

SOUTH ASIAN SECURITY

A complex but not unpractical concept

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SOUTH Asian security is a concept which is often discussed in different circles, but without much seriousness. Not that importance is not attached to the idea or it is largely disapproved; it is because the subject may appear as somewhat premature to many for understandable reasons. This may even sound unpractical for a variety of factors because the matter is all about security and that too in a region like South Asia on a collective basis, a region that is bedeviled by differences and disputes.

Nonetheless, security is a big issue in the South Asian region where many people think that much of the efforts for progress and collective development will not bear expected fruit unless the security system is improved and an atmosphere conducive to cooperation exists. Admittedly, such an atmosphere is a pious hope to a large extent given the harsh realities that characterise the political and military conditions in the region even though this unhealthy situation can be attributed mainly to the traditional enmity of two neighbours India and Pakistan. Nuclearisation of both the rivals has undoubtedly added a dangerous dimension to the security concept in South Asia, which is the home of more than one fifth of humanity. In the event of any use of nuclear weapons in the region a possibility that may look remote in the current political environment in the area because of the reconciliatory endeavour by two principal rivals, but can not be fully ruled out in the context of their long and bitter belligerence all the nations of the region will have to bear the burnt of any atomic catastrophe. The conventional military tensions are there, but the introduction of nuclear capability by the two major regional nations has plunged the area into possibilities of alarming proportions. South Asia is already an international flash point because of the arms race in the region and the amount of money that is being spent here for defence is really horrifying. Two celebrated personalities of the region have made no bones of the fact that South Asia need peace and security should its people improve the quality of life. The region is mired in abject poverty as hunger, illiteracy and ill health stalk the region. In stark contrast, the military expenditure here is huge and by any estimate it is not only highly disproportional to the economic strength of the countries of the region, but also largely at the cost of the socio-economic development that could

have directly benefited the vast segment of the people.

Late Dr. Mahbulul Haq, the well known economist from Pakistan, who had established a human development institute in Islamabad and made untiring efforts till his death for improving the human resource index of the regional countries, concluded that defence expenditures by India and Pakistan are by far much larger than many oil-rich Gulf nations when viewed in terms of proportional expenses in the sector compared to their income. He made a forceful plea for reduction of the allocations in the military and divert to areas related to socio-economic development. No wonder such pleas will land only on deaf ears since the protagonists of the arms race would place many factors to justify the expenses and their arguments are also not necessarily without basis. Nevertheless, when an internationally reputed economist like Dr. Haq make such prognosis about the economic conditions of South Asia, evidently the case of lessening military expenditures gets a boost.

Nobel laureate in economics, Dr. Amartya Sen, much of whose works and highly acclaimed thesis is based on the poverty of developing and least developed countries like those in South Asia, have also stressed the need for greater expenditures in the welfare oriented sectors for the benefit of the masses. Once again, it will be the height of folly to expect that their logic for bigger expenditures in social sectors by reduction in military expenditures will be heeded by those who are in the helm and find enough justification in the high defence expenditures. The poverty-ridden South Asia needs to come out from this situation for the sake of its people, who want to get rid of perennial hunger and other chronic problems and some taste of decent livelihood. True, poverty is not the case for all, but certainly a large segment of the people is in serious economic problems.

There is hardly any denying that much of the socio-economic progress in the region which is inextricably linked with the welfare of the people is contingent upon the overall security system in the area, and this is crucially important for the SAARC as a whole. Conventional military development along the nuclearisation has created a sense of insecurity and instability for the region. It is being increasingly felt that there is a need for evolving a cooperative security milieu here in order to give South Asia political security and stability, which in turn, will have tremendous bearing on

the socio-economic scenario. Within this broad framework, a South Asian peace and security system can provide the beginning of a much needed structure that will help substantial multilateral cooperation in the SAARC region.

Many experts opine varying views about the efficacy and effectiveness of a kind of security system in the traditionally trouble-prone region, but agree that a sense of collective security would have done great service to the on-going efforts of collective cooperation. Arguably, security is a big concept and it encompasses many a matter that has wide-ranging implications and need to be analysed in the context of larger global and regional perspective. Nonetheless, a broad parameter for South Asian security system can be considered for overall improvement of the political climate in the area. The current time is particularly appropriate for such thinking since the present positive trend of reconciliation among the belligerents and closer ties among others should encourage towards a better security system in the region.

Some experts feel that five principles are necessary for the system a commitment to the UN charter and UN resolutions; preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the states in the region and non-intervention in the internal affairs; commitment to SAARC convention for the protection of human rights including the rights of minorities; commitment to specified "cooling off" timeframe and dialogue in the case of a crisis; and lastly, a strategic stability regime can form a broad basis of a security system.

A regional conference in Pakistan nearly three years ago threw enough light on this complex but critically important subject with a view to creating a better political environment in the region that would facilitate goodwill and harmony, which in turn, will promote the desired cooperation in various fields among the nations of the area.

"We resolve to get out of the straitjacket of enmity, overcome obsession with over-demanding militaristic security paradigm and look beyond the traditional notions of security and focus on an integrated South Asian cooperative security that recognises interdependence and mutuality of interests" said an agreed resolution adopted at the conference last month participated mainly by the leading parliamentarians of the regional countries, and also others including editors and senior journalists, experts and academics.



They observed that the states ought to act in their enlightened self-interest to resolve their conflicts and differences through peaceful means and to the mutual benefits of the people of the region. This choice is often, it is felt, erroneously posed between regional cooperation and conflict resolution. All states of the South Asia have been urged to simultaneously move forward to address the long standing political disputes through peaceful means. "The main obstacle to regional cooperation and economic integration remains political and strategic. Therefore, we, the elected representatives of the people, vow to be courageous, flexible and consistent to resolve interstate and intrastate conflicts and dismantle political barriers to regional economic take-off," said prominent parliamentarians in their statement.

It is being increasingly considered that for regional cooperation in countering the widespread threat of terrorism, the SAARC nations must implement the current protocol for cooperation against terrorism and bring it in line with the international norms. The regional efforts against terrorism must also include measures to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, narcotics-trafficking, smuggling and criminal mafias. This will require exchanges and interactions between the

national intelligence and security agencies with their counterparts across the border and greater interaction between the armed forces and military establishments in the region.

The principle that there can be no intervention in the internal affairs of any nation in the sub-continent is being strongly emphasised. Yet, it is observed, given the implications of internal conflicts for regional security as a whole, the SAARC must pay greater attention to the relationship between internal and regional security.

Without prejudice to the current positions of the SAARC governments on amending the SAARC charter, the conference had called upon the SAARC to initiate a study of mechanisms for cooperative security in the region. In a remarkable agreed view, the participants cutting across national and domestic political divide said given the increasingly intrusive nature of the international political system, it is imperative that the region develop its own security and conflict resolution mechanisms. In this context, the conference urged the SAARC to consider the establishment of a SAARC Security Forum on the line of ASEAN Regional Forum.

Such a resolution, somewhat unprecedented in this tension-ridden region

definitely represents something that we all are longing for in line with the larger good of the more than 1.4 billion people in the region. South Asian collective security system is not anything impossible even though this is very complex and may take time for seeing the light of the day.

True, a South Asian collective security is not anything that is likely to emerge in short time and take any shape in the near future. However, the very realisation that South Asian collective security will bring all round benefit to the people of the region is gaining ground albeit slowly and not smoothly. The concept may seem premature at the present stage but may see the light of the day at some point, although such a time is highly unlikely in the near future. The SAARC was also initially considered impractical and an utopian idea, but at one stage saw the light belying all scepticism. That its progress is sluggish and may have fallen short of expectation is another story, but its existence is a reality. The South Asian security concept will certainly receive more consideration at one stage because of the complex global scenario and emerging complexities.

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Minister blames missions: Is the emphasis on the right place?

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FOREIGN Minister Dipu Moni, while addressing a gathering of Bangladeshi labour attaches in Dhaka recently, expressed her disappointment and frustration at the state of affairs in Bangladesh embassies where lack of cooperation between the Ambassador and different wings has jeopardized the labour market for expatriates. The Foreign Minister was absolutely correct on what she said. However, she has scratched the surface of a problem that is much deeper. In blaming the missions for lack of cooperation and coordination, the Minister has focused on the effect of an irrational system the cause of which is the way our foreign policy is articulated, coordinated and implemented at home.

Diplomatic missions are established in foreign countries to allow a country to reach its foreign policy goals. The history of establishment of diplomatic missions is as old as the conduct of peaceful relations between countries. In modern history, conduct of diplomatic relations has become complex and complicated for a variety of reasons of which, the influx of so many independent states is one major reason. Globalization is another. Therefore, today, a diplomatic mission is required to pursue in the host country a whole range of objectives to expand a country's interests abroad. It conducts very serious and indispensable business for the country. It is the most important implementation mechanism of a country's foreign policy.

The sizes of diplomatic missions differ from one country to another. For example, a US Embassy in an important capital would be as big, if not bigger, than our entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, diplomatic missions of all countries have some uniform characteristics. The most important one is the role of the Ambassador (High Commissioner in case of Commonwealth countries). There are perhaps very few job titles that can match that of the Ambassador. In his/her mission, the Ambassador is the unquestioned authority over everyone and almost everything that happens in the Embassy. No one has any authority unless the Ambassador gives it to him/her.

Work in a diplomatic mission is also universally organized under wings such as diplomatic, economic, commercial, consular, labour, defense, etc.

for sake of effectiveness where officers with specialized skills and background are grouped separately. In some countries, the bulk of these officers come from their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In other countries, like in case of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends officers to the diplomatic wing; in the other wings officers are sent from other Ministries of the Government. Such organization notwithstanding, all wings work under the unquestioned authority of the Ambassador where coordination and cooperation is of the essence. As a diplomatic mission represents a country's sovereign authority in a foreign country, it can only speak in one voice and act unitedly for the sake of the country. A sacrosanct chain of command under the Ambassador's authority and unity is indispensable to the establishment of a diplomatic mission.

The Minister's frustration over the missions, nevertheless, is absolutely justified because the consequences are affecting Bangladesh's vital interests very badly. The Minister has named manpower export as one but there are many more such instances. However, the Foreign Minister, while rightly assessing the problem, has failed to focus on where the solution lies. The solution is most certainly not in the mission. It is squarely and completely at home where the historical jealousy of the other Ministries with the Foreign Ministry is what has created this unbelievable situation in the Bangladesh missions abroad.

The Minister, by her statement at the meeting of the labour attaches, has admitted that our missions do not follow these sacrosanct principles of a diplomatic mission, namely the absolute authority of the Ambassador over his staff and the need of cooperation and coordination among the wings. It is also somewhat surprising that the Minister has blamed the mission for the independence of the wings. The history of Bangladeshi diplomacy shows how the Foreign Ministry has been virtually marginalised over the long haul since the death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the fight between the erstwhile Pakistan Foreign Service Officers who nurtured and established the career diplomatic service of Bangladesh and the officers of the erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Foreign Ministry was virtually

stripped of all its powers. Relevant documents of the Government like the Rules of Business and Allocation of Responsibilities were also suitably amended to legalize the marginalization of the Foreign Ministry. If the Minister cared to look into the roles of the Ministry of Commerce, the External Resources Division and the Expatriate Ministry in foreign policy goals, she would not have been surprised and frustrated that they can control the diplomatic missions on all affairs of economic diplomacy without the need to consult the Foreign Ministry.

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failed to focus on where the solution lies. The solution is most certainly not in the mission. It is squarely and completely at home where the historical jealousy of the other Ministries with the Foreign Ministry is what has created this unbelievable situation in the Bangladesh missions abroad. A Bangladesh diplomatic mission, in a microcosm, is literally many ministries working under one ceiling abroad, taking to foreign soil all the conflicts they have at home. Each wing receives its orders and directives from its own Ministry at home that are often mutually conflicting. While it is not possible to relate here the nature and extent of conflicts and contradictions among the ministries that have external nature of work, it would suffice to say that such conflicts are unhealthy and defeats the objectives of our foreign policy.

If the Foreign Minister is serious

about ensuring that the wings in a diplomatic mission work unitedly under the leadership of the Ambassador, which is the right and logical thing to do, then she must initiate action at home. The best way to achieve this is to expand the reach of the Foreign Ministry and bring under its wing trade, aid, and manpower export. The personnel for these specialized wings must be trained in diplomacy first, given the language skill next and then allowed to specialize before they are sent abroad. The present system of sending officers from the home based services, who have no diplomatic or language skills to work in a foreign environment, and expecting them to enhance trade, aid and manpower export is just a fond wish with little or no touch of reality. A colleague who lectured to a few labour attaches being sent to our missions aboard in the Foreign Service Academy was astounded by their lack of knowledge of the work they would be expected to do abroad. They also had very little perception of diplomacy and diplomatic work. Even if these officers keep the Ambassador fully informed of their work, it would be foolhardy to expect that they would be in any way able to enhance our manpower export.

If it is not possible to expand the reach of the Foreign Ministry, then the only other alternative would be to depote the officers of the other wings to the Foreign Ministry as it was done for awhile after our independence to allow the Foreign Ministry to issue their appointment letters so that they would be obliged to report to the Foreign Ministry. In any case, these officers do not belong to the Ministries that send them. Therefore, it would only be fit that they should report to the Foreign Ministry and be guided by it. This would also allow the Ambassador to have the control he should have over the wings.

If both the suggestions fail, then the only other way to force some rationality in the conduct of our foreign affairs would be to establish better coordination among all the Ministries with foreign policy responsibilities, with the Foreign Ministry in the coordination role.

Dipu Moni's frustrations notwithstanding, nothing will change till corrective measures are taken at home to bring the Foreign Ministry back into full reckoning or some at least in matters of foreign policy.

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Foreign Hand in Iran Bombing?

M MAHTAB ALAM RIZVI

THE recent suicide attacks in Iran killed at least 42 people including five senior commanders of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and some tribal leaders, dozens others were wounded in two bombings in the volatile southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. The attack took place in the city of Pishin, near the border with Pakistan, where the IRGC commanders were on their way to a meeting with local elders of the Shia and Sunni communities to reduce the tension between the two. IRGC Ground Forces Deputy Commander and Province Commander Sistan-Baluchistan, Nour-Ali Shoushtari and Rajab-Ali Mohammadzadeh were among those who lost their lives in the attack. The attacks on 18 October 2009 have deepened tensions between Iran and Western countries, particularly the United States and Britain. The attack was also a test for Pakistan, though relations between the two countries have been generally good in recent years.

Shortly after the attack, IRGC chief General Mohammad Ali Jafari issued a statement saying that the Sunni rebel group Jundallah (Soldiers of God), headed by Abdolmalek Rigi is involved in disrupting security within Iran and he promised to deliver a 'crushing' response. Rigi stated that the attack was 'undoubtedly' designed and prepared by the intelligence services of three nations - the US, Britain and 'unfortunately', Pakistan. The attacks were meant to foment strife between Shias and Sunnis. Iran's Parliament Speaker, Ali Larjani noted that the terrorist attack was a product of American measures, adding that if the US wanted to maintain good relations with Iran, it must be honest and transparent. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying that security agents in Pakistan were collaborating with the militants behind the bombing. He also stated that "we regard it as our right to demand these criminals from them."

Though Pakistan strongly condemned this act of terrorism in an area near its border with Iran, it denied allegations that security agents in Pakistan were cooperating with the attackers. In a telephonic conversation, Ahmadinejad and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari stressed the "necessity of joint cooperation in setting up a timetable with the intention of confronting and eradicating criminal terrorists." Ahmadinejad also pointed out that Iran and Pakistan have enjoyed brotherly and close ties but pointed out that given the presence of terrorist elements in Pakistan, their quick apprehension would require the Pakistani government's assistance.

In the past Iran has blamed the US that they supported Jundallah for stirring up trouble in the border area and has linked the group to the Sunni Islamist Al Qaeda net-

work. Pro-Ahmadinejad media Kayhan also raised a finger at Israel, describing the suicide attack as the 'new crime' of the Jewish state's intelligence agency Mossad. However, the US condemned the attacks and denied any connection with them. The British government also rejected the allegations.

Jundallah has claimed responsibility for the deadly attack. However, the authenticity of this is yet to be verified. Jundallah has evolved through shifting alliances with various parties, including the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan's ISI, who saw the group as a tool against Iran. The group also most likely gets motivation and material support from Baluchi nationalists in Pakistan. But there is little evidence of an operational relationship between Jundallah and militants, including Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Jundallah has also been involved in a long-running uprising in Sistan-Baluchistan. The group is also alleged to have ties with drug traffickers, who race across the border in heavily armed convoys, transporting drugs through a smuggling route from Afghanistan to Western Europe. Sistan-Baluchistan is the scene of frequent fights among security forces, ethnic Baluch Sunni insurgents and heavily-armed drug traffickers. Over the last few years, Jundallah, which blames Iran's Shia-led government of discrimination against Sunnis in the region, has been responsible for many deadly incidents. It also accused the Iranian government of executing many merely because they were Sunnis or Baluchis. Responsibility for the bombing of a mosque in Sistan-Baluchistan in May 2009 that killed 25 people was also reportedly claimed by Jundallah, which maintains that it is fighting for the rights of Iranian minority Sunnis.

Since the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), the recent attack was the deadliest incident in Iran. The attack also highlighted deepening instability in the region. It raised questions regarding the means through which security was breached around such a top delegation from the IRGC - the country's strongest military force, which is directly linked to the ruling clerics under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Guards force, whose influence has increased since Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, played a key role in suppressing the street protests after the June 2009 presidential elections in Iran.

There is no doubt that ethnic and sectarian divisions have made the region volatile and there is always clash between the Baluchi versus Persian, and Sunni versus Shiite. What is of immediate concern is that the attack and subsequent allegations of a foreign connection run the risk of overshadowing talks between Iranian and Western officials aimed at resolving the impasse over Iran's nuclear programme.

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