



SOUTH ASIA: STRENGTHENING MEASURES AGAINST SECURITY THREATS IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO - AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *The paper examines the present situation of South-Asian region from its security perspectives in the changing scenario. In this context, the south Asian countries have been experiencing a chronic threat of super-power rivalries during 1970's. During the 70's, the South Asian and the Indian Ocean had become a major theatre of super-power rivalries. With passage of time, there has always been more or less a threat of security for India and the countries, situated in this continent. As a result, it has become a chronic threat to whole region. It is therefore, become an imperative to review the situation in the sub-continent from the security threat in global perspective. It also becomes equally imperative to evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat to India and its neighbouring and littoral countries of the Indian ocean, so that the whole region may be protected as a 'zone of peace' in the present changing scenario.*

Keywords: *Security threat, super-power rivalry, Indian-sub continent, Indian Ocean, zone of peace.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian-subcontinent area is one of the prominent geographic regions of the world. It includes some of the major Asian countries which are collectively called South-Asia. These tropical and sub-tropical countries comprise 1/6th of total global area and are inhabited by 1/3rd of the world population. Despite being tropical and sub-tropical, India and the littoral countries of the Indian-Ocean are rich in agriculture, horticulture, mineral resources-which include iron ore, coal, oil and other non-ferrous metals in their hinter lands. The Indian-sub continent regions remain free from frost and snow throughout the year. The various islands located in the Indian Ocean and its littoral countries have greatly enhanced its strategic importance resulting in the whole region being viewed as a hub for 'Super power rivalries within this region'. During the 70s the whole of the Indian-sub continental region had become a major arena for super powers like The United States, The U.K, Russia, France and China to flaunt their economic and military might. This super power rivalry turned the region into a 'Zone of tension' for the countries located within the fringe areas of India and the Indian Ocean.

Keeping in view the present scenario, contemporary world has come to face multiple changes and challenges. The countries to be directly affected by these developments include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Afghanistan etc. These are the countries which have been closely associated with each other by sharing their socio-economic and political relations for last over fifty years through various bilateral and multilateral initiatives aimed at enhancing their opportunities for mutual benefits and co-operation. India shares common borders with almost all the South -Asian countries, as a result of which it has certain unresolved border disputes and a constant threat to the country's security. Some more serious and long standing border dispute is with Pakistan and China which have come to determine and characterize our relationship with these two countries during the last six decades.

Developments in neighborhood provide an important input in the formation of foreign policy of a state. The factors like geopolitical setting, socio-economic conditions, ethnic issues, societal composition, nature of borders, political stability etc in each of these countries could have helped better settle these problems in a judicious way in the initial stages. But that did not happen for obvious reasons allowing the matter to become a 'grim



situation' with the passage of time. In the Indian context, the perceptions towards each country are formed, based on these realities which ultimately shape up convergences and divergences in our relationship with these countries. For India, these factors become very pertinent as we have to deal with our neighbours which have diverse cultural backgrounds, histories and socio-economic milieu. It becomes all the more challenging in the case of smaller neighboring countries, as the latter have a critical asymmetry in terms of geography, demography, levels of economic development, military capabilities and availability of human resources, etc. These diverse factors have given rise to weakening of the collective 'regional strength' of the Indian sub-continent.

THE REGIONAL CHALLENGE OF SECURITY THREAT:

In context to the Indian – sub continent, it has been observed, there are some 'centrifugal forces' operating within the region which are viewed as a growing threat to the regional security. China and Pakistan view themselves as natural allies and have established special relationship to jeopardize India's interest in whatever manner it could be possible. Other countries like Bangladesh too we have some minor problems of internal security but these can be easily addressed. The major problem is of millions of Bangladeshis who have infiltrated into India since its creation. This has an adverse impact on the 'Indian economy' and security. It has been often noticed that the fake Indian currency, generally printed in tan and to some extent even in Bangladesh is clandestinely channeled into our system with a view to harm our economy.

By way of their alignment with block politics or joining certain military pacts, Pakistan and island countries certainly have the potentiality of changing the balance of power position in the region adjoining India, China's growing influence and interest in Pakistan's internal affairs and their growing cooperation is a case in point. The island nations like Sri Lanka and Maldives and some Islands of Myanmar (Burma), the Mergui Archipelago etc. are characterized by their 'Strategic Importance' in the scheme of through of countries like China. Such small countries are particularly vulnerable to the lure of countries like China to sub-serve their long term expansionist designs for establishing 'Military bases on the basis of 'lucrative terms and conditions' as quid pro quo.

Both Pakistan and Bangladesh in a way have been important variables in determining India's foreign policy. The India's foreign policy, enunciated in early 1990s also sought to emphasize



the importance of South Asia and of its regional organization ASEAN. In the initial stages, it was mainly driven by concerns such as those of energy and economic requirements of members' countries. However, later on political and strategic dimensions were also added to it. As a result, India first becomes the 'Sectoral dialogue partner' 'of the ASEAN' in 1992, a member of the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) in 1995 and finally 'a full dialogue partner' of the ASEAN in 1996. Subsequently, strengthening of these ties culminated into commencement of an annual summit meeting between India and ASEAN since 2002.

It is obvious that the new globalized world order hence begets new challenges, which many security analysts have termed as non-traditional challenges to security. If there is a continuously developing conflict on issues of vested interests among the states of the Indian-subcontinent, the resulting scenario would ultimately evolve into a threat to energy security, food security, water security and environmental security besides giving fillip to other problems such as terrorism and transnational crime, illegal migration, pandemics and natural disaster in the entire region.

In the globalized world, a proactive external engagement strategy with all countries of the region and beyond is required to protect and promote India's legitimate national interests. India, therefore, needs to define its own dynamic and strategic autonomy in the emerging globalized world order. From a foreign policy point of view, it means that India must be self-reliant in sectors critical to her national security and economic interests and should be fully capable to effectively leverage its external sources to its advantage. This will require that export control regimes specifically targeted against India should be strongly opposed.

Our foreign and security policy guidelines ought to flow from our national requirements of sustained and inclusive economic growth in the areas politically defined as the priority for the country. 'External engagement has to ensure an enabling environment for national growth and development of a country in terms of security and other key variables. The ultimate aim should be establishment of a periphery which is peaceful and permits sustained economic development of our people with unhindered access to material resources, technology and to the regional and international markets.

Keeping in view the present scenario of security in the South-East Asian countries, we may work-out a SWOT analysis of the security analysis of all the South-East Asian Countries, as follows:



STRENGTH:

During the recent past, various protocols and agreements have shown some good signs of developing cordial relations between India and Bangladesh. The year 2010 has been marked as a very positive one in the development of lasting bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh but a lot more needs to be done. The visit of Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India from January 10-13, 2010, spelt out a new epoch in the development of bilateral ties and clearly exhibited a promise of positive results. But more recently the initiative taken by a friendly Bangladesh regime seems to have lost its sheen because of perceptible ambivalence of India's political leadership in not honoring their promise on Tista river water and exchange of arenas to settle long standing boundary dispute on petty local considerations vociferously pursued by the chief minister of West Bengal.

In case of Sri Lanka also India has enjoyed a good working relationship in this area of bilateral relations. With the end of hostilities in Sri Lanka, India offered all possible assistance to help in relief, rehabilitation, early settlement and long term reconstruction of areas affected by decades of strife between majority signals and minority family ethnicity. Against India unhesitatingly took a position in the Utility over the issue of Tamil which was opposed by Sri Lanka and it strained our relations with that country. Nepal was engulfed in its internal problems in the recent past. In order to mollify the 'grim-situation', created by the political crisis, India made consistent efforts to stabilize the newly elected Nepalese Government. From 15-17 January 2010, the external affairs minister of India, S. M. Krishna visited Nepal, met the senior leadership of Nepal and signed four MoUS of mutual interest. India's relation with Bhutan, during 2010-2013 has been normal and cordial in nature. While Bhutan, is receiving constant help in the field of education, trade and tourism development. Bhutan has never had any border dispute with India. Recently, the nascent democracy has got its new government after national elections and India is doing its best for it to mature into a lasting and historical friendship.

In case of Maldives, India has extended all kinds of assistance in its development activities, predominantly in the areas of human resource development. Trade between India and Maldives is governed by the rules as mentioned in the Indo-Maldives Trade Agreement, signed on 31st March, 1981. India and Maldives also share the status of "Most Favored



Nation” with each other in terms of mutual trade. India has helped Maldives in establishing of health infrastructure, telecommunications and air links and also increased scholarship for Maldivian Students pursuing education here. The Maldives is an import-dependent country, bringing in everything from staple food to resort supplies, construction material and petroleum products.

It is obvious that excepting Pakistan, most other countries South and South-East Asian region, are having more or less cordial relation through multilateral trade, education, telecommunication and common-cultural relations. India is obviously much above the other countries in the region, by virtue of its geographical size, traditional and cultural links, demographic and economic potential, political weight and strategic capacity. The geographical location of Nepal and Bhutan made them naturally depend on India in the past in views of India’s control over the world trade and transit link. As a result the whole area excepting Nepal has remained stabilized, barring occurrence of a few disputes. But during the past few years India has suffered a number of slippages which primarily attributable to its we at foreign policy and burden of its over internal inconsistencies thrust upon its govt. at the Centro by regional political parties like DMK, AIDMK, CPM, CPI, TMC etc.:

WEAKNESS:

Amongst most of South Asian countries, Pakistan has never been cordial as the Kashmir issue has been a ‘bone of contention, for the last 65 years. The bitter relationship has resulted in four wars “between India and Pakistan. Despite the criticism that the South Asian Countries is a non-performing region is largely on account of the intra-regional political tensions capable of weakening of South-Asian regionalism. The politically-driven bilateral approaches in most of the countries individually have been at the base of suspicious and misapprehensions among the rest about regional cooperation. The politically fragile government saddled with a host of local political and divisive issues have been rendered in capable to deal with unresolved conflicts; and their failure to overcome paranoia, suspicious and mistrust, inhibits the South Asian countries to play a leadership role in not only the South Asia but also in the South-East Asian region in terms of regional security threat of interference by super powers. Another factor is ‘Intra State Conflicts’ in bilateral interests of members States which have a decisive influence over the South Asian and South-East Asian countries. It is the persisting mistrust. These being usually antagonistic to the long term



interest of this own people put one country against another and ultimately Lebed to undermining of organizational unity among all countries of the regional. In the recent past India stands out as a preferring example of this scenario.

As the South-Asian and South-East Asian countries have been influenced by external players and other regional organizations to a considerable extent in the past. (Ahmad and Bhatnagar, 2008). Given the fact that there are lofty propositions underway, towards deeper bilateral agreements and treaty proposals to joining other multilateral organizations (Baru 2010) South-East Asia is increasingly drifting towards the East. Pakistan is trying to attach itself with the East Asian Islamic World. There is similar situation in a number of smaller countries. With the sinister support from China, the Maoists of Nepal and the majority Sinhala Chauvinists in Sri Lanka have been constantly fermenting trouble for ethnic Hindu and Tamil Minorities respectively.

Despite being a group of contiguous countries, the South Asia and the South-East Asia is one of the least integrated regions of the world. In fact, South Asian Countries have many bilateral investment treaty agreements concluded with countries other than those in the South-East Asian region. (Chadha and Naturaj 208).

OPPORTUNITY:

Reviewing the opportunities for South-East Asian Countries, which have a great potential for Regional Cooperation, so that a 'collective bargaining' may be developed among these countries, Seeing the cross-border similarities in traditions and customs in the South-Asian region, the individual countries are closer to each other and geographical proximity, cultural asymmetry and common historical legacy are also very conducive to harnessing the region's potentiality for greater regional economic integration. They can help each other to ensure food security, energy security, water security, environmental security, stamping out menace of terrorism from the regions and to collectively deal with other serious problems such as illegal migration and natural calamities. It is possible, when all the South-East Asian countries show their commitment to mutual trust, solidarity, peace and stability among South-Asian neighbours the emerging scenario may lead them to habitually entertain positive perception of each other.

India's role in these initiatives can be emphasized if the different forms of security are first decided and ensured through mutual cooperation among countries. While India has been



rightly pursuing its policy respective with nations outside the region, it need to give equal importance to its immediate neighborhood.

THREAT:

For reviewing the internal and external threat to South-East Asian Countries, it becomes imperative to eliminate the 'pitfalls' and irritants that characterize the relationship among these countries. There are some 'Centrifugal forces' which often destinely operate with region to develop their vested interests among these countries. The differential estimate of security risks in the context of cold war, India's reluctance to participate in various regional security pacts, India's indifference to formation of Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1967) and its ambivalence towards South-Asian Politics had widened the gulf between India and South-east Asian countries all through the cold war period. It has been observed that inability to tackle inter-state conflicts, often holding the relationship have together transfixed India in a position it has been hostage to bilateral conflicts and nationalistic interests of these countries. Secondly, existence of an indo-centric strategic fear psychosis among India's neighbours, as well as the big players in global diplomacy have also contributed to the deficit of mutual trust among Southeast Asian Countries. These are some of threats, which have always been seen as a 'wet blanket' over the security issues within this region.

CONCLUSION:

Perhaps the important challenges that post-colonial Southeast Asia face are ethnic conflicts, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the all effects of globalization and antagonistic India-Pakistan relations. In the past half century, this region has witnessed many other conflicts related to communal tension, linguistic differences, under development, demand for representative government, border disputes, intra-state and inter-state dissensions etc. The most persistent of these conflicts have been armed struggle for self-determination by the LTTE in Sri Lanka, separatist groups in Kashmir, struggle for democracy in Nepal, Chakma up-rising over identity politics by the Muhajirs in Sindh, etc. Unless these diversifying forces are eliminated, the 'Security issues' will remain a real threat to the region. In order to ensure the 'Security' within Southeast Asian region, it is very essential and imperative to make a periodic review of the existing and potential programmes for discussing the 'Security Issues' in a harmonious environment, so that the



while Indian-Sub continent ay secure a 'sustainable position' in the 'security matters'. It requires an inter-disciplinary approach towards 'common-security problems' among the countries, belonging to the Indian Sub-continent. If the adage that the "21st Century is the Century of Asia" is to be made a reality, then the economic security of the Southeast Asian countries and of those of the Indian sub-continent will have to be essentially achieved. For this to happen the parochial, mindset of the South-east Asian leaders should shift from local to global, by minimizing strains on relationship among the countries of the sub-continent. It can only then be possible for our neighborhood to achieve the goal of sustainable peace and socio economic development of people in the region.

As on date India cannot claim it enjoys any degree of diplomatic influence in the region and its position has been sliding fast. As it is, Nepal is enjoying the comforts of china's lap while Pakistan has already started behaving like its buddy adding to our decades old problems. Our own impact handling of issues of pending Testa Water agreement and avenue swap with Bangladesh has antagonized a trusted neighbor Sheikh Haseena just to keep a belligerent Mamta Banerjee in good honour. Similarly, we have perforce pushed Sri Lanka tounwillingly accept China's refuge over the issue of voting against its government at the UNHRC involving ethnic Tamil initials in the island nation. The relationship with Bhutan and Maldives too has been unwittingly brought to a brink by our unstates man like approaches over trivial issues or by ignoring those for far too long. It is this situation which sees India standing totally isolated in the South-Asia sysontlay and it is, therefore, of utmost importance for India to rework its Foreign policy soon to ensure that we develop and maintain good working relations with all other neighbours for collective peace and progress in the region. It is a fact that Indian foreign policy never had it as bad and ineffective as now. It is not only unfavorable to us and our neighbours but also thoroughly counterproductive and antagonistic to our own long term interest as an emerging economy and a regional leader.

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