

## South Asian Security: Current Political and Security Architecture of the Sub-Continent

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### Abstract

*The major dilemma of the South Asian security architecture is non-compatibility of the regional security visions of India and Pakistan. The security architecture in the Sub-continent has diplomatic and political dimensions which are no less important than the purely military issues and security framework and mindset. Although there is hardly any chance for the divergence in the security perspectives of India and Pakistan to reconcile in the near future, but Pakistan can improve its situation in the regional political and security architecture by increasing its positive relevance for the international community. This is possible when Pakistan's civilian leadership is able to manage political conflicts, increases internal political coherence, strengthens the economy and above all, controls religious extremism and terrorism.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic/Linguistic Multiplicity, Hegemonic, Population, Territory, Sectarianism, Terrorism, Political/Security Architecture, Physical/Military Features, Diplomatic, Political and Economic Dimensions.

The South Asian Sub-continent has a complex political and security architecture. It is characterized by ethnic and linguistic multiplicity, over-population, underdevelopment and poverty, and a binary of the highly qualified people but a low literacy rate. There are territorial and political conflicts between India and Pakistan whose roots can be traced to the colonial rule, the partition process (1947), the Cold War and the divergent regional security and stability perceptions that have caused mutual distrust and non-congruent security dispositions.

There are two major aspects of the current political and security architecture in the Sub-continent: Physical, conventional military and

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nuclear-strategic issues, and diplomatic, political and economic dimensions.

### **Physical and Military Features**

Geographical and physical features of a region impose certain compulsions but an effective diplomacy and a country's internal political and economic strengths help to turn physical constraints into advantages or reduce their negative impacts.

The whole of South Asia represents about 22 percent of world population. India and Pakistan have more population than the rest of South Asia. This region is India-centric in terms of India's geographic location, population, territory, economy, and military power. India's dilemma is how to turn its physical advantage and military and economic power into political and diplomatic clout within the region and at the global level.

India and Pakistan have a long border (international border, working boundary in the Sialkot sector and the Line of Control in Kashmir) and they are vulnerable to conventional military pressure from each other because a good part of the border has a plain or desert like topography. India and Pakistan view each other as an adversary, entertaining a lot of mutual distrust and pursuing conflict in their bilateral interaction. They periodically engage in bitter arguments at various international forums.

The major dilemma of the security architecture is non-compatibility of the regional security visions of India and Pakistan. There is no shared vision of regional security. Most of their security is against each other. India has often emphasized three regional security principles in the post-1971 period:

1. India has the right to protect its interests and intervene in a conflict in a neighbouring state if India's security is threatened.
2. India disapproves the practice of some South Asian states that seek support of the states outside the region for strengthening their security and obtain weaponry or get into security alliances. These states should approach India first. Any problems with India must be taken up with India at the bilateral level. There is no need of raising it at international forums or with other countries.

3. The relations of the states of South Asia with other states outside the region should not undermine India's national interest and security. One writer describes India's foreign policy in the post-1971 period, especially in the 1980s as “hegemonic” and “expansionist.”<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan offers an alternate regional security framework to be evolved through a dialogue among the states of the region. It should take care of each other's security concerns, respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. They should resolve bilateral issues through dialogue and mutual accommodation. It is a participatory and cooperative security system rather than a bigger and powerful state setting the rules for the states of the region.<sup>2</sup>

Other features of the security and political architecture of the Sub-continent include underdevelopment and widespread poverty that has accentuated socio-economic inequities in both India and Pakistan; dissident and separatist movements, ethnic and religious/sectarian conflict; violence and terrorism; interference by a state in the internal strife of another state; and propaganda wars.

India enjoys superiority over Pakistan in conventional military forces and weaponry. The deployment of its military is focused on the India-Pakistan border and the Line of Control in Kashmir, although the official Indian statement describes China as a bigger security threat. Most of the new 'war ideas' explored by India's security community before and after the terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 pertained to Pakistan, i.e., limited war, surgical airstrikes, a quick military operation across the Line of Control that does not trigger a full war with Pakistan. In the past, India's security community talked of what was described as the “Cold Start”, a swift joint services operation against Pakistan. They also talked about a covert military operation inside Pakistan against the militant groups, especially the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jamaat-ud-Dawa, on the lines of the US military

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<sup>1</sup> Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp.2, 5, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Pakistan and the Geostrategic Environment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), pp. 21-22. See also Robert G. Wirsing, *Pakistan's Security under Zia: 1977-88* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), pp.3-20.

operation against Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011. In October 2015, India's Air Force Chief, Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha said that his Air Force had the capability to target the militant camps in Pakistan-administered Kashmir but such a decision is to be taken by the political leadership.<sup>3</sup>

The induction of nuclear weapons in the region in May 1998 has drastically altered the regional security environment. India's superiority in conventional security has lost its traditional salience because now both countries possess nuclear weapons and they are working on weapon-modernization and building delivery systems. Their leadership will have to ponder carefully about the prospects of escalation from a conventional war to a nuclear exchange. This calls for a new approach to conflict, war and security. On more than one occasion since 1998, nuclear weapons have deterred India and Pakistan from resorting to a full conventional war. However, this has not led the two countries to seek peace and stability on a permanent basis. It must be recognized that the role of nuclear weapons as a deterrent cannot be taken for granted. It is cultivated through responsible diplomacy, avoidance of brinkmanship, effective command and control; keep up with technological advancement and security and safety of nuclear weapons.

### **Diplomatic, Political and Non-military Dimensions**

The security architecture in the Sub-continent has diplomatic and political dimensions which are no less important than the purely military issues and security framework and mindset. In fact, with the end of the Cold War and especially the assignment of the highest priority to countering terrorism since September 2001, non-military aspects of security architecture have gained salience.

There is hardly any chance that the divergence in the security perspectives of India and Pakistan can be reconciled in the near future. India's BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi (since May 26, 2014) has adopted a more strident approach towards Pakistan than was the case under the predecessor Congress government led by Dr. Manmohan Singh. The foreign policy and national security team of the Modi government is known for a tough disposition towards Pakistan. Another supporter of the "get tough"

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<sup>3</sup> *The Asian Age* (Delhi), October 4, 2015.

with Pakistan policy is India's top Army command that has joined hands with Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy and security team, embedded in the mindset of Political Far-Right and the 'Sang Pariwar.'

India's hardened disposition towards Pakistan manifested in the cancellation of the Foreign Secretaries level talks scheduled for August 25, 2015 on the pretext that Pakistan's High Commissioner in New Delhi had held a meeting with a Kashmir Hurriyat leader, Shabir Shah, which India described as unacceptable.<sup>4</sup> It has been a common practice on the part of Pakistan's High Commissioner in Delhi to meet with dissident Kashmiri leaders from time to time. On occasions the visiting Pakistani dignitaries also met with them in New Delhi. This was for the first time that any Indian government decided to cancel a scheduled high level meeting on this ground.

It was in November 2003 that Pakistan and India agreed to observe ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. The LoC remained more or less stable and peaceful until the end of 2013. The firing incidents across the LoC began to erupt from time to time in January 2013 onwards. These incidents escalated from July 2014, within two months of Modi assuming the office of Prime Minister in India.

A large number of firing incidents on the LoC in 2015 are taking place in the area where, on the Indian side, it is the Jammu sector of Indian administered Kashmir but on opposite side is Pakistan's mainland in the Sialkot area. The Working Boundary which enables India to use Kashmiri territory to attack Pakistani territory rather than Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The two sides are firing bullets and bombs from their bunkers close to the Line of Control rather than going across it. This has avoided escalation against the backdrop of the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides.

The government of India has not been willing to revive the composite dialogue until recently that focused on 8 issue areas, including Kashmir and terrorism, in 2004-2008. Rather, it has refused to acknowledge positive gains of these talks. India wants to start a fresh dialogue process on its new conditions,<sup>5</sup> which has been renamed as Comprehensive Bilateral negotiations.

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<sup>4</sup> Mariana Baber, "India Calls off Secretary Level Talks with Pakistan," *News* (Lahore), August 19, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed and first hand review of the Indo-Pakistan dialogue during 2004-2008, see Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider's Account of Pakistan's Foreign Relations including Details of the Kashmir Framework* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.155-382 (Chapters 3 and 4)

The Modi government's policy towards Pakistan has two major features. First, it has reduced the bilateral relations to a single-issue interaction. It wants Pakistan to satisfy India on its terrorism related complaints before other issues can be discussed. It is a unilateral determination of agenda that insists on Terrorism First. Second, India applies strong military and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. The firing into mainland Pakistan from across the LoC in the Jammu sector is the manifestation of this policy. India's policy makers think that they can keep the military pressure on Pakistan without letting it escalate to a bigger war. The diplomatic pressure includes India's propaganda against Pakistan at the international level, blaming it for all terrorist incidents in India. It has been trying since 1992-93 to get Pakistan designated as a terrorist state by the United States and the United Nations.<sup>6</sup>

The stringent disposition of the Modi government convinced the Pakistani leadership in 2014-15 that it should view its relationship with India on the hold till the attitude of the Modi Government changes towards Pakistan. Such a freezing of the bilateral relationship was also needed for the Modi government to learn from experience that its Pakistan Policy will not resolve India's security and political issues with Pakistan. The government of Pakistan needed to wait for subsiding of India's religion-oriented ultra-nationalism.

Pakistan should focus on strengthening its diplomatic and economic interaction with the rest of the world. It should pursue strong and astute diplomacy, explaining its counter-terrorism policies since the beginning of the “Zarab-e-Azb”, the security operation in North Waziristan. Further active diplomacy and strengthening ties with other states holds the key to dealing with the situation of military and economic disparities, as these exist between Pakistan and India, to the disadvantage of Pakistan.

Pakistan needs to give special attention to strengthening its ties with Afghanistan for adopting a shared approach for countering terrorism and strengthening controls on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Pakistan must offer financial and technical support for Afghanistan's economic development. Similarly, economic and diplomatic interaction needs to be strengthened with Iran and the Central Asian states. Current plans to import electricity and gas from

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<sup>6</sup> Hasan Askari Rizvi, “No Hope for Peace and Stability” *Express Tribune* (Karachi), October 5, 2015.

Central Asian states through Afghanistan needs to be implemented on a priority basis. Similarly the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project should not be allowed to fizzle out. Another important project that needs to be taken up is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline.

A new window of diplomatic opportunity is available to Pakistan because Russia has made a generous offer of cooperation in various political, economic, societal and security domains. Given the Western pressure on Russia on the Ukraine-Crimea affair (2014) and India's policy of cultivating the United States, Russia is expanding its diplomatic options to demonstrate dynamism in its foreign policy. Pakistan should avail of the latest Russian overtures by expanding economic, trade and cultural interaction. Russia and Pakistan are now working towards increased cooperation for controlling terrorism in the region. In April 2015, Pakistan and Russia agreed to joint military exercises.<sup>7</sup> Russia also offered to lend Pakistan \$2 billion for building a pipeline from Karachi to Lahore for transporting liquefied natural gas.<sup>8</sup>

Russia has agreed to provide helicopters to Pakistan for boosting the latter's counter-terrorism capacity. Important negotiations have taken place between the two countries for providing Pakistan with more military equipment and transport and communication facilities. It was in 1968-69 that Russia (Soviet Union) provided helicopters and tanks and transport equipment to Pakistan. It also helped to set up the steel mill in Karachi. Now, Pakistan is getting helicopters and some military equipment in 2015-16 after such a long period of time. Pakistan has now been elevated from the observer's status to full membership in 2015 in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>9</sup>

Pakistan and China have started working on a grand economic and industrial cooperation project in 2015, described as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), linking Kashgar in the Xinjiang region of Western China with Gwadar in Balochistan by road, air and railways. This idea was first floated during China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang's

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<sup>7</sup> *News*, April 16, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> See the statement of Pakistan's Petroleum Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi: *Express Tribune*, April 18, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> For a review of important development in the Pakistan-Russia relations in 2013-15 and its background, see: Hasan Askari Rizvi, "New Opening towards Russia," *Express Tribune*, June 15, 2014. Fahd Humayun, "Russian Opening," *Dawn*, February 26, 2015. Mehrunnisa Ali, "Soviet-Pakistan Ties since the Afghanistan Crisis," *Asian Survey*, Vol.XXIII No.9, September 1983, pp.1025-1042.

visit to Islamabad in May 2013 when China and Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding for building such a road link.<sup>10</sup> The notion of the CPEC was fully articulated during Chinese President Li Jinping's visit to Islamabad in April 2015, when the two countries signed 51 Memorandum of Understanding for extending bilateral cooperation; twenty of these MoUs are related to the CPEC which included a road link between the Xinjiang region of China and Gwadar, the development of Gwadar as a modern seaport as well as various projects for public service and infra-structure development, energy and industrial projects along the Corridor. The total value of these projects amounted to \$ 46 billion over the next 10 to 12 years.<sup>11</sup> The CPEC and the associated projects offered a major opportunity to Pakistan for economic and industrial development.

The CPEC is a part of China's vision of "the Silk Road and Economic Belt" and the "21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road" meant for reviving China's old trading links with Asia, Africa and Europe. In today's modern context this connects China with Central Asia, Russia, South Asia, the Persian Gulf and the Europe as well as the ASEAN countries, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

In addition to working with China on the CPEC and the related projects, Pakistan should upgrade its economic, trade and political ties with the US, the European Union, Japan, East Asia and the Middle East. Pakistan's decision to use active diplomacy to cope with the current disharmony and conflict with India will enrich the security and political architecture of the Sub-continent.

### **Internal Political and Economic Dimensions**

An important aspect of political architecture of the Sub-continent is internal political dynamism and the economy of a country. In today's international system, a country derives its main strength from how its political and societal mechanism functions and what is the nature of its economy.

If a country suffers from internal social and political incoherence and conflict and its politics is fragmented to such an extent that the

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<sup>10</sup> "Afghanistan Crisis," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXIII No.9, September 1983, pp.1025-1042.

<sup>11</sup> *Pakistan Today* (Lahore), May 23, 2013; *Daily Dunya*, May 23, 2013.

For Chinese articulation of the CPEC, see Chinese President Xi Jinping's article entitled "Pak-China Dosti Zindabad," *Daily Times* (Lahore), April 19, 2015.

government is unable to ensure good governance and smooth political management, it is difficult for the country to play an effective role at the global level or withstand external pressures. Similarly, stable and viable economy that also ensures distributive justice for the common people is critical to the role of a country in regional power architecture and global power politics. A country heavily dependent on external financial support for sustaining itself will have limited options for pursuing foreign and domestic policies in an autonomous manner.

Pakistan can overcome its handicaps in the regional and global contexts by putting its political and economic house in order. Pakistan's domestic democratic political system is facing serious difficulties because of the growing conflict among the major political parties that find it difficult to come to an understanding for handling political affairs. Consequently, governance and political management on the part of the federal government has faltered. It has not been able to evolve conflict resolution mechanisms to cope with the political alienation and protest.

There is an urgent need to make Pakistan's economy self-sustaining and viable. Its dependence on external sources limits Pakistan's political and economic choices. The acute electricity and gas shortages have a crippling impact on the economy. Further, the price hike and inflation has increased economic pressures on the common people. The health and education facilities offered by Pakistan's federal and provincial governments are inadequate. Though Pakistan is not a food deficit country, a large number of people cannot have two meals a day and children die of mal-nutrition and a lack of health facilities.

Religious extremism and terrorism have become negative features of Pakistan's security and societal architecture. These two factors have caused more damage to Pakistani politics, society and economy than any other factor. The inconsistent and ambiguous government policies and a state of denial about the existence of extremist and terrorist outfits made it difficult to cope with these challenges. Extremism and terrorism have also adversely affected Pakistan's economy. Consequently, Pakistan faces greater threats to its survival as a coherent polity from within rather than from outside. Its reputation has also suffered at the global level because it is often described as the most dangerous place in the world by writers and analysts based

outside of Pakistan. Extremism has increased religious and cultural intolerance in Pakistan that has caused much polarization and conflict. Religious minorities often become target of religious extremist and hard line groups. The state is unable or unwilling to protect the rights and identities of religious minorities and other weaker sections of the society.

The decision of the Pakistan Army top brass to initiate a comprehensive security operation in North Waziristan and other tribal areas in mid-June 2014 was a delayed but much needed policy measure to counter terrorism and extremism. So far, this operation has produced positive results because the terrorist groups no longer have a safe-haven in the tribal areas; their command and training centres have been destroyed. This has weakened the terrorist groups. Similarly, the security operation in Karachi by the Pakistan Rangers and the Police has improved internal security situation there. However, the challenge of extremism, sectarianism and terrorism has not been fully eliminated. The on-going security operations in the tribal areas and parts of mainland Pakistan have to be pursued with consistency till the situation is fully under control. The success of these efforts by the security establishment and civilian governments will not only restore internal peace and stability in Pakistan, but will also improve the prospects of economic along with restoring Pakistan's credibility at the international level.

### **Positive Relevance to the International Community**

Pakistan can improve its situation in the regional political and security architecture by increasing its positive relevance with the international community. This is possible when Pakistan's civilian leadership is able to manage political conflicts, increases internal political coherence, strengthens the economy and above all, controls religious extremism and terrorism. The key to Pakistan's capacity to cope with external pressures, especially India's strident policies, lies with addressing these issues in a satisfactory manner.

The most important relevance to the international system relates to the economy. How far a country is linked with the international economic arrangements that involve trade, market for goods and services and an attractive proposition for foreign investment? How far a country can serve as a transit route for movement of goods, services and energy?

The current military efforts to control terrorism also increase Pakistan's relevance to the international system. Pakistan's diplomatic position is strengthened by the statement of Pakistan's Army Chief General Raheel Sharif that the army is taking action in North Waziristan and other tribal areas against all terrorists groups in a non-discriminatory manner. This is being seen as a shift in Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy because one major complaint against the Pakistan government and the military-intelligence establishment at the international level was that these were selective in taking action against the terrorists groups. Now, the current military action in the tribal areas is targeting all groups based there.

Pakistan can strengthen its position in the security, political and economic architecture of the Sub-Continent/South Asia by pursuing active diplomacy, expanding its interaction at the global level, putting its political and economic house in order and addressing extremism and terrorism in a forthright manner. Pakistan needs to improve its positive relevance to the international system by becoming an attractive place for trade, investment and economic activity. It should be viewed at the international level as a part of the solution of the problem of terrorism and regional instability and incoherence.

### **Postscript**

Three quick diplomatic interactions between Pakistan and India in November-December 2015 improved the prospects for revival of the bilateral dialogue on the contentious issues. This was partly because of the realization in India of the futility of its policy of building diplomatic and military pressures on Pakistan and not talking to it except on its terms. The first signs of change emerged when Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked to each other briefly on the occasion of the global conference on environment in Paris on November 30, 2015. This contact was followed up by the meeting of the National Security Advisers of Pakistan (Lt-General (ret'd) Nasser Khan Janjua) and India (Ajit Doval) in Bangkok on December 6, 2015. The Foreign Secretaries of both countries were present in this meeting. These two diplomatic interactions paved the way for the visit of India's Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, to Islamabad on December 8-9 to participate

in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process meeting on Afghanistan. The bilateral meetings between her and Pakistani leaders resulted in a decision to revive the bilateral dialogue under a new name “Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue.” The Joint Statement issued on December 9 noted that “the National Security Advisers will continue to address all issues connected to terrorism. The Indian side was assured [by Pakistan] of the steps being taken to expedite the early conclusion of the Mumbai trial.” The Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and India were directed in the Joint Statement to work out a schedule of meetings on “Peace and Security, CBMs, Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wuller Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Economic and Commercial Cooperation, Counter-terrorism, Narcotics Control and Humanitarian Issues, People to People Exchanges and Religious Tourism,”<sup>12</sup> The Joint Declaration incorporates the major concerns of both countries and other problems. Hopefully, this will provide a basis for yet another revival of bilateral talks between Pakistan and India.

However the attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot has once again disrupted the process of negotiations. India has asked Pakistan to hold an inquiry into the attack and communicate her the action Pakistan would like against the involved the attackers without allowing access to Pakistan inquiry team into the Pathankot base, which puts a question mark on the early resumption of the negotiations.

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<sup>12</sup> For the full text of the Joint Statement: *Nation* (Lahore), December 10, 2015.