is sensitive to instability and drug-trafficking from Afghanistan via Central Asia. Pakistan can be instrumental in bringing peace to Afghanistan and indirectly Central Asian stability will be assured.

This shift in Russia's policy due to the above factors and altered ground realities in Afghanistan, South Asia and Central Asia demand closer strategic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan. Prof. B.M. Jain opined in his article that China and Pakistan jointly sought to whip up the ripples in Moscow-Delhi relations to isolate Russia (Jain 2016). It is worth mentioning here that Russia, the third largest economy of the world, understands better with whom to deal and how.

Relations between states develop on the basis of mutual benefit and convergence of interests. The evolution of International Relations is a dynamic and constantly changing process where convergences and divergences of interests amongst states develop accordingly. Foreign policies change with changes in international and regional orientation which require shift in a state's role and activities.

Furthermore, it has been correctly pointed out that Pak-Russia relations are guided by the Theory of Realism according to which states try to defend their interests either by maximising their power or by seeking alliances to create and maintain balance of power (Hanif 2013: 65). So, from a realist lens, one can see convergences between Pakistan and Russia for inclination towards

each other. The evolving Russian strategy towards South Asia has been, however, reinforced by the Sino-Russia partnership aimed at creating a multipolar world order which totally denies B.M. Jain's theory of isolating Russia. Samuel Ramani's view of Russia's current policy in South Asia carries some weight as he sees Russia pursuing a policy of balancing India and Pakistan by having military and strategic relations with both countries simultaneously (Ramani 2017). It can be beneficial in a sense that if Russia agrees to mediate between Pakistan and India, it would need the consent of both countries. Pakistan may welcome Russia's mediation efforts for resolving the Kashmir dispute whether these efforts are unilaterally or multilaterally under the umbrella of the SCO. Russia plans to develop trust with Pakistan, and eventually between Pakistan and India by interceding between them (along with China) for a cohesive multipolar world, and ultimately smoothen the ground for India's involvement in the Eurasian integration via Pakistan (Korybko 2015). Poor economic interdependence between Pakistan and Russia can be overcome by integrating Eurasian Union via CPEC to South Asia and to the Indian Ocean and beyond. Russia and China, under the auspices of the SCO, have the potential to persuade India and Pakistan to sit, talk and resolve their disputes. If this plan works, there will be no space left for those who follow the policy of divide and conquer.

However, there are forces at play to pull Russia and Pakistan away from each other, therefore, both the countries have to make sure that their relations remain invulnerable to external pressures or can survive in any kind of regional circumstances. As New Delhi may try to dissuade Moscow, while the US may try to pressurise and dissuade Islamabad from strengthening these ties. Vladimir Putin cancelled his planned visits to Islamabad twice in 2012 and 2014. According to Topychkanov (2017), 'despite welcoming signals from Islamabad, Russia's leaders were slow in their moving towards Pakistan and Vladimir Putin never visited Pakistan.' However, both countries need each other and must accord priority to re-arrange a visit of Russia's President to Pakistan. Russia has

also shown interest to participate in the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) and Trans-Afghan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipelines, but here again there are external pressures. Russia also signed an agreement to invest USD 2 billion in the North-South Gas Pipeline for Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Karachi to Lahore which had to be completed by December 2017 (Bhutta 2016), but unfortunately work has yet to be started on the project.

## **Policy Options for Pakistan**

In the rapidly changing global and regional geopolitical circumstances, Pakistan needs to take positive actions through diversification of its foreign relations, most importantly by having close relations with the Russian Federation in response to the latter's shift in policy and tilt towards it. The altered regional geopolitical circumstances also demand a well-informed and rational foreign policy to adapt to changing ground realities in international relations.

Pakistan's foreign policy has mostly remained one-dimensional for most part of the country's history i.e., with extra-dependence on the US. In the face of Pakistan's enormous, but unfortunately unrecognised human and material losses in the US-led War on Terror, and unnecessary and unjustifiable pressure, the country desperately needs to diversify its foreign relations. If one compares Soviet Russia's massive military and economic assistance to India i.e., developing public sector companies like Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd., Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., and Indian Steel Industry (Pant 2017) with the US' trivial assistance in sustainable economic development of Pakistan, one would agree that the US 'flirted' with Pakistan.

In the contemporary geostrategic environment of the region, there is convergence and congruence of interests between Pakistan and Russia. Moscow has clearly tilted towards Islamabad, and the government needs to capitalise on this opportunity for improving its close strategic, political and economic relations, which should be

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free from external pressures because having a free and independent foreign policy according to core national interests is vital.

If Afghanistan harbours a strong but unfriendly government that plays into the hands of India on the indications of the US and blocks all of Pakistan's projects in and around Central Asia, then Russia could be the ultimate circle breaker (Hussain and Sangay 2012: 21). There is a perception that the US desires long-term military presence in Afghanistan to supervise the surrounding states, and therefore, is least interested in peace. Pak-Russia cooperation on peace in Afghanistan is, thus, imperative and will be beneficial for peaceful integration between Central Asia and South Asia.

Pakistan needs allies who are technologically advanced and reliable and who prefer relations on the basis of equality. Russia can be a reliable as well as easy partner. Also, traditional Russian ethos is intrinsically antithetical to Western individualism as they have a deeper sense of brotherhood and community (Brothers 1993; Berdayev 1948).

Pakistan also needs to diversify its arm production and military hardware basket by having close military relations with Russia. The country also needs foreign investment in the energy sector which Moscow can provide. In conclusion, Pakistan's relations with Russia are mutually beneficial, and therefore, should not be seen against any third country, and are not a hurdle in having cooperative relations with other powers.

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# **Strategic Situation in Afghanistan and its Regional Implications**

- **Navigating Troubled Pathways: India's Role in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Apprehensions**

*Ambassador (R) Rustam Shah Mohmand*

- **Reconciliation Process in Afghanistan: Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

*Vladimir Potapenko*



# **Navigating Troubled Pathways: India's Role in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Apprehensions**

*Thought Piece*

**Ambassador (R) Rustam Shah Mohmand\***

**T**he ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has multidimensional implications for Pakistan. These range from a destabilised border to acts of terrorism; decrease in the volume of bilateral trade and the plight of both refugees and returnees etc. However, more ominous consequences loom on the horizon if normalcy does not return to the war-ravaged country. Pakistan's westward expansion of trade would be in jeopardy if the situation in Afghanistan does not improve. Projects like Central Asia-South Asia (CASA)-1000 power project and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline would be in danger of derailing causing incalculable harm to the country's economy. Even the smooth execution of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would, to an extent, be adversely affected. Trade with Central Asia will not take off, and we would not be able to benefit from exploitation of Afghanistan's huge potential of minerals - estimated at more than USD 1.5 trillion.

But when the stakes are so high, there is need for concerted and relentless endeavours to help kick start a Reconciliation Process to achieve durable peace and stability. That laudable objective has, unfortunately, passed Pakistan by. Ignoring the cost of not inviting attention to the root cause of the insurgency, and the continuance of a conflict that has robbed the region of huge economic opportunities, Islamabad has instead remained preoccupied with India's role in the West Asian country. How best

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to restrict or redefine India's role in Afghanistan has been a major consideration or goal that has constrained policymakers from formulating a robust approach for peacemaking in Afghanistan. But what is India actually doing in Afghanistan?

India-Afghanistan relations go back to 1947, but civilisational contacts are two thousand years old. In 1950, the two countries signed a friendship treaty; and in a break from protocol, the treaty was signed by Afghanistan's Ambassador to Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the then-Indian Prime Minister. This journey continued through the 60s and 70s.

The Soviet invasion in late 1979 transformed the political landscape of the country. While the Moscow-installed regime came closer to India, the people of Afghanistan chose to confront and fight against the alien ideology and system. India, by and large, remained on the sidelines during all these years when Afghanistan was being ruled first by pro-Moscow regimes and then by the Mujahideen from 1992-96 (although it had cordial relations with the Government in Kabul from 1979-92, the insurgency had taken hold and not a great deal was happening on the bilateral front). The Taliban rule from 1996-2001 did not bring about any change as far as Delhi-Kabul ties were concerned. Then came the United States and its invasion in October 2001, and the mostly pro-India group of the Northern Alliance was swept into power under the American watch.

That was the beginning of a new era of relations between Kabul and India. India saw huge opportunities in the new emerging scenario. The following considerations influenced the new Indian approach to Afghanistan: there was a presumption in India that Taliban were Islamabad's strategic assets and could be used to help Kashmiri freedom fighters. Defeat of the Taliban was, therefore, seen as a critical turning point in re-establishing India's historic connections with Afghanistan.

By promoting strong ties with Afghanistan, particularly in the economic sector, India wanted to create a powerful pro-Delhi lobby that could counter Pakistan's influence, and deny the so-called

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'strategic depth' that some in Pakistan wished to achieve. India could also realise its long-term ambitions of accessing the hydro-carbon rich Central Asian states by using Afghanistan as a springboard and thus, benefit from its energy resources.

Delhi was nurturing hopes of soon becoming a regional power. Afghanistan could be a strong base for its westward expansion. Lastly, the vast mineral resources were so tempting for a country like India that it was ready to help with investment, manpower and technology in exploiting these hidden treasures. These perceptions drove India's policy.

In the post-2001 era, India's role has been consistent, unambiguous and focused. It has undertaken, in consultation with the Afghan Government, high visibility big projects mainly in the relatively less volatile North and West of the country, and hundreds of small development projects in the remote areas of South and East of the country.

These high visibility projects include Parliament building construction in the capital; Sama Dam in Herat province; power supply and transmission schemes for Kabul; training of police and military officers, diplomats etc.; and scholarships for more than 1000 Afghan students in Indian universities. The 250 small projects include roads, health clinics, and water supply schemes etc.

Donation of Air buses to Afghanistan's national carrier Ariana; modernisation of the Indira Gandhi hospital in Kabul; and connecting all the provincial capitals to the national TV network are also significant projects that have considerable impact on the population. India's popularity rating has increased tremendously. How would Pakistan view such deep ingress into Afghanistan by its South Asian rival? There would, quite naturally, be deep apprehensions.

The perception in Islamabad is that by establishing a strong foothold in Afghanistan, India would, in many different ways, try to cause damage to its vital national interests. There are disturbing reports about Indian agents using Afghan soil for carrying out



attacks inside Balochistan. Islamabad also fears that India would, by its economic investment acquire a role that could be used to the detriment of Pakistan's interests. Islamabad believes it has made sacrifices in the cause of Afghans since 1978-79, not only in relation to giving shelter to hundreds of thousands of refugees, but also backing the struggle for freedom when the country was invaded by the former Soviet Union, and in doing so, it has put itself in harm's way.

Pakistan also claims rightly that it has strong ethnic and religious ties with Afghanistan and stability of the country is an indispensable component in Islamabad's calculations and its view of the region. This important relationship could be threatened by enhanced Indian presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan also fears that with a heavy, preponderant Indian influence on Afghanistan's institutions, Islamabad's long-term ambitions of expansion of trade, investment and commerce as well as its plans to import energy from Central Asian countries, could be in danger.

But then, how to navigate through such troubled pathways? The following factors need to be incorporated in any strategy that aims to take into account both short- and long-term interests of Pakistan:

There should be no compromise on Pakistan insisting that Afghan soil would not be used, covertly or overtly, against its territory or people.

Afghanistan's right to formulate its own policies, both internal and external, must be acknowledged and respected. However, no such policy that creates or gives space to any force or country to operate against Pakistan's interest should be allowed.

Beyond this fundamental reality, Pakistan should have no objection to Kabul's growing relations with India, particularly in the realm of economic cooperation. Pakistan must realise that by trying to restrict India's role in Afghanistan, it is risking a very severe Afghan backlash. The Afghans would not accept any disguised intervention that seeks to regulate Kabul's policies vis-à-vis its neighbours.

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The rising level of acrimony and anger against Pakistan across Afghanistan is deeply worrying. No such step should be taken which would further accentuate the feelings of hatred and frustration. The border fencing would result in deepening the feeling of despondency and generate hostility. The requirement of passport and visa for travelling would also lead to more pain and suffering. Early morning at 5 o' clock queues are formed outside the Kabul embassy building and visa applicants have to wait for four to five hours before they are able to submit their forms. It takes a week to get a two-month visa. Afghan goods have to wait for clearance at the Karachi harbour for weeks, incurring heavy demurrage. No wonder the bulk of Afghan transit trade has been diverted to the Chabahar Port.

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are harassed and live in constant fear of insecurity. They are being forced to repatriate. Deadlines are being fixed for their repatriation as if Afghanistan has returned to a state of normalcy. Those who are being encouraged or coerced into returning carry bitter memories.

Pakistan has lost the battle of winning hearts and minds by its short-sighted approach to a humanitarian problem. The enormous reservoir of goodwill has evaporated. In this perspective, it is not surprising that India's standing and popularity has gone up substantially.

The continuing stalemate in Afghanistan and the deteriorating security situation poses serious dangers for Pakistan. Not only would the Pak-Afghan border remain destabilised, there would be manifold other implications. The TAPI gas pipeline, CASA-1000 and even the much trumpeted 'One Belt One Road' would be in jeopardy if the conflict in Afghanistan is not resolved. For Pakistan, the stakes are high.

It is this issue that needs to be clearly identified and resolved. The true potential of Pak-Afghan relations can only be realised when the insurgency ends, and Afghanistan returns to a state of normalcy - of institution building. Pakistan has not been able to

initiate meaningful dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan Government that would seek to mainstream the Resistance on mutually agreeable terms.

The two principal bottlenecks to peace and reconciliation are: the US reluctance or inability to lay down its cards on the table. What does the US want to accomplish? It appears there is no ambivalence - the Americans, for a host of reasons, are not willing to withdraw from Afghanistan. Containment of China, opposition to CPEC, keeping a menacing watch over Pakistan's nuclear development programme are some of the reasons the US wants to maintain its military presence in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Government - a product and beneficiary of the 'status quo' would also not like to risk any mainstreaming of the Resistance that would threaten and undermine its position, hegemony, control or privileges. For Pakistan, then, there is an enormous challenge: How to, in the face of such formidable obstacles, push the Reconciliation Process?

It can only act decisively by soliciting intervention and help by seeking to encourage a more active role from China, Turkey, Iran and Russia. Such a multi-national endeavour for peacemaking will be too difficult to contain, ignore or obstruct.

By taking no initiative, Pakistan would only be acquiescing in a situation which is fraught with huge risks. It is this concern or objective that should engage the minds of those in the government, rather being obsessed only with India's role in Afghanistan. ■

# **Reconciliation Process in Afghanistan: Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

*Speech*

**Vladimir Potapenko\***

**T**he world is entering a new phase and the events of the past few years indicate vividly that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s current agenda remains both topical and important.

It is common knowledge that, right after its inception, the SCO focused on charting common, principled approaches and solutions to regional security issues under conditions of the new geopolitical realities of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Century. Over the years, the SCO has accomplished a lot in this area. The common multilevel consultative mechanisms are functioning smoothly, the activities of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) are growing, and the cooperation among member states is being strengthened at bilateral and other levels.

The armed confrontation in Afghanistan, despite the efforts of the country's central government and external forces supporting it, remains the main destabilising factor in the region. The attainment of security and stability in the country reflect the basic interests of the SCO member nations. Apart from the Taliban, presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants, many of whom have grassroots in the SCO member states, causes additional concern. The return of militants and terrorists to their home countries can add to regional instability.

The SCO focuses on common concerns for future developments in Afghanistan. The member nations are interested in Afghanistan as a peaceful and neutral country that respects and observes human rights and basic freedoms; and that maintains

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friendly relations with its neighbours. Since the SCO's inception, the situation in this country and around it has been discussed at all summits and meetings among the Heads of Government, Ministers and the Heads of other principal institutions. The SCO-Afghanistan cooperation has come a long way. Since 2004, the President of Afghanistan has been involved in annual SCO summits. In 2012, the country received Observer status by the SCO. In 2015, it applied for full membership.

Afghan issues are part of all principal SCO documents. The 2017 Astana Declaration called for the urgent need for stability in Afghanistan as an important factor in maintaining and strengthening security in the entire region. The Declaration resolutely supported the efforts of the IRA Government and the people aimed at asserting a peaceful and stable state free of terrorism, extremism and illegal drug trafficking based on the United Nation's central coordinating role in international efforts to stabilise the country and ensure its development. The Statement by the SCO Heads of State on terrorism as well as the Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism that help strengthen the international legal framework for coping with new challenges and threats in our region, should also be viewed in the same context.

While supporting international efforts to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan, the SCO members are constantly expanding political, economic and other assistance to Kabul, including defence, law enforcement, transport development, energy, anti-drug operations, training national experts, etc., both on bilateral and multilateral bases. The members take an active part in a number of important multilateral regional projects that also involve Afghanistan. These include the Heart of Asia - Istanbul process, Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and others. The mutually complementary nature of various economic initiatives by the SCO member states will enable opening up additional opportunities for economic and infrastructure growth in the region. This area of activity will

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certainly become stronger and more meaningful as the economic aspects of SCO activities are consolidated. While using proactive approaches during multilateral efforts to help Afghanistan to launch peace talks, the SCO members confirm their willingness to contribute to this important area.

The Organization has recently expanded by admitting such key regional states, as India and Pakistan, nations with deep historical ties with Afghanistan. This process is going on against the background of the increase of the SCO's global authority and influence as well as international ties. All this provides new opportunities for making the voice of the 'Shanghai Eight' more pronounced in the interests of resolving the protracted Afghan crisis through peaceful means.

On 11 October 2017, Russia chaired a meeting of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group at the Deputy Foreign Minister level in Moscow. The agenda included a discussion on the developments in Afghanistan and their influence on the situation in the region, as well as efforts to chart the most effective short-term action plan for the Contact Group's activities. Attention was focused on security issues and it called for raising the level of counterterrorism and anti-drug cooperation, including between the SCO's RATS and the relevant Afghan agencies.

The country is involved in regional projects focusing on transport infrastructure, including within the framework of the SCO Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport Facilitation. Kabul's contacts with the Business Council, the Inter-Bank Association and the SCO Forum, as well as the organisation of science and practical events could help establish wide-ranging economic cooperation. In terms of cultural and humanitarian cooperation, it would be appropriate to use the potential of the SCO University and the SCO Youth Council. Efforts to train and retrain national experts of Afghanistan will continue.

I thank you.■



# **Addressing Security Concerns in South Asia: A Way Forward**

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# **Resolving the Jammu and Kashmir Dispute: An Imperative for Regional Peace**

*Scholarly Essay*

**Dr Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema\***

**S**ince the martyrdom of Burhan Wani in a typically murky operation by the Indian security forces, and the consequent intensification of young Kashmiris' freedom movement, not only did the Modi regime totally abandon the policies of engagement, but also encouraged and facilitated the advent of a reign of terror in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). Consequently the world witnessed rapid intensification of the ongoing human rights violations. For the last 71 years, the people of IOK have seen nothing but death, mass destruction, indescribable atrocities, violation of human rights, world's first mass blinding operation, burning of shops and houses etc.

Mass graves not only reflect atrocities the Kashmiri people have endured over the years, but also tell the story of the United Nations (UN) failure to resolve the dispute. It is a well-known fact that the UN promised the people of Kashmir that they would be given right to choose their own future. Despite more than seven decades, the UN has been unable to influence India to comply with the resolutions of 1948-49. For obvious reasons one cannot put the blame on India alone, it is the support of great powers, especially the United States (US) which indirectly encourages and enables India to persist in its defiance. The key to the Kashmir dispute resolution undoubtedly lies with Indian leadership. This essay initially discusses the nature of the dispute and its accession, perceptions in various regions of Kashmir, internationalisation of the dispute, human rights violations, followed by a focus on efforts

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to resolve the dispute. Finally, it attempts to highlight the path to regional peace.

## **The Dispute**

The Kashmir dispute originated in 1947 primarily because of the hurried departure of the British. While the last Viceroy laid down a guideline for states to opt either for India or for Pakistan, he did not follow these guidelines strictly. The basic principle for accession to either of the dominion revolved around ruler's choice. However, the rulers were asked to take into consideration the geographic locations of the state and the composition of the population. It was made clear to the rulers that the wishes of the people and state's geographical location should be given utmost consideration. An examination of the Kashmir dispute clearly points out that neither the physical location nor the aspirations of the people were accorded deserving consideration.

No dispute has had so much influence over the policies of both India and Pakistan, especially policies towards each other, than this ongoing dispute. It still continues to shape and mould attitudes of Pakistanis and the Indians.

The Indians view Kashmir not just as a Muslim majority state, but whose ruler opted to join India disregarding the aspirations of the people and ignoring its geographic location. Compared to the Indians, the Pakistanis insist that the local Kashmiri people be allowed to participate in a UN-supervised plebiscite as approved by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949.

## **Accession**

### ***India***

India claims that since the *Maharajah* (great ruler or king) acceded to it and later the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) ratified the accession, the princely state is an integral part of

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the country.<sup>1</sup> Much later, the Indians claim that a resolution was passed by the Indian Parliament recognising Kashmir as an integral part of the Indian Union. Although the legality of accession has been frequently questioned by many scholars and officials, India insists that J&K is an integral part of the state. However, it does not apply the same principle of ruler's right of accession to Junagadh and Hyderabad.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Both scholars and officials in various parts of world have frequently questioned the issue of legal position of accession. A British scholar Alastair Lamb and American officials have questioned the validity of the instrument of accession. Alastair Lamb raised many intriguing questions that certainly require investigations. Was J&K invaded before the signing of accession? Did the *Maharajah* put off the signing and permitted a reference to the instrument of accession? Did *Maharajah* ever sign the instrument of accession? For details see, Lamb 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Many Indians have demonstrated tendencies to sidetrack the application of one specific principle, the principle being ruler's right to opt for a desired future status. The ruler of Junagadh opted to accede to Pakistan which India did not accept, and consequently, invaded and absorbed it. Following the takeover, India initiated a process of genocide and brutal repression of Pakistan's sympathisers inside the area. Simultaneously, it also promised to hold a plebiscite under UN supervision but no action was ever taken in this regard. Instead, India held a plebiscite of its own and announced that majority of the population had voted for India. Samaldas Gandhi who headed the Indian-sponsored provisional government before the state was invaded, openly threatened those contemplating to vote for Pakistan. As a result, almost all supporters of Pakistan opted not to participate in the plebiscite as they were repeatedly referred to as serpents and scorpions. Since Samaldas Gandhi's militant gangs (with the blessings of the Indian government) consistently terrorised the supporters of accession to Pakistan, most of these people realised the futility of participation in a plebiscite under such conditions. The significant fact that needs to be highlighted here is that India applies different principles to different cases. In case of Kashmir, it suits India to stress the ruler's right of accession, and in cases of Junagadh and Hyderabad it does not suit it to respect the sanctity of this right of accession, and so, it applies geographical factors to justify its illegal actions. Similarly, Hyderabad's quest for independent status was brutally suppressed. The *Nizam* (administrator of the realm) of Hyderabad offered to hold plebiscite, but India insisted that Hyderabad should first accede to India, and then a plebiscite could be held. India rejected the *Nizam's* offer of plebiscite on the grounds that under the conditions in which small groups of *Razakars* (volunteers) control the destinies of the people and are left free to terrorise people into submission, is unlikely to be reflective of peoples' wishes. Ironically, in the Indian-conducted plebiscite in Junagadh militant gangs with

## **Pakistan**

For Pakistan, the process of J&K's accession to India appeared contrived and fraudulent. Further, it was conditional on a plebiscite, which was never held. Most Pakistanis view the Kashmir dispute as a symbol of Indian duplicity and high handedness, and would like to see the dispute resolved by an independently supervised plebiscite as agreed to by both countries in the UN resolutions and as openly and repeatedly promised by both Mountbatten and Nehru. If this is not acceptable, then negotiations can be held how to resolve the issue and how to assess the wishes of the Kashmiris.

## **UN Resolutions**

India brought the Kashmir dispute to the UNSC accusing Pakistan for encouraging and assisting Pathan tribesmen to invade it. India wanted the UN to declare Pakistan as an aggressor which the UN refused to do. The case of this dispute was filed under Article 35 of the UN Charter VI which deals with the Pacific Settlement of Disputes. However, after having heard both India and Pakistan, the UN Secretary General urged both countries to prevent aggravation of the situation. The UNSC also established United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to mediate and resolve the dispute. After having discussed and consulted all the concerned parties, the UNCIP tabled two resolutions. These resolutions were accepted by both India and Pakistan and endorsed by the UNSC (Choudhury 1968; Burke 1973).

Taken together, these resolutions implied three things: to secure ceasefire and demarcation of a ceasefire line; the

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open blessings of the Indian government terrorised the people, but Delhi insisted upon the authenticity of results and the fair nature of plebiscite. Figures quoted by Indian scholars are misleading and reflect a totally different picture. Since Pakistan's supporters remained away from the polls, to quote the figures of such a plebiscite amounts to deliberately contrived distortion of the factual situation. See, Brecher 1953; Lamb 1994; Choudhury 1968; and GoI 1948.

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demilitarisation of the state; and the holding of UN-supervised impartial plebiscite to determine the question of accession of J&K to India or Pakistan (Choudhury 1968). Following the passage of the above mentioned resolution, while the two countries immediately stopped shooting at each other, the demilitarisation could not be attained. Since the state was not demilitarised, the plebiscite could not be held.

A section of Kashmiris has recently started voicing their refusal to accept the above-mentioned resolutions because these resolutions do not include the independence option. Neither India nor Pakistan adhere to this option. However, if negotiations start, options dealing with the nature of plebiscite along with other options could be discussed.

### **Self-Determination**

The UN resolutions, the Pakistanis and the Kashmiris all support the demand for exercising the right of self-determination through a UN-supervised plebiscite. Currently the Indians, of course, argue that Kashmiris have already made their choice. They refer to the J&K Constituent Assembly's confirmation of accession to India, but avoid mentioning that it was Nehru who advised Sheikh Abdullah not to hurry the accession issue, and gave him the idea of holding election for J&K's Constituent Assembly, and then securing confirmation from this body (Burke 1973).<sup>3</sup> All 75 members of the J&K's Constituent Assembly were not only nominees of Abdullah's party, but were also elected unopposed. Perhaps that is why Joseph Korbel (then-Chairman of the UNCIP) was compelled to question the validity of the adopted electoral processes and asked whether or not those could be called as proper democratic 'election.' He felt compelled to express his opinion in order to describe those elections in his book that 'No Dictator' could do better (Korbel 1954: 218-26).

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<sup>3</sup> See also, *Lok Sabha Debates*. 26 June 1952, Col. 2587.

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Pakistan has always supported the idea that the Kashmiris be allowed to exercise their right of self-determination in accordance with the UN resolutions whereas India, though it took the case to the UN, always created hurdles on the road to the resolution of the dispute.

Since the Constituent Assembly's election, India has maintained a remarkable consistency in rigging almost all elections in J&K. The only election that can be credited with some fairness is the one held in 1975. Many writers (including Indians) have repeatedly stressed that one major cause of frequent uprisings, is the repeatedly rigged elections. How can rigged electoral processes justify reflecting the true aspirations of the people of J&K?

Indian interpretations of almost all the uprisings including the current intensification of freedom struggle tend to place the blame invariably on Pakistan. Interestingly, some residents of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have also accused Pakistani leadership for not doing enough to help the struggling Kashmiris in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). However, it is encouraging that almost all Pakistani political parties are unanimous in extending their political, diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiris freedom struggle.

Compared to India, which has systematically eroded Kashmir's special status that was given to its people in the Indian Constitution under article 370, Pakistan did not absorb either the Northern Areas or Azad Kashmir, rather created the special region of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB Region).<sup>4</sup> India is determined to retain IOK.

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<sup>4</sup> Although theoretically Gilgit was part of Kashmir, the Dogras were never able to consolidate their authority over it. The region always had its own independent life, and even the Dogras had to rule with the help of local princes with minimum interference. As far as the status of Hunza and Nagar was concerned, it was clearly spelled out by the British India Government. In response to a letter Gopaldaswamy Ayyengar, the British Resident communicated the decision of the Government of British India dated 27 July 1991, regarding the status of the Hunza and Nagar states vis-à-vis the J&K. It was stated that though Hunza and Nagar were under the suzerainty of the Kashmir state, they were not parts of the state, rather separate states. For details see, Razvi 1971; Cheema 1986; and Dani 1984.

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Initially, it opted to take the case to UNSC to buy time, later, it carefully devised a series of moves with a view to integrate IOK in India.<sup>5</sup>

## **Perceptions about the Kashmir Dispute**

### *In the Valley*

Almost all Kashmiris living in the Valley appear to be unanimous in their resolve to carry on their struggle until they win freedom - freedom from the oppressive Indian rule. Despite having suffered extreme forms of brutalities neither their morale nor efforts, in any visible manner, reflect a decline in their quest. On the contrary, the burning of mosques and shrines, along with the rising killings of innocent civilians have injected an added sense of urgency to convince even those few Kashmiris who were not actively participating in the freedom movement that the Indians are out to not only destroy their religious and cultural heritage, but are also indulging in genocide in a systematic way. Recently, the martyrdom of Burhan Wani has added further impetus to the ongoing freedom struggle.

### *In Jammu*

Over the past two decades, the Hindu-dominated Jammu has experienced relative calm when compared with the situation in the Valley. However, over the years the alienation and uneasiness have considerably grown even within the Hindu-dominated Jammu. The Kashmiri *Pandits*, who were allegedly forced to move to Jammu by Governor Jagmohan, have frequently expressed their resentments. Many Indian writers place the blame for the *Pandits* migration squarely on the shoulders of the freedom fighters. Nothing could be far from the truth. While many factors caused

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed analysis of moves directed to absorb Kashmir into the Indian Union, see, Cheema 1994a.



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their flight from the Kashmir Valley to Jammu, three need to be mentioned here: the policy of Jagmohan; independent actions of a few over-enthusiastic individuals and insignificant groups of freedom fighters; and the communalists' quest to seize opportunities and capitalise on the emerging situation (Puri 1993: 64-66). Being promised so much but left in the lurch, the *Pandits* have frequently demonstrated against the treatment accorded to them by the state government. However, there are some *Pandits*, who believe that they left the Valley because of increased activities of the freedom fighters.

### *In Ladakh*

Ladakh used to have three districts Leh, Kargil and Sakardu. Sakardu is in the GB region, while both Leh and Kargil are within the IOK. For quite sometime, Leh, which is overwhelmingly Buddhist, has sought to have either an autonomous status or be ruled directly from Delhi.

### *In Azad Kashmir*

Almost all the people in Azad Kashmir enthusiastically support the Kashmiris' call for self-determination. The problem confronting the AJK government is how to effectively guard the LOC as many zealots frequently make attempts to cross it, and stage regular demonstrations in support of the freedom fighters. The perception of AJK people is that the movement will eventually reach its logical conclusion which, according to the Azad Kashmiris is to secure the right of self-determination.

### *In Northern Areas/GB Region*

Like AJK, people in Northern Areas view the struggle in the IOK sympathetically. The brutal suppression accompanied by total disregard for human rights and the incumbent reign of terror that has been unleashed by the Indian security forces is regularly condemned, and expression of sympathies for the freedom fighters

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frequently demonstrated. The people in AJK and GB are convinced that the international media, human rights watch groups and diplomats are only allowed to enter the Valley on a selective basis and that too, for a limited period, during which extreme vigilance is maintained. India's attempts to dupe the West through calculated propaganda moves and stage-managed activities are well understood in both AJK and GB.

### **Internationalisation**

Over the past 71 years, the Kashmir dispute has been internationalised due to the concerted efforts of the Kashmiri people, the diaspora and Pakistan's support. Pakistan allows access to journalists from various parts of the world to visit all parts of AJK with a view to highlight the adverse impact of the ongoing Kashmir dispute. Compared to Pakistan, and as discussed before, India maintains strict control over visits of the media in IOK. It refuses to allow the international media to visit IOK, but gives permission to select Indian media to cover the crisis in Kashmir. It needs to be mentioned here that Pakistan's government allows interested visitors and human rights activists to visit AJK, and talk to the unfortunate victims of the crisis, whereas India does not allow such visits to the IOK.

Apart from Pakistan's efforts to project the dispute internationally, the Kashmiri diaspora living in various countries are also active in highlighting the plight of their people in IOK.

### **Human Rights**

India believes that Pakistan has been over-projecting the human rights violations that have been and still are currently taking place inside IOK. Many Indians tend to justify the violations and portray the Kashmir situation as an insurgency and emphasise that violations of human rights are somewhat inevitable. During the last

few decades, the word 'insurgency' has been replaced by the use of the word 'terrorism.'

Despite the fact that almost all human rights groups have persistently condemned the continuous gross violations in Kashmir, India does not seem to have been moved by such condemnations. It carries on with its policy of brutalisation with impunity. Despite repeated reminders by international human rights watchers, no action has been instituted against those directly involved in unthinkable abuses. However, it needs to be stressed here that in some rare cases, like the rape case of the Canadian tourists, symbolic and cosmetic actions were initiated to dupe and divert the attention of the world.<sup>6</sup> Among the black laws, that have been and continue to be, enforced in J&K include:

- Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978
- Jammu and Kashmir Disturbed Areas Act, 1992
- Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), 1985-95 (modified in 1987)
- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958
- Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2004, 2008, 2012
- National Security Act, 1980
- Official Secrets Act, 1923; and
- Newspapers Incitement to Offences Act, 1908 (Cheema 2016).

The last 30 years have witnessed blatant and gross violations, of human rights in Kashmir that have been regularly condemned by concerned quarters. Yet, the situation, instead of registering improvement, is consistently showing signs of deterioration primarily because of Indian intransigence and great powers'

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<sup>6</sup> Even after conviction, the two army soldiers who were involved in the rape of Canadian tourists remained in barracks rather than being immediately sent to prison.

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unconcerned attitude. This lack of interest has further provided impetus and strength to Indian's uncooperative attitude. While many human rights watch groups such as Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) severely criticise Indian policy in IOK, the policy and attitude has not registered any positive change.<sup>7</sup> As long as the great powers do not take interest, the efforts of human rights organisations would remain somewhat unrecognised, and the Indian government will continue to view these reports as teeth-less pressures and treat them with customary disdain.

Another factor that has effectively impeded the desired alleviation of human rights situation in Kashmir is the perpetual conflict situation in South Asia. With well-prepared and carefully intensified Indian propaganda, all regional problems were and still are painted as products of the local conflictual cobweb.

Also, another important factor that has effectively arrested the quest for improving the human rights situation is the lack of sufficient level of interest on the part of the UN. After a long gap, it was only in September 1993 that UN Secretary General deemed fit in his wisdom to recognise the dangerous potential of the Kashmir crisis. However, it must be stressed that Pakistan has been continuously raising the Kashmir dispute at various international bodies. In 2017, the Prime Minister of Pakistan not only forcefully highlighted the gross violations of human rights in Kashmir, and Indian refusal to implement the accepted UN resolutions, but also demanded that the High Commissioner for Human Rights should send an enquiry commission to occupied Kashmir.<sup>8</sup> Instead of making efforts to resolve the dispute, the Indian government has

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<sup>7</sup> For details see, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch publications like 'The Human Rights Crisis in Kashmir'; and 'A Crime of War the Crackdown in Kashmir: Torture of Detainees and Assault on Medical Community', respectively.

<sup>8</sup> See the Speech of Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, 21 September 2017. Also see *Dawn News*, 23 September 2017.

been focusing on how to suppress the legitimate struggle for self-determination. In this connection, India maintains nearly 700,000 troops in occupied Kashmir.

### **Efforts towards Resolution**

It is a foregone conclusion that no progress towards the resolution of the Kashmir dispute would be made unless India changes its attitude and policies. With the advent of the Trump regime, India's policies have received anticipated support from the United States. The Trump administration has, so far, demonstrated total callousness towards the ongoing gross human rights violations in occupied Kashmir. While everyone knows that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was signed in 1948, and it knows no religious, national or political boundaries, yet one finds that its blatant violation in some areas is either totally ignored by the great powers or only lip service is paid.

Both bilateral and multilateral efforts have been undertaken since 1947 but success seems to have eluded both types of efforts. Most of the multilateral efforts revolved around the UN quest for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. The early years of the dispute saw active UN participation in order to secure a quick resolution. During the initial phase, the UNCIP worked hard and produced two resolutions (13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949) which were accepted by both. However, full implementation of these resolutions never took place. Later, the dispute became the victim of the Cold War; and the Soviet Union at the behest of India consistently and effectively blocked every tangible UN effort aimed at resolving the problem.

Among the earlier bilateral efforts, perhaps the most important was the meeting between Mountbatten and Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah at Lahore in November 1947. On the initiative of Jinnah, it was agreed to arrange a meeting between the Governor-Generals and the prime ministers of the two dominions, but it could not be held as planned because of Nehru's illness and

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Sardar Patel's reluctance to talk with the Pakistani leaders (Choudhury 1968).

A constructive three-point proposal was advanced by Jinnah stressing a ceasefire within 48 hours, departure of all alien forces, including the tribesmen and the Indian forces, undertaking the administration of the state and arranging a plebiscite under the joint control of the two governors-general (Ibid.). The meeting ended inconclusively as Mountbatten pleaded his inability to accept the proposals without the consent of the Indian cabinet which subsequently turned down all these proposals (Ibid.). Thus, ended the first major bilateral effort. Following this failure, three more attempts were made by the Pakistani authorities to resolve the dispute through bilateral negotiations, but all were frustrated by Indian intransigence (Ibid.). These included Chaudhary Muhammad Ali's India visit in November 1947 during which he worked with V.P. Menon and Lord Ismay to find a solution for states with succession-disputes; and Liaquat Ali Khan's participation in Joint Defence Council's meeting in which he made efforts to resolve the dispute, and finally the two Prime Ministers met but were unable to find a settlement. At the meeting Liaquat highlighted the inconsistency of the Indian stance with regard to Junagadh and Kashmir. Unable to contain himself, Sardar Patel, who was also present in the meeting, reacted and said:

Why do you compare Kashmir with Junagadh? Talk of Kashmir and Hyderabad and we could reach an agreement (Ali 1967: 292-293).

According to Ali (1967), Patel believed that 'to retain a Muslim majority area against the will of the people was a source not of strength but of weakness to India.' It appears that Sardar Patel was much more realistic in assessing the situation than most others.

The second phase of tangible bilateral efforts started after the Commonwealth meeting of June 1953. To begin with, the two

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Prime Ministers met in London and discussed the dispute, but were unable to reach an agreement. Both leaders met again in August 1953 and agreed that the best way to resolve the dispute was to hold the plebiscite (Choudhury 1968). The meeting of the prime ministers was followed by exchange of 27 letters and telegrams (covering the period between 10 August 1953 and 21 September 1954), reflecting increasing disagreement and revealing failures to reach an agreement even on most of the preliminary issues (Ibid.).

The third phase of bilateral efforts covers direct negotiations which were started under outside pressures following the India-China war of 1962 in which India was badly mauled. In response to Indian appeal both US and UK offered military assistance worth USD 120 million on emergency basis (Burke 1973). Although Pakistan reacted to the American decision, it did not urge an absolute ban on Western military aid to India. Instead, it urged the Western leaders to press upon India to make new efforts to settle the Kashmir dispute (Ibid.). Six rounds of talks were held at ministerial level (with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto heading the Pakistan delegation and Sardar Swaran Singh leading the Indian team), but they were also unable to find a solution acceptable to both parties (Ibid.). It appears that India only agreed to discuss the dispute with a view to appease those who agreed to help it in terms of desired military aid. India soon reverted back to its pet theme that Pakistan be declared an aggressor and asked to vacate the aggression.

The fourth phase of bilateral talks revolved around the signing of the Simla Agreement in 1972. Following the India-Pakistan war of 1971, the two sides met at Simla and worked out an agreement which was signed on 2 July 1972. Both sides agreed to meet at a mutually convenient time in order to seek a final settlement of the Kashmir dispute and the release of prisoners of war. Since 1972, the two sides met 45 times to discuss various issues and policy aspects, a focused meeting on Kashmir dispute was only held once on 2-3 January 1994 at Islamabad. The meeting failed to secure desired agreement. The next major efforts to

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resolve the dispute were made during the peace process of 2004-08 only to register another failure.

The fifth phase of bilateral efforts started with the advent of the peace process in 2004. For almost four years, the two sides discussed and explored ways to resolve the dispute but could not succeed. Following the Mumbai tragedy in 2008 all negotiations stopped.

### **Regional Instability**

Undoubtedly, the Kashmir dispute has its global and regional dimension. At regional level, the Kashmir dispute has been taking a much heavier toll than what the region can afford. Both India and Pakistan cannot even contemplate normalisation of relations unless this dispute is resolved. Instability in the region is the direct product of their inability to resolve this dispute. Even the competition for acquiring nuclear capability is in some strange way linked with the persistence of the Kashmir dispute. In short, the peace of South Asia has remained hostage to this issue. A Russian Finance Minister once aptly described the situation in South Asia when he asserted in Davos that there could be no peace in the subcontinent without solving the Kashmir problem.<sup>9</sup> While both countries have often expressed their deep yearnings for peace and stability in South Asia, at practical levels they have often acted less pragmatically. Without their being realistic and pragmatic, the advent of peace in the region is likely to be delayed and impeded by three major factors: national interest; the involvement of non-regional power; and the distinct contours of the South Asian region.

Undoubtedly, national interest is very high on the priority ladders of all countries. But, if the efforts to promote national interests are tempered with realism and due consideration for the

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<sup>9</sup> *The News International*. 31 January 1994.



other party's sensitivities, it may arrest the creeping negativism and promote a healthy atmosphere (Cheema 1992).

Second, the involvement of outside powers in this region has frequently complicated the situation causing unnecessary obstacles on the path to regional stability. Invariably, outside powers come to the region with their own agenda. This process is invariably injected with complications. The outsiders often exploit the regional strife to their own advantage. However, they play little part in creating the exploitable situation. They can only come to the region in question if the region creates a situation that attracts them.

Third, the peculiar nature of South Asia has often given birth to unwanted complications. Not only the region is Indo-centric, it is also physically asymmetric. Almost all countries are neighbours of India, but none of them is a physical neighbour (having common border) with each other except Afghanistan and Pakistan (Ibid.). While small regional countries expect India to be more like a benevolent guide and a good neighbour whose genuine cooperation would help them accelerate their developmental collaboration within the region, many of them have been ruled by authoritarian and illegitimate governments that managed to stay in power by resorting to fundamentalism, Bonapartism and chauvinistic modes of governance and illogical references to India as a powerful irredentist neighbour. Aware of its towering geographical advantage, India, in fact opted to pursue assertive policies disregarding the sensitivities of its neighbours - a fact which has gradually transformed the Gandhian image of pacific India into an aggressive one. Lacking in magnanimity and dwelling heavily upon a parochial approach, India has effectively impeded the advent and development of much needed peace in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Kashmir needs pragmatic approaches by both the Indians and the Pakistanis. Six initiatives could accelerate peace in South Asia:

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introducing flexibility and moderation vis-à-vis each other; opting for *realpolitik*; having consideration for each other's sensitivities; avoiding heavy dependence upon outsiders; strengthening the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and supporting and pursuing dialogue aimed at resolving the outstanding disputes on realistic terms.

Given the high level of internal conflicts, South Asia's chances of acquiring a fair share of world trade are slipping further away. Even within the region, trade is not impressive despite the existence of the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA).

The key to regional peace lies with India. Unless it is genuinely inclined to resolve the Kashmir dispute, peace in South Asia will remain elusive. Despite the repeated assertions by the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and leaders of many countries including the United States that the elections are no substitute for the promised plebiscite, the Indian government continues to base its arguments that elections have reflected peoples' verdict. It is a well-known fact that almost all elections in Kashmir are rigged comprehensively.

Without the participation of the APHC, no government is likely to succeed. Besides, as a senior American official has indicated in clear terms, the US does not consider the poll a substitute for the promised plebiscite. The election may provide some kind of short-term breathing space, but is never going to resolve the dispute or dampen the Kashmiris' freedom struggle.

Four initiatives could influence India's attitude towards the dispute and towards the Kashmiris' movement. Perhaps the most important one seems to be rapid drift towards the possibility of a war breaking out in which human rights are flagrantly violated. Ironically, such a situation often quickly attracts the world community's attention. To secure the desired dividends, a little more concentration is required in order to push the world community sufficiently. The exercise entails three stages:

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awareness, active expression of views, and undertaking concrete efforts aimed to resolve the dispute (Cheema 1994b).

The second initiative requires according full support to the resumption of India-Pakistan dialogues both at the governmental as well as non-governmental levels, if there exists no governmental level contact; efforts should be made to initiate one in addition to extending full support to the existing non-governmental dialogues.

The third initiative needs to be undertaken by the UN with a view to encouraging efforts towards a feasible solution as suggested recently by Pakistan's Prime Minister. A UN initiative is necessary not only in terms of demonstrating its new assertive role, but also to make parties involved realise the urgency of peace in South Asia. A UN initiative implies the keenness of the major world actors to resolve the dispute. India is unlikely to take any dialogue seriously unless it is convinced that the world community is determined to resolve the dispute. However, India would expect that the global community understands its difficulties and comes up with a feasible face-saving device that would enable its rulers to respond to any initiative somewhat positively.

Fourth, both the Indian and Pakistani governments should try to control their respective media. If media avoids negative projection and applies concerted efforts to project positive developments, it could enable and facilitate the negotiators to work out some kind of compromise solution.

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# The Role of Global Powers in Building a Cooperative Security Order in South Asia

*Working Paper*

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## **Abstract**

South Asia has been a theatre for great power rivalries. But how far can global powers contribute to the creation of a cooperative security order in this region? In order to address this question, this paper will first focus on the concept of security architecture. Second, the interests of great powers will be analysed with a view on South Asia. Finally, the paper will look at some of the instruments and approaches that may contribute towards the development of a security architecture in the region.

**Key words:** Security Architecture, Great Powers, Cooperative Security Order, India-Pakistan, Non-Proliferation, Terrorism, BRI.

## **Introduction**

**A**t present, the main international security concerns are the Korean Peninsula with the danger of a conventional or even nuclear confrontation, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and the fight against the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East. South Asia is also conflict-ridden and has often been characterised as a ‘region of chronic instability’ or the ‘most dangerous place in the world.’

South Asia’s special importance comes from a mixture and overlapping of different conventional as well as non-conventional

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security challenges. The territorial disputes are still virulent and marring bilateral relations, for instance, between India and China, India and Pakistan, and Pakistan and Afghanistan. The nuclear issue is an essential part of the India-Pakistan relationship, and most countries in the region are faced with different forms of terrorism, ranging from religious extremism, and ethnic separatism, to left-wing violence. Moreover, great power rivalries, potential conflicts over resources, and non-conventional security challenges from climate change and migration are additional dimensions to the already complex regional security scenario.

At least, except for the situation in Afghanistan, the internal security situation in many South Asian Countries (SACs) has improved in recent years. The civil war in Sri Lanka came to an end in 2009; and the military operations of the Pakistan Army in the tribal areas since 2014 have improved the security situation. Nepal and Sri Lanka are each having political debates to find constitutional solutions to the demands of minorities. But the situation in the region is far from being satisfactory when looking at the ongoing fighting in Afghanistan and the deterioration of India-Pakistan relations.

### **Security Architecture: Definition, Limitations and Adaptations**

The debate about security architecture has its origins in the Cold War period. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which became operational in 1970 was one of the first attempts to establish an international regime against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union led to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABMT) between the superpowers. This was followed by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the US and Russia after the end of the Cold war.

In contrast to disarmament regimes, security architecture is more complex. An important definition was given by Tow and

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Taylor (2010: 96) in their seminal work on the subject. They define it as:

...an overarching, coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically-defined area, which facilitates the resolution of that region's policy concerns and achieves its security objectives.

So far, there have not been many successful attempts to establish a regional security architecture. One of the first examples was the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). It was established with the Helsinki Accords in 1975. It comprised 35 countries from the Western and Eastern bloc which agreed on permanent consultations and Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) in three different fields: military and security issues; economic, scientific, and technological cooperation; and human rights affairs. These arrangements created a network of conferences, workshops, and expert meetings which intensified the collaboration between the two antagonistic blocs.

After the end of the Cold War, the CSCE was transformed into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The CSCE was regarded as a successful institution that helped to overcome the tensions of the Cold War. Its documents and agreements were not international treaties, but acted as a framework of norms, procedures, and regulations. These agreements helped to improve the relations between the antagonistic blocs in the field of security, economy, and people-to-people contacts.

A second example is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that was established in 1967 in order to cope with the different security challenges in the region. In 1994, the member states set up the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which specifically dealt with security questions. It was also a forum which included other powers. The ARF became the core of Southeast Asia security architecture. In 2006, the first ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) was held.

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At present, the debate on regional security architecture is most vibrant in East Asia (Acharya and Goh eds. 2007; Alagappa ed. 2003). The main focus is either the Korean Peninsula or on the military and political implications of China's rise. In contrast to this, the debate in South Asia is still in a nascent stage. The attempts for closer security cooperation are focusing on India-Pakistan relations or the prospects for collaboration on non-traditional security challenges (Karim ed. 2013; Xiaoping 2012; and Bailes 2007). Moreover, various ideas have been developed for a 'cooperative security framework', a 'strategic architecture' or a 'regional security architecture' to deal with the different security challenges in South Asia in a comprehensive way (Muni 2013; Pattanail and Nayak 2013).

### **Global Powers in South Asia: Who?**

South Asia has a long history of great powers' involvement on different levels. The Cold War confrontation led to different orientations of SACs. On the one side was the close alliance between Pakistan and the US that started in the mid-1950s when the former joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The conflict between India and China fostered Pakistan's rapprochement with the People's Republic since the 1960s. In reaction to the rapprochement between the US and China, India and the Soviet Union signed the Friendship Treaty in 1971 expanding their bilateral relationship. China's elevation to a great power state as permanent member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and as a nuclear weapon state in the NPT in the 1970s also had repercussions on South Asia. Most SACs have played the 'China Card' in their bilateral conflicts with India.

The end of the Cold War, the global War on Terror after 9/11, and the increasing rivalry between China and the US have brought a strategic realignment in South Asia. The most fundamental change is the comprehensive political, economic, and military



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cooperation between India and the US since the 1990s. This is a reaction to the economic and political repercussions of China's rise which is a challenge for various countries. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers new economic incentives for many South Asian countries. Pakistan, especially, can be one of the main beneficiaries with the completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). But whether CPEC will be a 'game-changer' will depend to a great extent on the implementation of the different projects. Furthermore, massive Chinese investment has also initiated controversies about rising debts and greater political dependence on China in some SACs.

The US will remain an important player in the region. The new South Asia strategy of the Trump administration has underlined the long-term commitment of the US to stay engaged in this theatre. Relations between India and Russia normalised with a focus on arms and energy. In contrast to the Cold War, Russia has also intensified its political and military relations with Pakistan in recent years. This was seen as a reaction to the situation in Afghanistan and vis-à-vis the rise of the Islamic State in some parts of Russia.

Besides the US, China, and Russia, other countries have also played an important role in South Asia. Norway was very active in the mediation of the Sri Lankan civil war. Japan and the European Union (EU) are among the largest donors to most SACs. Their economic support will contribute to enable these countries to establish a cooperative security order.

### **Global Powers in South Asia: What?**

Two main security concerns for the international community have triggered the interest of great powers to engage in the building of a cooperative security order: non-proliferation and terrorism. Both issues are characterised by differences between the global powers and SACs; and among SACs themselves.

Since 1970, the issue of nuclear proliferation has been regulated by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although India

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and Pakistan have not signed the treaty, it should not be overlooked that 188 states have joined this international regime which is one with the highest number of followers. Nuclear weapons states like the US, China, and Russia have established close bilateral relations with India and Pakistan in this field. The civilian nuclear deal between India and the US of 2005 triggered a controversial debate in how far a similar agreement can be achieved for Pakistan.

Moreover, new institutions have been set up in recent years in order to cope with arms development like the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), and the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies. The Australia Group was established in 1985 as an informal grouping to support member countries to identify exports that need 'to be controlled so as not to contribute to the spread of chemical and biological weapons.' It has 42 members.

Most SACs have suffered under different forms of terrorism. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, terrorism is also regarded as a major international threat. 9/11 initiated a variety of new forms of political, economic and military cooperation both on the bilateral and the multilateral level between global powers and SACs. The military intervention of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan; the sanctions list of the UN against militant groups and extremist individuals; and stricter regulations in order to control the transnational financial flows of militant groups are examples of these new forms of international collaboration.

Unfortunately, there has hardly been any noteworthy regional security cooperation among SACs themselves. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) enacted the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism in 1987. But, it was never implemented because the member states could not agree on a common definition. In recent years, India has expanded its

security cooperation with many of its neighbours, for instance Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka in order to fight cross-border militancy.

Hence, the attempts of global powers to establish a security order in South Asia are hampered both by disconnects between SACs and the international community in the nuclear field; and by the differences among SACs with regard to terrorism.

### **Global Powers in South Asia: How?**

The great powers have used a variety of strategies in order to deal with the different security challenges in the region. One of the earliest hotspots was the conflict over Kashmir which was brought to the UN by India. The Security Council passed various resolutions on the conflict that have not been implemented by the two parties. Moreover, the US, Great Britain and the former Soviet Union tried bilateral diplomatic missions and mediation attempts in the 1960s. With regard to the nuclear issue and the India-Pakistan conflict, great powers, especially the US and other Western powers, have supported a variety of CBMs on the Track Two level.

The global powers have also mandated military interventions in the context of the UN, for instance in Afghanistan after 9/11. In order to fight terrorist groups, they have been engaged in various regional initiatives on Afghanistan. The most promising one is the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) consisting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US which resumed talks in October 2017. China and Russia have also initiated talks with the Taliban without a clear outcome so far.

The promotion of economic cooperation has also been an important instrument of global powers. In order to support the peace process in Sri Lanka after the ceasefire in 2002, important donor countries like the US, the European Union (EU), Japan, and Norway set up the Peace Donor Support Group (later known as the Co-Chairs). In the context of Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia-

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Istanbul (HoA) process is an important multilateral instrument to support the economic reconstruction of the country.

## **Prospects**

The chances for a cooperative security order in South Asia remain slim. First, the great powers will continue to pursue their own interests in the region. Second, these powers have different priorities for security challenges in which South Asia, except for Afghanistan, ranks relatively low.

Hence, a security order has to be established by the regional stakeholders. Given the complex security constellations, South Asia will probably see different security orders rather than a single comprehensive one. A security order for the nuclear field will remain confined to India and Pakistan. But in the present stage of their bilateral relationship it does not seem very likely that both sides can agree on additional CBMs beyond those which are already in place.

Although, all SA governments would qualify terrorism as a main threat, the creation of a cooperative security order for this also seems to be difficult. But like-minded countries which share security challenges posed by militant groups can expand their collaboration.

The most interesting external driver that may contribute to a security order is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The positive repercussions of economic development may contribute to bringing down militancy and may increase regional connectivity. But closer economic relations with China come at a price which has created controversial debates in some countries. Moreover, it is not clear in how far BRI will have spillover effects.

The basic assumption of the BRI that economic cooperation is a win-win scenario for all partners who may in the long-term help to overcome other controversial issues is one of the main ideas on which the EU was established after the World War II. Unfortunately, Asia has not seen the benefits of increased economic

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interdependence so far. China has close economic relations with both India and Japan. But the political relations between China and the two other Asian powers are still difficult. Hence, it will remain the responsibility of the SACs to think about new and innovative approaches for a Cooperative Security Order.

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# **Annexures**





## ***Authors' Bios***



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# Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia

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South Asia, the fulcrum of geoeconomic cross currents, is now the emerging centre of power in a political universe which is more complex and fluid not only due to the growing multiplicity of nation-states, but also the potpourri of non-state actors increasingly in the mix. These include terrorists, 24/7 news channels, transnational businesses, social media, and civil society all impacting world affairs. And it is in South Asia, where all this is amplified by the flow of people, knowledge, ideas and money interacting with a constellation of forces impinging upon each other.

Kipling's 'The Great Game' remains as real today as it was in the 1800s with the regional and global political landscape transforming at the speed of light. From the announcement of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2014 to Donald Trump's South Asia policy in 2017; from the battle against the Islamic State and fundamentalist elements in Afghanistan to the threats posed by climate change and water scarcity to the sovereignty of South Asian countries; from the Indo-US strategic partnership to the ever estranged Pak-India ties and their inclusion in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) - all these developments highlight the complexities of the international system and the role this region is playing in shaping it.