

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS: THE CASE OF SOUTH ASIA

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South Asia, the home to one fifth of humanity is endowed with abundant natural resources. However, like other developing world, it has so far failed to realize its full potential. In recent years, a significant economic growth has been witnessed in the region especially in India. Nevertheless, even this economic development remained unable to alleviate poverty, diseases, environmental hazards, and unemployment, mainly due to existence of both traditional as well as and non-traditional security threats, which consume major chunk of the limited regional resources. While the political stakes are very high in case of traditional security issues, non-traditional security problems can be resolved through cooperative efforts without encumbering the political and historical baggage.

The region needs paradigm shift to solve its multifaceted problems. Focus on non-traditional security challenges would be one way of preventing the region from further chaos and instability. In today's age of globalization, because of the ubiquitous traditional and non-traditional challenges, South Asia is considered as one of the most vulnerable region on the globe. Since the bulk of region's GDP is spent on defence budgets and other non-developmental expenditures, therefore, only a minuscule attention could be paid to meet the challenges of the non-traditional security threats to the region. There is an urgent need for the regional countries to evolve a cooperative framework wherein joint strategies could be worked out to resolve the non-traditional security threats.

Human security and development are the main non- traditional security challenges to South Asia. Except Sri Lanka and Maldives, the conflict prone region falls at the bottom quartile of the human development index. With respect to the human poverty index, South Asian countries are on the breadline once compared with rest of the

world. This is the only region in the world, which spends less than 30 US dollars per capita on healthcare per year, which is even 2/3rd of what Sub-Saharan Africa. Based on purchasing power parity of 1 US dollar a day, over 35 percent people of South Asia survive below the poverty line. This percentage would be doubled, if the universal criterion of US \$2 a day is made as the basis for drawing the poverty line in South Asia. In that case, 80 percent Indians and 73.6 percent Pakistanis would fall in the category of poor.

Dynamics of Non-traditional Threats

Apart from its benefits, the globalisation has created a fright whereby, “a threat to one is a threat to all”, an argument echoed by a high-level panel at the UN that studied the nature of hazards to global security.¹⁴ Indeed the concept of security has transcended the traditional geographical borders of state(s) and the military force can no more be considered the only measure to ward off threat to the securities of nations.¹⁵ This transition in the concept of security is a product of globalization. The non-traditional security threats are non-military in nature and transnational in scope¹⁶. These are indeed neither domestic nor purely interstate, rather appear at a very short notice, cause colossal losses and transmitted rapidly due to globalization and communication revolution.

The non-traditional security threats like natural calamities and the non-state human actions, cannot be restrained within the geopolitical boundaries and hence affect governments, people, societies and institutions alike within or across the geographical boundaries of a state. As globally agreed, these threats are three-dimensional in nature: first; purely related to the natural disasters like hurricanes, floods and droughts, earthquakes, tidal waves, volcano eruptions and avalanches. Likewise, it also includes; outbursts of communicable diseases like; HIV/AIDS/COVID-19, tuberculosis, SARS, swine flu, etc. The second dimension includes the semi natural threats that affect the essential resources and economic conditions of the nation states like water shortages, scarcity of energy resources, poverty and unemployment, etc. The third category however is purely manmade and appears in the forms of; terrorism, deforestation, transnational crimes, insurgencies, trafficking in illegal drugs, weapons and migrants, etc. Natural disasters and manmade security crises can potentially lead to mass migrations and displacements.

The sub-Himalayan South Asian region, one of the most densely populated geographical region of the world that is marred by both traditional and non-traditional security threats.²⁰ Otherwise, the regional politics is careworn by the frequent divergences and political instabilities, mainly caused by the nuclear rivals; the India and Pakistan. Three major wars between India and Pakistan and natural disasters have resulted in to big loss of life and have increased impoverishment. War and conflict have marginalised the potential of SAARC since its inception in 1985 and there perished over 130,000 people due to natural disasters since the beginning of the new millennium and less than 30,000 people in all major wars and minor clashes between India and Pakistan.

The Way Forward

Non-traditional security threats do not respect borders; hence, it is difficult to find their solutions at national level. Rather countering these threats demands synergistic international or at least regional efforts. Within South Asia, there is a need for comprehensive responses at political, economic, and social level, all to be coordinated at the platform of SAARC. Owing to the perpetual trust deficit among the South Asian states, the foremost requirement would be to restore the trust in order to bring harmony of thought processes among the regional stakeholders. Overcoming this nightmare would enable us to embark upon the resolution track of the non-traditional security threats in South Asia as a cohesive force.

Prospects for a Collective Regional Response

An empirical and temporal assessment of non-traditional threats to the safety and security of South Asians shows that its 1.6 billion people are more vulnerable to hazards of migration, displacement, human security, environmental degradation, natural calamities, water scarcity, energy deficiency, HIV/AIDS, and small arms proliferation. Unlike the traditional sources, the non-traditional security threats present a bigger challenge as well as opportunity to South Asia. These threats are common in nature, beyond the management capacity of an individual state and can be tackled jointly. Hence, if the states work together at SAARC forum and make it more effective and powerful; the effects of traditional security threats will be largely mitigated. Except water issues, there appears no worthwhile variance among the South Asian nations for a regional approach to solve the non-traditional security threats. Water too is becoming a compulsion for every state to be resolved justly, while taking into considerations the requirements of each country. The following recommendations proffer the way forward.

National Responses

Apart from the regional approach, there is a dire need of a state level solution of the issues related to small arms and light weapons through domestic legislation. This can be accomplished by imposing strict restrictions on their unauthorized use or even possession. Since pollution is badly damaging the environment besides creating health hazards to everyone in the region therefore, industries and automobiles violating the rules in this respect should be ceased to function until become free of risks. Other contributory factors should be trounced through plantation and enhancing the greenery. In connection with the human trafficking and its connected crimes, there is a need to create a sense of awareness during the movements within and across the borders.

Conclusion

In today's highly globalized world, where a threat to one is taken as a threat to all, every state requires international or at least regional cooperation to make itself secure. South Asia is witnessing the emergence of a multi-threat environment where traditional security challenges are no longer a stream of single point threats. Rather, the region has become a raging river of new challenges, often-indistinct signals that require fast and smart analysis, rapid and robust action plans, and well-orchestrated, cross-boundary responses.

The prevalent non-traditional security threats looming over the regional horizon are posing great danger to the human security in South Asia. In over 90 percent cases, South Asia faces a similar threat gamut; therefore call for a comparable, harmonized, sincere, and dedicated mode to counter them. Espousing of an integrated and unanimous strategy at the regional level would diminish the traditional differences and collides, rampant in South Asia since the end of colonial rule.