

Dynamics of South Asia's security

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SOUTH Asia has been a tension-filled region. India and Pakistan fought three wars (1948, 1965 and 1971) during the last fifty years, two of those over Kashmir and the third one (1971) resulted in emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country. India and China fought a brief war in winter of 1962 and there is a shadow of China impacting on South Asian security. There is currently a thaw in Indo-

threats arising from within the region and not from outside the region.

There are several important dimensions to South Asia's security and some of them deserve mention below:

First, the region is asymmetrical in nature. The size of India is larger than that of six countries of the region combined together. Furthermore India sits right in the middle of South Asia and shares borders with almost all countries. No country in the region shares border with each other. This geopolitical situation has

but as symbol of power and prestige. Most significantly, India plans to acquire Theatre Missile Defence System (TMD) from Israel to neutralise missile capabilities of Pakistan. The plan means that Pakistan is likely to counter India's plan and the arms race continues in the region.

Fourth, in terms of India's nuclear protocol, the objective of nuclear weapons is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by "any state or entity against India and its forces". It is significant to note that the word "entity" has been employed. It refers to non-state actors (terrorist outfits) outside India's borders.

Fifth, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka should not do anything that affects India's security. India's Foreign Minister at a seminar in New Delhi on 10 January 2003 stated: "Within the overall approach to the security concerns of South Asia, we have to be aware and sensitive of the security concerns of each others....If those security concerns become overpowering, then many other areas of cooperation are lost sight of temporarily or in the long run. So sensitivity to each other's security concerns is an issue which we have to keep in mind."

The statement implies that smaller countries fall within the security parameters of India's security and if India is attacked, it can send its soldiers in those countries. Prime Minister Nehru in 1950 said that "a threat to Nepal is a threat to India and India cannot tolerate any invasion of Nepal from anywhere".

Sixth, India claims that its security interests are trans-South Asian region. India defines its security position in light of China's military strength and Pakistan assesses its security concerns against India's position. This has manifested in arms and missiles race in South Asia. This triangular security dimension-China, India and Pakistan- complicates the security situation in South Asia.

Finally, security threats must include violence, and internal instability. Nepal and Sri Lanka are going through violent political confrontation within the country. These are not healthy signs for South Asia because such violent confrontation may spill over neighbouring countries.

Conclusion

Given the above factors, South Asian countries, especially the smaller countries including Bangladesh, have to be always vigilant and alert in identifying security concerns in the region and use preventive diplomacy to contain the tension that may erupt to destabilise the region. Time and energy must be invested to remove first signs of conflict during peacetime before actual conflict flares up.

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many ramifications in the region.

Second, South Asian security is inextricably linked with the unresolved Kashmir issue. The hard reality is that Pakistan lacks power to force the issue with India. Until India is ready to resolve the issue, Pakistan is a helpless spectator and the dispute continues.

Third, both India and Pakistan have intensified in manufacturing their missile capabilities not only as defence strategy

US bombing in Pakistan: Is anywhere safe?

BILLY I AHMED

ON January 13, the US carried out a reckless air strike in Damadola, near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. The air strike under the international law tantamount to an act of war.

In the strike, 18 civilians were killed, including five women and five children, further inflaming already high political and social tensions inside Pakistan.

However, the Pakistani government of President Pervez Musharraf has agreed with the US takeover of Afghanistan, but it has never formally granted the US military the right to cross the border and carry out operations on Pakistani soil or airspace.

It is unclear whether the Pakistani government and military had pre-knowledge of the attack. However, in the face of public outrage it has been pin down to issue a protest to the US ambassador and deplores bombing Damadola as "highly condemnable".

Nevertheless, Pakistani officials say that, despite their knowledge of the area and a ban on foreign forces operating on their territory, they were not consulted ahead of the strike.

Pakistan defence analyst Hassan Rizvi said, "Everything is not shared. The US did not tell Pakistan fearing things might slip out before the air strike."

Not only was the attack a violation of Pakistani national sovereignty, the intended target, the senior Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri was not even in the village.

Haroon Rashid, the local member of the Pakistani National Assembly, told Afghan Islamic Press: "I know all the 18 people who were killed. There was neither al-Zawahiri nor any other Arab among them. Rather they were all poor people of the area."

A Pakistani military intelligence officer told Al Jazeera: "Their [the US military] information was wrong, and our investigations conclude that they acted on false information."

Various unnamed US officials, however, have told the press that American intelligence agencies believed that al-Zawahiri was sleeping in one of the three homes that were reduced to rubble.

The New York Times reported the attack was thought to have been carried out by CIA-operated unmanned Predator drone aircraft, which flew into Pakistani territory from Afghanistan.

The air strike was the second US intrusion into the country within one week. On January 7, at least eight people were killed in an attack by US helicopters on a house in North Waziristan, another mountainous



border region some 300 kilometres to the south of Damadola.

The imperialist arrogance and outright gangsterism of the Bush administration has provoked demonstrations across Pakistan.

In the region surrounding Damadola, up to 8,000 local tribesmen gathered on 14 January to denounce the raid and Musharraf's alliance with the Bush administration.

Tribesmen chanted, "Death to America", "Death to Bush" and "A friend of America is a traitor" a reference to the Pakistan government.

Later in the day, demonstrators set fire to the offices of Associated Development Construction, an organisation financed by the US Agency for International Development.

Riot police and troops fired tear gas and bullets in the air to disperse the crowd. Further protests were held on Sunday and were planned for today in the area.

Some 10,000 people rallied in Karachi on 15 January, chanting "Death to American aggression". Smaller protests took place in several other cities and towns.

A coalition of Islamic parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, has called for Musharraf to step down as president. A coalition leader, Ghafur Waziristan, another mountainous

leader, declared: "The

US cannot defend the country under his leadership".

In a signal of the depth of feeling following the bombing, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, which holds several ministries in Musharraf's cabinet, took part in the anti-US and antigovernment demonstrations.

President Musharraf was forced to make a nationwide television address. He defended his collaboration with US foreign policy because of it was preventing open US aggression against Pakistan.

He appealed to the ethnic Pashtun tribes in the border regions of Pakistan, which share cultural and linguistic ties with Afghan Pashtuns, to stop supporting the guerilla resistance against the US-led occupation of Afghanistan. Musharraf declared: "If we keep sheltering foreign terrorists here... our future will not be good."

The US military asserts that large numbers of Al Qaeda fighters and Taliban supporters are taking refuge in the mountainous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and using it as a base to launch attacks on American-led forces.

The number of attacks on the US-led forces is steadily increasing and the number of US and allied deaths more than doubled in 2005 to 129.

Under pressure from Washington, President Musharraf has deployed

70,000 troops along the Afghan border, provoking tensions with the fiercely independent local tribes and rifts within the Pakistani military, sections of which are hostile to the US presence in the region.

He now faces, however, expanding opposition demanding that Pakistan distance itself from the Bush administration and finish backing US operations in Afghanistan.

Democrat Senator Evan Bayh told CNN the "real problem" was not the death of innocent civilians, but the death of innocents on the Pakistani border. "It's a regrettable situation", he declared, "but what else are we supposed to do? It's like the wild, Wild West out there... So this kind of thing is what we're left with."

Republican Senator John McCain, a possible presidential contender, bluntly stated: "We understand the anger that people feel, but the United States' priorities are to get rid of Al Qaeda, and this was an effort to do so. We apologise, but I can't tell you that we wouldn't do the same thing again."

With such an attitude in Washington, and with the Bush administration alleging that Al Qaeda cells exist in dozens of countries, nowhere can be considered immune from US strikes.

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SLMM: Challenges to ceasefire monitoring in Sri Lanka

N MANOHARAN

SRI Lankan refugees trickling into Indian coasts denote that all is not well in the island. Despite the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and a Monitoring Mission to oversee it, violence has escalated to significant proportions, especially after the LTTE's split in March 2004. What is the mandate of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM)? Why could it not prevent the spiralling violence when its aim is to "prevent and diffuse escalation"? Is the outbreak of violence due to a lack of commitment of the parties to the basic principles of the agreement?

Article 3 of the CFA stipulates setting up of an international monitoring mission "to enquire into any instance of violation of the terms and conditions of the Agreement." In order to implement this, the Head of SLMM issued an 'Operation Order' codenamed HERMES, which gives a short introduction to the current situation, the mission of SLMM and how the head of the SLMM intends to execute the mandate. Accordingly, SLMM operates offices round the clock in the six districts of Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Amparai, Mannar and Vavuniya apart from its headquarters in Colombo and a Liaison Office in the LTTE-controlled Killinochi. Sea violations are monitored by specific teams stationed at Jaffna and Trincomalee. The SLMM consists of members from the five Nordic countries - Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. They are all accorded the same immunities and privileges as diplomatic agents under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 18 April 1961. In addition, there are Local Monitoring Committees (LCMs) in

each district to "deal with issues related to the implementation of the CFA, and to inquire into incidents and alleged violations of the CFA, seeking to resolve any dispute at the lowest possible level." Each LCM consists of five members, two appointed by the government, two by the LTTE and chaired by one SLMM monitor. The SLMM is the final authority regarding the interpretation of the CFA.

Despite these multilayered arrangements the SLMM could not prevent escalation of violence is a cause for major concern. The eastern parts in particular are a challenge when it comes to monitoring. The attack on the Batticaloa SLMM office and temporary withdrawal of monitors from the Trincomalee districts due to the unmanageable situation there are two recent examples. Three actors are responsible for incidents involving ceasefire violations. The LTTE launches sporadic attacks on the security forces and the paramilitary groups opposed to the Tigers. Although the LTTE denies its involvement claiming them as "people's attacks," evidence suggests otherwise. Similarly, the government forces are also responsible for violent incidents in the name of retaliatory attacks or security measures. The most worrying aspect, however, is the involvement of armed groups aligned with the security forces, and the criminal elements hiding behind the conflict.

The resulting situation is muddled, affecting the people, especially of the East. No wonder that a majority of the complaints are from the general public despite risks involved in lodging complaints. In 2005, the SLMM ruled 519 violations by the LTTE and 41 by the government; in 2004 the figures were 845 and 20 respectively; in 2003 the LTTE violated the CFA 1,113 times,

while the government breached it 49 times; for 2002 the figures were 994 and 52 respectively. Thus, since the CFA came into place, the LTTE violated it 3,471 times as against 162 times by the government. But, it is not clear how violations by the paramilitary groups are accounted. The very magnitude of violations indicates failure on the part of actors to enforce self-discipline. Ironically, the SLMM has not been taken seriously; monitors are at times threatened and even attacked. If the two parties comply with the CFA sincerely, the job of the monitors would be easy.

At the structural level, the SLMM is insufficiently empowered to discharge its responsibilities. The monitoring appears "cosmetic"; the body exists just to monitor violations and make suggestions. Most importantly, the SLMM could do little to mitigate the increasing distrust between the government and the LTTE. Therefore, it is required to upgrade the powers of the SLMM to give it more teeth to deter violators. If such upgradation demands review of the CFA, then the parties concerned should not hesitate to do so. The SLMM is still inaccessible to many Sri Lankans; its role and functions are not clearly understood; and the media has so far not been "friendly". This has resulted in a gap between the monitors and the people. This aspect has to be addressed immediately. The more the Monitoring Mission closes the gap with the masses, higher are its chances of success.

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Book Review

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Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Realities, Priorities and Challenges

Author: Ambassador Harun ur Rashid
Published by Academic Press & Publishers Library,
House # 55, Road 8A, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka 1209
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The book has been released in October 2005 by APPL. It is a work that will delight the readers. The analysis the author, Harun ur Rashid, a former Ambassador of Bangladesh and a prolific writer, has provided in the volume on foreign policy bears the imprint of careful handwork.

During the last 30 years of public life, Ambassador Rashid witnessed and often played a part in many of the pivotal moments in the history of foreign policy of Bangladesh. He was one of the architects of the 1977 Ganges Water Agreement with India.

Along his diplomatic career, he has forged important political, cultural and economic ties with our neighbours as Additional Foreign Secretary in the 1980s and as Director General of South Asia and South East Asia in the 1970s.

This book has been written with a sharp eye on details of Bangladesh foreign policy and its impact on other nations. The work contains 13 chapters divided into three parts. Each part has a series of chapters.

The valuable work focuses on three significant themes: The historical background as well as the domestic and international setting which actively impacted on the formulation, implementation and evolution of the foreign policy of Bangladesh. It also describes and analyses the strength and weakness of Bangladesh in the implementation of its foreign policy;

Contents and implementation of policy with 34 countries which include state of bilateral relations and their future directions;

And the role of Bangladesh in inter-governmental institutions and in facing the challenging issues of the first decade of the 21st century.

The author competently deals with the basic ingredients, which shaped foreign policy of a country almost surrounded by a very big neighbor, India. He skillfully explores the concept of national interests in the context of the complex and fast evolving South Asian environment.

The author puts forth comprehensive suggestions for developing effective ways of enhancing the contribution of Bangladesh to global and regional security. He also recommends practical measures for advancing the country's economic and trade interests and handling its onerous responsibilities as the eighth most populous nation of the world.

Ambassador Harun ur Rashid underscores the need to appreciate and act at defining moments in a self-respecting nation's life when sound policy is required to be pursued in the national interest although such steps may put a particular relationship under strain. He suggests that national interest can be productively advanced through development of sustained sound relationships with other countries by competent professional and personal efforts of the political leaders and career diplomats.

It is obvious that a history of foreign policy of 34 years cannot be

Bangladesh Foreign Policy

Realities, Priorities and Challenges



Harun ur Rashid

compressed in a book of this size. The author does not deal exhaustively on subjects such as terrorism and US's doctrine of pre-emptive action and its impact on policy in Bangladesh. However, the topic of security of small states is dealt in detail in Part III of the work. China's emerging role, as one of the most important industrial and economic powers, has not received adequate attention, probably because of constraints of space.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is well written, balanced and realistic. It is a timely and welcome addition to the resources of researchers, students, diplomats, journalists and general readers who are interested in Bangladesh Foreign Policy.