

South Asian Security Perspective

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Thank you very much Honourable Chair, Honourable Secretary of Defence, Chief of Defence Staff, Commanders of the Armed Forces, General Peiris, Vice Chancellor KDU, respective speakers, ladies and gentlemen. I'm actually standing speaker because the president of the NDU was supposed to make a presentation, but for some unavoidable reason he could not come yesterday, and it was only yesterday that the Vice Chancellor requested me to make a presentation. So therefore what I'm going to speak are just my thoughts that I collected over the last twenty four hours. Also I want to make a disclaimer that whatever I'm going to say are just my own personal views; they do not necessarily represent the views of the government of Pakistan. So what I'm going to talk about is the South Asian Security Perspective and the flavour of my presentation is going to be slightly different. I'll focus on the South Asian region as such, the emerging importance of the South Asian region, the security dynamics and challenges that we as a community of nations collectively face in South Asia. I'll then talk about the security architecture that exists in South Asia, I'll talk about its weaknesses and then make some recommendations on how we can improve the overall security environment in South Asia, and finally I'll briefly touch upon and what role Sri Lanka can play in this overall process.

Emerging Importance of South Asian Region

Ladies and Gentlemen, South Asia as a region has been steadily rising in importance since the end of the cold war, and some of the main reasons for this are that China's rise as a potential economic and military super power is a cause of exciting among certain regional powers and as well as the United States. You may hear many scholars and strategists debating these days as to whether this rise of China will be peaceful or not. South Asia happens to be China's several neighbour. This amongst others is an important reason for the growing US engagement in South Asia, specially its strategic partnership with India. And you often hear the Americans talking about India as a pivot to Asia. I make these two points because just to make the point that South Asia in the years and decades to come will be and an important component of the global security architecture. However, it is not just the issue of proximity of China that is the cause of the fame of South Asia. South Asia in its own right has great economic potential; it is home to one sixth of the world's population and its geostrategic location is very significant. Also I want to make a questionary note that this is considerable potential for

inter-state and intra-state conflict in South Asia. And inter-state conflicts can have global implications, especially due to the presence of the nuclear weapons both in India and Pakistan. Also the potential for intra-state conflicts is also very significant as we all know very well that intra-state conflicts do not remain confined to those states alone; they seriously affect the security of neighbouring states as well. And finally South Asia dominates the vital sea lanes passing through the Indian Ocean.

Security Challenges and Dynamics of South Asia

Now I briefly talk about the security challenges and dynamics of South Asia. South Asia is a region of great diversity. We have states with very different complexions. In terms of geographic locations there are land-locked states and there are island states. In terms of demography we have states with a few million people to states of one billion people. The economic and military differential between these countries is vast and also within and between these countries there is substantial ethnic and religious diversity. This interplay of all this diversity causes serious dynamics of security. There are outstanding disputes between states that have led to wars between them. Military means have often been employed by states both directly and indirectly to influence political outcomes. We have seen conventional conflicts. We are now seeing considerable employment of sub conventional means and warfare which is also in intra-state conflict. We have an operative equation of nuclear deterrents between India and Pakistan, and both countries have growing nuclear arsenals. Military interventions have often been taken by states in response to internal stability of other states. So what we are talking about in South Asia is the potential for full spectrum warfare which means that we can have conflicts from the sub conventional to conventional and right up to the nuclear level. Also in recent years there has been phenomenal rise in intra-state militancy and emergence of non-state actors and these non-state actors have gained strategic autonomy, and by strategic autonomy, I mean that they have the ability to undertake high profile acts that can create strategic effects. International coalition led by the United States has been engaged in military conflict in Afghanistan which has had serious security implications for our region, especially for Pakistan. Situation remains highly uncertain as we are fast approaching the end game in 2014. This might be an end game for some countries but not for Pakistan and South Asia. We will have to deal with the short, medium and long

term implications of this protracted conflict. And finally water resources in the region are fast depleting while the requirement of the water is increasing. Sharing the water resources, which if not managed equitably can be a source of future tension and conflicts between the states.

Existing Security Architecture

Now I'll briefly talk about the existing security architecture of South Asia. This is very fragmented security architecture when we look at the region as a whole. Between India and Pakistan we have a complex deterrence situation in place. Also to maintain the stability of this deterrence we have a whole set of CDMs both at the conventional and nuclear levels. Another important stabilising factor is the leverage possessed by the United States to diffuse tension and crises between India and Pakistan. A positive element of this security architecture in South Asia is the multilateral cooperation that is on going to ensure maritime security in the Indian Ocean and this aspect has been mentioned by some previous speakers as well. There are examples of bilateral security cooperation and a very significant and important is example has been Pakistan Sri Lanka defence cooperation during your long war against terrorism. What is South Asia lacking as far as the security architecture is concerned? In these globalized world where regional cooperation is vital for economic development and security, SAARC has not become viable. This is mainly due to the difficult relationship existing between two major countries of South Asia, namely India and Pakistan.

SAARC essentially remains an incomplete forum as it does not have a mandate to develop and implement collective or even cooperative security mechanisms because security and economic development as you all well know go hand in hand. Mistrust between countries is deeply entrenched which is often and easily exploited by non-state actors to pursue their nefarious designs. Countries have a complex mosaic of engagement in South Asia. This engagement is a combination of cooperation, co-existence, competition, deterrence, coercion and confrontation. In some cases in South Asia, the dominant segments of this engagement are deterrence, coercion and confrontation. Other negative trends are unhealthy competition to gain influence in other countries and exploiting internal pressures of other countries to achieve strategic ends.

Some Recommendations

I would now like to quickly make some recommendations to improve the overall security architecture of South Asia. The phenomenal development of China and ASEAN countries is creating as we all know a positive developmental impulse in South Asia. This in my view is a historical opportunity for economic development that we all must not miss. South Asia has to develop as a region. We cannot afford that any country is left out. South Asia needs to be peaceful within. Nor should it become an arena of any future cold war. It must remain an honour line region economically engaged with

other regions of the world. Cooperation not competition should be the approach to deal with the complex problem of Afghanistan. Post 2014 more than the US and the West it is in the South Asia's vital interest that Afghanistan does not once again become descending to chaos as it did in the 1990s. SAARC must be made use of as a vehicle to achieve economic interrogation of the region. At the bi lateral level all countries must endeavour to evolve a positive mosaic of engagement between them. Cooperation, coexistence and economic engagement should be the dominant segments of bilateral engagements. Disputes between countries should be managed peacefully. SAARC must also evolve as a regional security mechanism. This will obviate the need for mediation by extra regional powers and it is more often not that we have seen in the history that the mediation of extra regional powers is more often unhelpful than been helpful. Terrorism is a menace that needs to be dealt with collectively. India and Pakistan must endeavour to develop CDMs to deal with tension and instability caused by terrorist attacks, and within the overall framework of CDMs, this is an area where we do not have of any effective CDMs. The maritime security architecture that is currently in place – and it is being developed between other countries as well in the region – needs to be further strengthened.

The Role of Sri Lanka

What is the role of Sri Lanka? Sri Lanka's geostrategic location as has been amply highlighted by many other speakers is pivotal and central in South Asia. The sea lanes of the Indian Ocean connected not just to most countries of South Asia but to other important regions of the world. It can thus develop not just as an economic hub that everybody is pointing out, but I will add to this cultural and strategic hub as well. Sri Lanka can play an important role in strengthening SAARC as well. Despite numerous difficulties and challenges that Sri Lanka faces it has managed to maintain good relationship with all regional countries. This foreign policy approach is worth emulating by other countries of South Asia. Sri Lanka has won a protracted war against terrorism. In the process you have gained valuable experience and expertise. This experience and expertise must be shared with other countries of the region in their efforts to deal with terrorism, and Sri Lanka has a long history of inter communal and religious harmony. All the important religious communities of South Asia are presented and represented within the Sri Lankan society. And if you take a longer view of Sri Lankan history you will find that the conflict that you had for the last three decades was an aberration and not a norm. The norm has been peaceful co-existence and Sri Lanka must be a model of religious harmony for rest of the countries of South Asia.

And finally, Sri Lanka's locates unique location within the Indian Ocean enables it to serve as a pivot of security for the Indian ocean. It can thus become a crucial enabler of international trade. I thank you all.