Full Length Research

Peace and conflicts in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan and India

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The theme of regional integration suggests increased economic, social and political interdependence. In south Asia this effort beside all recognized goals was aimed at bringing peace and prosperity in the region. But till to date this effort is seen a failure. Other contemporary organizations of SAARC have achieved tremendous growth. The studies on the region reveal that inter-state rivalries are the main hurdle in the growth of the organization. ASEAN region has developed mechanism for conflict resolution. But SAARC has failed to develop any such mechanism. Through this study an effort is made to highlight the major conflicts in the region and their impacts on the working of the organization. Recommendations are provided for some established mechanisms for conflict resolution in the region. The impact of different threat perceptions in SAARC is highlighted. An attempt is also made to analyze the role of dominant regional power in the success and failure of regional organizations. This effort aims at further understanding about the core issues of the region and their solution. The available literature on the subject suggests a descriptive perspective of the issue. This article aims at analytical review of the topic.

Key Word: Conflict, Mechanism, Perception, Regionalism, Threat

INTRODUCTION

South Asian region is unique in the sense that its social, political and economic problems and issues have peculiar nature. It is often called the 'nuclear flash zone' because the major actors of South Asian politics India and Pakistan are nuclear powers. All other countries of the region are facing numerous domestic and regional problems. All the seven states of the region are connected through their Regional Organization namely; the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in 1985. Afghanistan is recently awarded the membership in the South Asian Organization is gravely facing the problems of

insurgency, political and economic instability. South Asia faces many problems like poverty, malnutrition, underdevelopment, economic instability, energy short fall and terrorism. Though mechanisms (SAPTA and SAFTA) for trade and trade liberalization exist, yet becoming a vibrant trading bloc is still a dream. Till to date SAARC has not been able to grow faster like ASEAN and EU. The main reason behind this uneven progress is inter-state conflicts, especially between India and Pakistan. On the other hand the weak conflict resolution mechanism is an important factor which hampers the growth of SAARC. Further, the hegemonic role of India is analyzed which is

one aspect of the failure of this organization. Through this study solutions to the basic questions relating this organization are searched out, i-e; the role of India that imbalance the region, and reasons behind the weak conflict resolution.

Effects of Conflicts on Regionalism in south Asia

Conflict means a difference or dispute between two or more countries that if exits can damage regional or international peace. Conflict is an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles or two or more groups of people or countries.[1] Regional organization can be fruitful in avoiding and pacifying conflicts and solving borders issues. Wulf[2] (2009) observes that regional organizations suffer from almost five basic weaknesses i.e. (i) Lack of common values; (ii) contested sovereignty; (iii) overlapping responsibilities; (iv) lack of capacity; and (v) dominant regional power.
Let us consider weakness number five i.e. dominant regional power. It has been observed that every region has a dominant regional power for instance in the ASEAN region, Indonesia can be classified as a dominant regional power; similarly, in SAARC region the dominant regional power is India. Both these powers have different characteristics of dominance e.g. in the ASEAN region the Indonesia is the dominating power. Her role is pacifying in nature and always acts to reduce imbalance the region. Indonesia had not ever tried to marginalize her dominant character and influence the regional and national policies of the member states. While in the SAARC region India's dominant character is tremendously affecting the regional and national policies of the member countries. The image of India demand habitual obedience from her neighbours (Bhatta, p. 10).

The Indian size and strength is raising suspicions in her neighbours. They think that she would dominate and interfere in their internal affairs. As such, the member countries of SAARC find out side security assistance and alliances. It is often observed that the policies of the member countries are influenced by their fear from India. They visualize that interdependence can lessen their autonomy and bargaining power. Therefore, they would not be able to settle their disputes with India (Pattanaik, 2006).

According to Bhatta, "South Asia is to be regarded as an Indian backyard." India is the main player of this association. It share borders with almost all the member countries except Afghanistan. Bangladesh, Bhuttan and Nepal are at a distance of few kilometers from each

other, but separated by the Indian Territory. Now, the possibility of trade between them passes through Indian corridor. Therefore, the possibility of trade and connectivity depends on Indian approach. The Indian approach is obvious for because she fears that the neighbours if joined together could harm her interests in the region (Kas International Report, 2012).

Threat Perceptions

There is great difference between the regionalism of East Asia and South Asia. The most important line of comparison between the two is "threat perceptions." Studies on regional organizations reveal that there is no external threat perception in SAARC like EEC and ASEAN. Rajan Mahan postulated in The Nature of South Asian Region: Assonants Affinities, Dissonant Diversities that the later viewed their organizations in two dimensions i.e. not only appropriate but also as an essential response to external threat – the south Asia has no such external threat perception (cited in Bhatta, An Analysis). The south Asian countries think that threat emanates from domestic troubles and time wasting demands of the regional countries. Keeping in view these realities Bhatta stated that south Asia displays different political and power structures that one seldom finds in any other geo-Political region of the world.

The practice of regionalism in the region shows a self centric and west centric approach of the member countries. While some studies reveal that the member countries take more interest in other regional organization than SAARC. Rajapaksa (Sri Lankan president), criticizing this trend in these words:

> We often tend to provide priority to our engagement with extra regional actors – we are not devoted to further develop and strengthen links within our own regional organization (Pattanaik, 2006).

SAARC has not been successful in creating peace and harmony in the region. The organization is imbalanced by grave conflicts. These conflicts keep the member states hesitant to cooperation. The member countries have consumed a long time in accommodating the mutual suspicions and their behaviour exposes rather antagonism than cordiality. The basic weakness of the organization lies in its mechanism which excludes the discussions on contentious issues. The member states till fails to create an environment of cooperation and cordiality and their relations are characterized by varying conflicts. South Asia has been described as the most dangerous place on the earth (Hentz, p. 157).
A researcher has categorized these conflicts into four

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[1] *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary* (3rd Edition).
[2] Herbert Wulf is adjunct senior researcher at INEF (Institute for Development and Peace). He is former Director of the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).

categories:[3] (a) Territorial conflicts; (b) Cross border terrorism; (c) Conflicts over natural resources; and (d) Conflicts related to immigration of refugees.

Pakistan and India have conflicts over Siachen, Sir Creek, Kargil and Kashmir. Kashmir is regarded the bone of contention between India and Pakistan. This issue has led them towards active wars, proxy wars and hot line issues. Pakistan and Afghanistan have been uneasy about Durand Line since 1947. Afghanistan is blaming Pakistan for infiltration and state of war on her land. Pakistan has suspicions over the inflow of terrorist from Afghanistan into her tribal built and Baluchistan. India and Bangladesh have disputes over common borders and maritime boundaries. Bangladesh has reservations over India in her ethnic disparities. The debilitating effects of these rivalries have been substantial, and determine the course of Regionalism in south Asia (Sridharan, 2008).

Both India and Pakistan suspect each other involvement in their disturbed state of affairs. India held Pakistan responsible for infiltration and Jihadist surge in Kashmir (Pattanaik, 2004). It also blames Pakistan for terrorist activities inside her territory. Pakistan has also strong reservations over Indian involvement in the uprisings in Baluchistan and adjacent tribal belt with Afghanistan.

The regional players have been seen busy in settling the disputes over the distributions of natural resources. The distribution of water resources under Radcliffe award created troubles between India and Pakistan. The succeeding events led to TAS agreement which made the distribution a fair deal. But still Pakistan held India responsible for violating the TAS agreement concerning Baglihar Dam, Wullur Barrage and other similar projects. Bangladesh demand India equitable share of the Ganges water. She has reservations over the building of Farakha Barrage.
The organization will be less responsive to regional cooperation or a more balanced interdependence until the intensifying and persistent conflicts continue to dominate the relations of south Asian states (Mukerjee`, 1995, p. 141).

Just after independence both Pakistan and India had to face the problem of refugees' settlement. This mass migration created ethnic, linguistics and identity problems in both the countries. Other are problems exist between Bangladesh and India. India demands Bangladesh to stop illegal immigration of Bengalis into her territory. Nepal and Bhuttan have similar reservations against each other. Sri Lanka's affairs with India were driven by the problem of Tamil Tigers. India had her own interests in Sri Lanka and has attempted to keep the region under her control by managing the conflict (Ahmad, 2006, p. 204).

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[3] Tomislave Delinic, *SAARC: Twenty Five Years of Regional Integration in South Asia.*

These developments disturb the routine business of the organization and create disharmony in the region. For example the eleventh SAARC summit was held after three years of postponement. The event was hijacked by the Kargil issue between India and Pakistan. All this happened because of India's unwillingness (Sridharan, 2008). Pakistan strongly denounced the Indian postponement and held her responsible for the breach of established norms of inter-state relations (Frontier Post, 1999).

The relation between India and Bangladesh were so worsen over borders that brought both into active use of force in 2001. The after effects swallowed up two approaching summit meeting in 1992 and 2005 respectively, (Sridharan, 2008). In 1989, similar troubles between Sri Lanka and India took away the summit meeting. Sri Lanka held India responsible for interference in her internal affairs.

According to the Charter of SAARC, the Heads of States or Government would meet once every year. In the known history of the establishment of the organization these meetings were held only seventeen times. Kumar points out that the failure to hold summit meeting per schedule has been mostly attributed to Indo-Pakistan tensions. On one side India try to dominate the region and maintain her supremacy. On the other Pakistan try to balance India and undermine her leadership role through combined regional efforts.

Pattanaik (2010) observed that there are four main weaknesses in the SAARC frame work: (i) inability to tackle interstate conflicts; (ii) Indo centric perceptions in the member countries; (iii) Lack of trust among the elite; and (iv) Ousting of contentious issues from the table of discussion. Regarding the trends and orientations of the member states P. Lyon (2008) said that SAARC's growth and progress depends more on the domestic political and economic dynamics rather than international factors.

Conflict Resolution

Regional cooperation is seen in the context of bringing economic integration, connectivity, sustained peace and development which can provide a solid base for conflict resolution. Tandon (2007) observed that when the United Nations failed to guarantee and insure peace and security in the world, the nations compellingly tended towards regional solutions. UNO, after 1990 became so overburdened that it had to rely more and more on regional and sub-regional systems for peace keeping (Hettne, 2009). But for the sustenance of peace in the region it needs a quick response system (QRS). The quick response system works as a pre-condition of peace. It can avoid the conflict and adds to the regional stability. It also can play some important roles i.e. (a) addressing security threats; (b) monitoring peace

agreements; and (c) providing early warnings.

Conflict Management briefly means that how a conflict is dealt with or to minimize the devastating effects of it. Regional organization is a formal way to maintain peace in the region. Conflict management offers an interpretation in the maintenance of peace in the region. Muthia (1995) synthesizes three basic elements in conflict management i.e. Prevention, Containment and Termination. Conflict prevention means avoiding complex situation and insuring that no such situation appear that could possibly lead to conflict. Containment means to control the complex situation that could lead to conflict. Termination is the process of finding solutions to existing conflicts. It offers the elimination or eradication of conflicts through the channels of diplomacy and bargaining. When a region becomes successful in achieving the first element, it should be considered successful (Sridharan, 2008).

ASEAN is said to have been successful in conflict management into some extent. They have established the mechanism to prevent conflicts, and denounce the use of force in complex situations. In south Asia, regional organization has little to do with conflict management (Diehl, 2003). The regional mechanism here often fails to prevent complex situations the Kargil episode is the most glaring example. According to leading analysts of the region, there is lack of political will within the Indian and Pakistani regimes therefore, the dialogue process between the two big remain fragile.

There is a generalization in the SAARC quarters to include bilateral and contentious issues in SAARC agenda. It has been observed that sometimes the delegations of small member countries raise their bilateral issues during summit meetings. Sri Lanka on many occasions during SAARC meeting has raised her concerns with India on ethnic issues. Sri Lanka in 1987 expressed her resentment on India's unilateral action of air-dropped relief supplies in the Jaffna province (Gopal, 1996, pp. 260-61). The Sri Lanka foreign minister suggests evaluation of a mechanism which would provide space for secrete foreign ministerial level meetings where contentious issues would be discussed. SAARC must not end up as deaf, dumb and blind association (Gopal, 1996).

Pakistan, Maldives and Nepal multilaterally demanded space for discussion on bilateral issues in the forum for the prosperity of the region and its people (SAARC summit, 1995). During Musharaf era Pakistan made recommendations for creating conflict resolution mechanism is SAARC to deal with all regional conflicts (Shahab, 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed above, there are different factors involved

in the system of conflict management. The ground realities in south Asia suggest the immediate application of the second and third options i.e. containment and termination. By applying the strategy of containment, complex situations could be controlled through the channels of diplomacy. The channels of diplomacy when involved will lead to the containment stage where the final resolution of the conflicts would be possible. In the conflicting scenario of south Asia track I channels[4] are experiencing failure. Therefore, the scholars suggest other channels of diplomacy if contacted first will make a ground for official diplomacy. The track II diplomacy often named as unofficial channels may become very fruitful in creating understanding amongst people. Track II diplomacy can create confidence building in different folks of life i.e. religious personnel, sportsmen, artists, businessmen and journalists.[5]

Experts on the subject assert that when these channels fail, other options get open like track III or multi-Track diplomacy. Malik says that opposition leaders may play that role. He further gives instances of Maulana Fazalur Rehman (Top leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, a political party in Pakistan), who is working on this channel by visiting India and stressing on peace.

The diplomatic channels are great bargaining tools. They can mould the minds, building confidence and creating peace in any given circumstances. But these channels need time and space for achieving goals. SAARC is failing even in creating space for people to people contact, exchange of students and other social organizations. There are still many hurdles in mechanisms of SAARC. There is also space for creating new mechanisms according to new situation and the older needs implementation.[6]

CONCLUSION

Through the initiative of SAARC it was deemed that this effort would extend interdependence in the region. It would further explore potentials of the member countries in areas like social, political and economics. But the organization is seen a failure. The main reason of this failure is grave inter-state conflicts. There is no proper mechanism in or outside the organization to deal with these conflicts and delimit their effects. Other contemporary organizations like ASEAN and EU have

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[4] These are also called the official channels, where negotiation on head of state level, take place.

[5] For a background discussion on the application and success of these channels see Sajjad Malik, Track II Diplomacy and Its Impacts on Pakistan -India Peace Process, *Current Affairs* (2013).

[6] For more details consult SAPNA (2006) recommendations on conflict resolution mechanism for SAARC.

been successful in establishing effective conflict management mechanisms, which SAARC do not have.

The Indian dominant position wants habitual obedience from her counterparts. It is observed that in other organization threat perceptions emanates from outside but in SAARC threat perception rise from inside. SAARC can obviously progress if a strong and effective conflict resolution mechanism is evolved. To differentiate the role of dominating power in SAARC and other regional organizations, it is quite obvious that in SAARC the role of India being big power of the region is hegemonic towards the smaller countries. Whereas, the cases of other dominating countries of other regions (like ASEAN) suggests that they are playing a very positive role and exercise its influence in resolving the conflicts.

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