

NALSAR Directorate of Distance Education
M.A. (Security Studies and Defence Laws)
Semester 3

REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Prof. P.V.Rao

National Fellow ICSSR &
Visiting Professor, CADL, NALSAR
E-mail- pvraoj@yahoo.com

Regional Security Cooperation in South Asia

- Regional security of any region of the world is determined by several factors. Though political security is the main determinant, other non-political factors like geography, historical background, socio-cultural linkages, demographic profile and the economy of the countries belonging to a particular region also are key determinants of the security environment of a region.
- South Asia as a 'region' has a specific character. It is historically a closely connected region; geographically its countries share common frontiers, loose borders, rivers, greater Himalayas and a peninsular location abetted by the waters of Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Regional Security

Cooperation in South Asia contd...

- But the most striking character of South Asian situation is the asymmetry between India and the other countries. Geographical size, economic development, military strength, technological capabilities, population distribution and the global status of India are comparably far above the similar elements of India's neighbours.
- The asymmetry between India and other smaller countries of South Asia in every key sector is the chief determinant of the regional security environment and cooperation. India's small neighbours suffer from a sense of insecurity, apprehension and mistrust in dealing with India. It is this 'small state security syndrome' that influences the level of cooperation between the countries of the South Asian region.

Regional Political and Security Cooperation

- Post-independence, all the countries of South Asia signed number agreements time to time in order to promote cooperation between them political amity, security cooperation, economic development, river water sharing, cultural exchange and good neighbourliness. Several other bilateral pacts helpful to foster broader understanding between each of them for mutual trust and fraternity have been inked.
- Political content of bilateral agreements emphasized respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in their internal affairs and mutual non-aggression. Cooperation to combat together common security threats from non-state actors like drug-traffickers, terrorists, arms smugglers, insurgents etc. are commonly found in mutual security agreements.

Regional Political and Security Cooperation contd...

- South Asian inter-state borders are porous and fragile. Colonially drawn borders are mostly redefined between the neighbouring states, mainly India and her neighbours. India shares border with every South Asian state. This geographical uniqueness is a major determinant of political and security cooperation. Very often it is also the source of misunderstanding between the countries that share their individual borders with India. Therefore India signed bilateral border security agreement with each neighbor, including Pakistan.
- India-Pakistan rivalry is a key determinant of regional political and security cooperation in south Asia. Their relationship is conditioned by the differing political and security perception of each other. Pakistan perceives India as a regional hegemon which wants to impose her foreign policy and security priorities on regional neighbours. India argues that Pakistan's relationship with India is Kashmir-centric. Their frequent disputes on Kashmir, and border wars have disturbed South Asian regional security and stability. In a nutshell, regional peace in South Asia is captive to Indo-Pak rivalry.

Role of Borders in South Asian Regional Cooperation

- An unfortunate feature of South Asian security climate is that differing interpretation of territorial and maritime borders between each neighbouring state frequently mar relations and mutual trust between them. Though borders are formally defined and demarcated through formal treaties/agreements, their non-compliance and violation is the frequent cause of interstate rivalry, mainly between India and Pakistan.
- In recent years some of the settled or dormant issues relating to interstate border are being questioned. Calls for renegotiation , even unilateral change in the cartography of a bilateral border are attempted. India-Nepal current row over Kalapani is one such example. Similarly, Kachchateevu island is another source of irritation in India-Sri Lanka Relations. Border differences influence the dynamic of political pulse between two neighbouring states.

Role of Borders in South Asian Regional Cooperation contd...

- Every interstate border in South Asia is unmanageable. Because non-state actors like insurgents and trans-border criminal agents make border security management difficult for each state – big and small in the region. Certain communities or groups living on the periphery of a country's border (example, Mizos and Nagas) refuse to recognize the sovereignty and political authority of the state. Such groups and their insurgencies, and attacks on border security forces from the neighbouring states are a major source of security concern, often influencing relations between the neighbouring sovereign states, like India and Myanmar.

Regional Water Security Issues

- Water is life. But water is also an integral element of state's national security. Water security has emerged as a key element in the developing countries of South Asian region. Since rivers of the region flow between two or three of the regional states, sharing rivers waters is another factor that determines interstate relations. Though bilateral water-sharing agreements have been signed, development activities like dams and projects undertaken by an upper riparian state are questioned and politicized by lower riparian state.
- Indus water sharing between India and Pakistan is a major event of recent mutual differences. The Indus River Water Sharing Treaty between India and Pakistan (1954) allotted to each country three out the six rivers (Indus, Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, Sutlez) . But Pakistan disputes whenever India, the upstream country undertakes a project on one of these rivers.

Regional Water Security Issues contd...

- India and Bangladesh border topography is characterized by the flow of 56 rivers between them. For most of these rivers, India is the upper riparian state. When India began building the Farakka Barrage on river Ganga in West Bengal, Bangladesh, the lower riparian state seriously disputed and turned the issue into a big bilateral political dispute. The issue however was amicably settled in 1996 through a treaty. Today sharing the waters of another interstate river, Teesta is another bilateral issue.
- India and Nepal and India and Bhutan too signed several bilateral agreements on sharing or developing the river waters for mutual utility. These two Himalayan states being underdeveloped and lacking capital investment capacity, signed agreements with India, the co-riparian state for constructing dams, hydel projects and other development activities. By and large mutual cooperation is reasonably satisfactory between these three states, barring some small irritants.

Thank you