

Post 9/11 Scenario and its Impact on the Security Parameters of South Asia

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The South Asian Regional Security Complex, like most other post colonial security regions, came into being as a *Conflict Formation*. Barry Buzan & Ole Waever¹

Introduction

South Asia as a regional construct is considered both a natural, given its unique geophysical characteristics, as well as an unnatural entity resulting from British colonial cartographic experiments. The post-independence South Asia has supported a rather simple political configuration with a powerful India, the proclaimed heir to British legacy located centrally both politically as well as geographically. Next in line is Pakistan as the sole power balancer or challenger. No other regional country is in a position to pose direct physical threat to New Delhi. During as well as after the Cold War, there has not been any momentous external geo-physical or structural transformation; however, there is a visible shift in the patterns of formal, informal alliances, partnerships as well as events and factors that have influenced the region in varying degrees. True to the aforementioned quote of Buzan and Waever, more often it has been observed that geostrategic regions mainly came into existence due to patterns of interaction between state actors. These interactions, more often than not, are based on patterns of enmity and conflict than on amity and peace. These patterns are increasingly evident in case of South Asia, where conflicts, old and new, have managed to become intractable and increasingly complex with no will to resolve them. In comparison any mechanisms of cooperation such as the singular regional body SAARC have not been able to create much impact.

Conflict transformation (CT) is a comparatively less explored phenomenon than other conflict resolutive measures. *Per se*, it addresses the root cause of a conflict. Unlike conflict resolution and conflict management approaches which focus on top-down, short-term solutions CT refers to outcomes, processes and structure oriented long-term peace-building efforts, which aim to truly overcome revealed forms of direct, cultural and structural violence. The underlying assumption of CT is that the potential for peace-building already exists in the particular region or community and is rooted in its traditional culture, therefore the positive or negative outcome of such processes remain contingent upon the existing political

will and environment of a given region. CT is the process by which conflicts are transformed into a peaceful outcome. However, one must also bear in mind that transformation of a given conflict situation may also turn negative. The positive as well as negative transformation of a given conflict situation may occur with a change in the basic structure, discourse, context, actors and issues involved.

Through this paper, an attempt is made to examine the impact of a watershed event such as 9/11 had on the shifting parameters of regional (South Asian) security. Did the patterns of internal as well as external interactions and relations remain the same, shifted slightly or altered totally after that event? Did the post 9/11 environment give rise to new strategic as well as security structures? If so then what impact did these new developments cast on the previously established structures? Did this transformation lead to a more pacifist region, moving towards regional integration or superimposed on the previous patterns, or worst still, give rise to new patterns of conflict?

During the Cold War and even after that conflict rather than cooperation guided the regional relations. Though South Asia was considered marginal to the main theaters of the Cold War, nonetheless it was penetrated by it, and its securitization remained dominated/ overshadowed by the larger Bipolar Cold War dynamics. In order to balance the *status quo ante*, Pakistan the challenger state to India had to seek external support, in the form of military alliances and pacts it signed with the USA. India on the contrary sought extended military and economic assistance from the Soviet Union on very amicable and friendly terms. Security concerns largely traditional and inherent, such as Kashmir, contested borders, quest for hegemony by India remained dominant. In short during this time as characteristic of the dominant cold war politics, most of the issues remained centered around state actors rather than non-state actors.

What is Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is a process which *addresses the root cause of conflict by bringing the necessary political, social, and attitudinal change to achieve lasting peace.*² CT involves conscious efforts by parties to the conflict to understand their situation differently by visualizing positive outcomes to the dispute. Dynamics of conflict get so fundamentally altered that possibilities for a permanent solution begin to emerge as a viable alternative to fighting and feuding, and parties to conflict agree to bury the hatchet.

Transformation of a conflict can take place at four basic levels:

- Actor transformations – internal changes in the concerned parties, or the appearance of new parties.
- Issue transformations – altering the agenda of conflict issues.
- Rule transformations – changes in the norms or rules governing a conflict.
- Structural transformations – the entire structure of relationships and power distribution in the conflict is transformed.

However, contrary to the popular belief that conflict *per se* transforms for the better only is an anomaly. CT can both be positive, as well as negative, at internal as well as external levels. Implying that transformation in any of the mentioned categories, whether in the shape of actors as facilitators or spoilers, issues, norms and rules governing the conflict, and lastly the power distribution and structural alterations can both bring about a positive or a negative result to a contentious issue. Any of these factors can assert themselves at the internal or external level depending on what the intervening factors are.

Post 9/11 Scenario and Transformation of South Asian Security Parameters

9/11 by itself was a Stand Alone *Shape Shifter* event and a major transformer. If we view South Asian security dynamics pre and post 9/11 in the context of Actors/ Parties, we come across a range of traditional state actors at the national, regional as well as international levels that have been part of this security framework for the past decades. Then there is the factor of introduction or active involvement of new state actors who may not have been active agents in the previous regional configuration or had remained on the fringes, but have gained a direct influence in and around the region. Thirdly, the inclusion and introduction of non-state actors (NSAs), both as multinational corporations (MNCs), international organizations (IOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as well as terrorists, militants, insurgents who may perform within a state's boundaries or cross border. Correspondingly these NSAs at the internal to global levels place immense challenges on a state's capacity to handle and deliver. In terms of issues and rules of engagement etc., 9/11 ushered in its own set of problems and thus affecting both the issues as well as structures of power and political arrangements. In the present context various actors in the region are faced with these transformational issues.

Afghanistan

Affected by the Global War on Terror (GWOt), Afghanistan ended up losing its traditional buffer status by becoming the center stage in this effort. With all major global and regional actors converging physically and otherwise in Afghanistan to flush out the roots of terrorism and militancy from the country and the region, Kabul's inclusion in the sole South Asian regional platform SAARC also recognizes this change of status.

Given the complex security equation, any developments in Afghanistan affect the power dynamics of neighboring Pakistan more than ever before. Of these few are, more than 3 million Afghan refugees and nationals who have resided in Pakistan since the late 1970s, cross border movement, and activities of non-state actors which comprise Afghans, locals as well as Central Asians. The spill-over effect of the war is evident through the interests of vested actors into continuing this war. In order to continue to enjoy the dividends of the war economy the fighting militias, warlords, government agents, private and governmental contractors as well as other actors, including the drug, timber, gun, transport mafia, non-state actors such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda would be against any attempts for peace. Kabul's insistence at this time to seek a settlement of the Durand Line, which many countries, including Pakistan consider to be an issue long settled represents another dimension of the changing situation. Introduction of US and its Western military allies as full-fledged neighbors, alongside new political actors, such as the Taliban and its splinter groups, Al Qaeda and its local affiliates, local armed actors and militia, the Afghan national security forces (both police and army), Afghan civil society, political actors and former Northern Alliance and last but not the least international and regional actors such as India, Russia, Iran, China and Central Asia, who given their vested interests may act as spoilers or facilitators.

Pakistan

In this regional profile, Pakistan has to deal with the previously mentioned traditional problems alongside some pressing newly emerged Post 9/11 issues. The problems range from Kashmir, its troubled relations with neighboring India and the continuity of the peace process, which covers eight crucial issue areas awaiting final agreement. Pakistan's relations with US became the main contentious issue with problems such as the drone strikes, mounting civilian casualties, resultant rising anti-Americanism, and how negatively it has impacted

and found a translation in domestic politics. It is interesting to note that despite a high number of casualties and massive military deployment on its North West, many in Pakistan question the wisdom and ownership of this 12 year war. What Pakistan gained out of its unconditional support for this venture was the title of major Non-NATO ally of the US, which has not at all been of any benefit.

Today Pakistan stands increasingly energy and resource deficient. It needs to redefine its relations with neighbors (Iran, China etc), take concrete measures to counter terrorism, rising militancy, and societal intolerance. It has acute governance issues, and issues pertaining to the ever changing civil-military relations. These factors are major negative conflict transformers, which further get compounded by the fact that owing to the post 9/11 US led military engagement in Afghanistan, Pakistan has to face a two front war for the first time. Thus compelling the military to rethink its military force posturing. Owing to this development Pakistan army has to further involve itself in internal security tasks which were never part of its traditional purview. Serious questions with regards to nuclear security and stability have been raised and Pakistan as a nuclear state stands responsible for addressing these concerns.

With diminished law enforcement capacity of civilian law enforces the military is over stretched because of the rising law and order and internal security concerns, in addition to tackling insurgency and militancy. And added to this is the cost and resources invested in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of civil as well as military assets. Newly emerging challenges include the changing status of both Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and those administered by the province (PATA), the need to incorporate them in the main fold and extend proper government writ in these areas in order to curb NSA activities. They gain strength through cross border movement of weapons, resources, men, as well as sanctuaries. Many of these issues sprouted from the policies pursued in the decade of 1980s by the Zia regime while acting as a conduit for CIA and US administration's efforts to ouster Soviet Union from Afghanistan. These policies have now matured and come home to haunt us.

India

The biggest positive transformer for India has been the signing of its strategic partnership with USA, which largely entails civil nuclear cooperation and a tacit acknowledgment of its nuclear status. The justification provided by world community is that India is an aspiring regional power and US wants to nurture

India as a counter weight to China. In response to Pakistan's genuine concern about the rapidly growing military muscle of India it is pointed out that India is now looking East-wards and the world community is more focused in the making of an Indo-Pacific region, which given the composition of the economically powerful ASEAN member states, will also soon become a place for competition. Furthermore, New Delhi's improved economic profile has brought about a resultant military modernization both in conventional as well as strategic weapons, thus enhancing the conventional weapons asymmetry further. Such transformational aspects have a far reaching effect, as this will further erode the carefully maintained nuclear deterrence and lower the potential threshold for a probable nuclear exchange, in case of accidental or intentional provocation. Besides the mutually contested long standing issues such as Kashmir, Sir Creek, Siachen and others, for Pakistan a genuine cause of concern is New Delhi's rapidly expanding role in Afghanistan, its military doctrines such as the Cold Start or Proactive Strategy and events such as Mumbai terrorist attacks which can push both the countries to a nuclear exchange.

China

Beijing is making investments both in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan for increased mineral resources. It is also increasing its outreach to the Indian Ocean through development assistance in port cities such as Gwadar, in its string of pearls orientation and its growing economic influence in the regional countries. These moves are viewed with a lot of suspicion not only by India but also by the US and Russia.

Iran

Another important regional player with respect to its role in Afghanistan, Tehran has supported various Afghan factions, including the Taliban in its bid to nail US-led ISAF forces. Iran also provides near neighbors such as India with alternate access routes and trade corridors to Afghanistan through the Chabahar port and has been an important player with regards to the critical energy pipelines that could have been a life source to the energy deficient South Asia. However, US owing to regime specific concerns tried to dissuade regional actors away from the Iran - Pakistan - India (IPI) pipeline, and instead goaded them to go for the TAPI a pipeline planned from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Finally by mid-2013 New Delhi pulled out of this trilateral (IPI) agreement.

The year 2013 was also witness to the seventh Iranian presidential elections, which brought Hassan Rouhani to power. Though the US still has concerns regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions for which US contemplates options ranging from sanctions to preemptive strikes; however Rouhani's election and a mutual desire by Washington and Tehran to seek better diplomatic ties are positive developments. For Pakistan the biggest problem emanating from its South Western neighbor is the twin problem of sectarianism and the ethnic Baloch issue.

USA

US as an active military and political player in the regional dynamics has managed to completely transform the equation. Washington's growing ties with India and its Afghan policy are two major concerns for Pakistan. Coupled with a growing mutual distrust between Pakistan and US incidents such as attack on Salala, a military forward post inside Pakistan, drone strikes, Bin Laden operation as well as a free hand given to non-civilian military contractors by US has enhanced anti-US sentiments in Pakistan. Likewise, Washington also views Islamabad as an unreliable partner in this military effort, yet after a long decade of complete denial, has grudgingly realized and acknowledged Pakistan's role in the post 2014 Afghan political transition.

Conclusion

The year 2014 is another very important and critical timeline. With all major players in this scenario facing elections and possible change of governments, what would be the future power relations is a total mystery. One thing is however definite, that there would be no radical change in the regional security profile. There may be a US-led ISAF drawdown by end-2014, but not a complete withdrawal, with minimal military foot print, and an increased role of private security contractors as well as increased role of air power through unmanned aerial vehicles or the infamous drones.

Where will we stand? There is going to be an increased energy, resource and water stress, which will add to the traditional plus nontraditional security concerns. This is largely due to the dangerous population growth versus rapidly shrinking and diminishing resource base, which will become critical if adequate safeguards and policies are not adopted soon. Pakistan has abundant natural resources and potential, the need is to channelize its energy to exploit and

manage them better. The shifting demography and youth bulge can prove both an asset and a liability. The unfolding political scenario in Afghanistan will deeply affect Pakistan. Lastly for Pakistan, there is a need for ushering in transparency, accountability as well as developing a capacity for addressing the critical issue of governance, beside early read of coming events.

The South Asian neighbors need to address the problems of mutual concern with a consolidated effort and take serious note of the dismal governance and human development indicators. Security is a holistic notion and needs to be addressed comprehensively in order to meet the challenge of traditional and non-traditional security dynamics. Unless and until these countries realize that their common destiny lies with each other's growth and stability the region is not likely to achieve peace, prosperity and development. It is critical to address and settle long standing conflicts such as Kashmir in favor of the Kashmiri population. The major impediment is the deep mistrust and lack of investment in the constituencies of peace. As a result, over the decades, new problems and stakes have managed to make the conflict profile more complicated and difficult to manage. Added to these are a host of traditional security issues as well as pressing non-traditional security issues such as growing demographic pressures, rapidly depleting resource base, poor water management and environmental concerns.

Instead of focusing on these critical aspects, which if left unchecked have the potential to transform the entire region for the worst, the two nuclear neighbors of South Asia remain single mindedly focused on strengthening their military muscles. Unless these countries of the region enter into a meaningful and result oriented dialogue and make parallel progress, in all contentious areas, there would be no way out of this stalemated situation. Watersheds events such as 9/11, given their global outreach have made state actors align their priorities and interests in line with the changing dynamics. Whether those choices made, more than a decade back, were in the interest of the state and people is already evident in the transformed internal security dynamics of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Decision making is a complex process that needs to take immediate to long term consequences into consideration in order to avoid costly mistakes.

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Endnotes

¹Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003), 101.

² David Bloomfield, Martina Fischer & Beatrix Schmelzle, (ed.), "Social Change & Conflict Transformation," Bergh of Handbook Dialogue Series, Issue no. 05, 2006,
http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue5_sochange_complete.pdf