

NALSAR University of Law

Regional Security and Global Governance

Concept of Regionalism

By

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Regionalism in Global Politics

- Concept of regionalism emerged after the end of second world war. Regionalism connotes a common sense of unity and self-help among the countries belonging to a particular region. Every region formed Regional Group (RG) for its countries: SAARC for South Asia; ASEAN for South East Asia; OAU for Africa; EEC for Europe; Most common factors that inspire countries to form a regional group (RG) are the following.
- **Geographical location:** Nation states belonging to a single region entertain a feeling of regional fraternity. Their territorial proximity, land, river and maritime border linkages, common histories and ethnic/religious heritage promote a sense of regional identity. Arab nationalism, 'African unity', 'Asian brotherhood' are some of the acronyms used to express regional solidarity among the countries of the region.

- **Security consciousness:** States which are living close to a powerful neighbor are fearful of being dominated or attacked by big neighbor. Past record of imperial invasion by a dominant country like China attacking smaller neighbours like Korea, Laos, Vietnam motivate them to form a common security organization. EEC (European Economic Community) was formed after second world war by west European countries to protect themselves from the neighbouring communist Soviet Union.
- **Economic interdependence:** Newly independent Afro-Asian countries were economically underdeveloped. Almost all of them were dependent on Europe and America and other developed countries for their economic development, even survival. To reduce dependence on foreign countries and promote their development goals like food security, industrialization, agrarian reform, educational and health services countries of a region formed regional groups. Mutual self-help, interdependence and self-reliance are the basic economic objectives that encouraged Asian and African regional groups.

Sub-regionalism

- Sub-regionalism refers to a group of immediate neighbours. In such group member countries are geographically close to each other. They commonly share not only borders but river and sea waters, natural resources like minerals, oil, fish, soils etc. Similarly they share products like jute, textiles, cotton, pulses, cement, industrial machinery, tea and timber. 'Geographical proximity' and 'Immediate neighbourhood' are the two governing principles of sub-regionalism.
- Sub-regional groups facilitate quick and easy movement of goods and people by land, river and sea. Transportation of inter-state cargo across the immediate borders promotes regional trade and economic integration. It cuts down costs and time of transportation. It is also much easier to exchange one state's products and skills with other states and vice versa. Simply, potential for mutual exchange of goods and services is very high since all states are neighboured with each other.

- The best example of sub-regionalism is BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). This is a 7 member sub-regional group formed in 1997 between countries belonging to the Bay of Bengal region, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Its objectives are to promote regional economic integration among the following sectors: infrastructure , investment and trade, transport, tourism, energy, fisheries maritime security.
- Another experiment in sub-regionalism is BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India , Myanmar). This is a China-initiated regional forum. Its objective is to promote close trade, transport connectivity, energy and tourism. Though other countries have welcomed this initiative, India is not keen to join this groups in view of Beijing's ongoing effort to increase its role and influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Geo-political issues influence regional economic cooperation very much.

Trans-regionalism

- Trans-regionalism means countries belonging to different regions (Not one region) deciding to promote cooperation in areas/sectors of common interest. Generally trade, investment, agriculture, security, technology, energy, counter terrorism/piracy, transport & communication are the chosen sectors of trans-regional cooperation. Cooperation beyond a single region is the essence of trans-regionalism (TR).

Major causes of TS:

- a. Growing interdependence between countries of different regions in the world (Asia, Europe, Far East, Pacific, Latin America) for their economic development and security.
- b. Threats to the security of countries from international pan-Islamic terror groups (Al Queda, Abu Sayyaf, Jama Islamiyah). To counter these global terror groups TR is necessary to exchange information about the movements, hideouts, funding sources, arms procurement and training camps of the terror groups. No single country including India can check effectively security threats from an international terror group.
- c. Globalisation, i.e. integration of national economies with international trade, investment, markets. All countries in the world have adopted raising their GDP levels as an economic choice. Economic growth is possible only when individual countries exchange goods, capital, services and technology with countries/regions nearer or far off from their borders. Growth-led economies are trans-regional economies. They defy rigid regional boundaries. Mobility is the dynamic of modern economies. Countries therefore are signing trans-regional economic pacts (e.g. WTO, FTA [Free Trade Areas) to increase their international trade, investment opportunities, and exchange services (banking, IT, education etc.)

- **Major TS groups are:** APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation); EAS (East Asia Summit); IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association); RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). Most recently formed group in 2022 is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) with 14 members including India. In these groups membership is from more than one region or continent. Overlapping memberships (membership in more than one group) is common feature. Generally TS groups are loose, open ended (any country from any region can join) and flexible (decisions are not strictly binding on member countries)
- Current regional groups are not only created for economic reasons, but geo-political interests are also determining their formation. In the Indo-Pacific Region, political competition between the regional powers – China, India, Japan, US and the ASEAN – plays important role in forging regional groups.

Regionalism: An Assessment

- The growth of regionalism and regional groups since the end of second world war has made great contribution to world peace. Unlike in the past when European imperial powers formed regional groups (Axis, Allied, groups) and the cold war alliances (NATO, Warsaw Pact, SEATO) which encourage competition and wars, regionalism developed political understanding, economic cooperation, self-help and interdependence. Peace, not War is the objective and outcome of current regional groups.
- **Conflict Resolution.** RGs through regular consultation on mutual issues and differences have minimized scope for conflicts and military attacks. CBMs (confidence building measures) are promoted between member countries to peacefully discuss and resolve a border, water sharing, economic dispute. Through such mutual consultation mechanisms RGs contributed to regional and global peace and order.

- Regionalism and RGs have helped economic development. Through such economic decisions like increasing intra-regional trade, investment, reduction of cross-border trade barriers and tariffs (customs duties/taxes) each country has increased its per capita income, production, employment opportunities, technological skills etc. RGs in short are development agencies.
- Multiple memberships in more than one group advanced the scope for better political, security, energy, trade understanding. All countries are facing some common problems which are called Global Commons (climate change, food and water security, COVID type pandemic diseases, terrorism, piracy, energy etc). Cumulatively, all RGs of the world have promoted the noble cause of cooperation for Common Good.

THANK YOU