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## Non- Traditional Security Challenges: South Asian Cooperation

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Recently, an Indian national Hamid Nehal Ansari, who had reportedly entered Pakistan through the North-western part of the country to meet a woman he had befriended on social media, was in the news depicting the existential realities of divided spaces and antagonistic politics in South Asia. He faced the investigation for two years and was given a prison term of three years in 2015. In pursuit of emotional craving of his heart he paid the price of spending six years in jail for entering the neighboring country without valid documents, oblivious of the fact that boundary lines drawn in blood are impervious to tender feelings of love and affection. The mother of the repatriated Indian national, a reputed teacher from

Mumbai, expressing gratitude to Indian Ministry of External Affairs, equally acknowledged the support of a Pakistan based NGO, *Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy*, for extending support in ensuring fairness and justice to her son. In the similar vein, in another case, a man from Pakistan who fell in love with an Indian woman came on valid official documents to India and married her, but overstayed and had to undergo ten years of imprisonment before being deported back to Pakistan. Both the tales are heart rendering which bring forth two noteworthy issues. First, the new generation in South Asia is not sensitive enough at the conceptual level to the gravity of violation of the borders that divide South Asian States which otherwise project an image of uniformity in view of

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linguistic and cultural similarities. They have not been witness to the horrors of partition of the sub-Continent in 1947. Their feelings of amity are further augmented by the prevailing phenomenon of globalization in which borders are losing significance. Moreover, the fact remains that historically the region, over thousands of years, has shared common culture, traditions and languages. These commonalities and similarities are still prevalent across the borders in the region. The second issue, projected by the incidents mentioned above underscore the presence of conscientious groups of people who cherish the historical moorings and desire to revive the tradition of cooperation and equanimity among the human beings living in divided spaces. These humane voices are not perturbed in their passion and activism by the jingoistic rhetoric of fringe political or extremist religious elements. It is a sad state of affairs, as pointed out by Indian Ministry of External Affairs while welcoming the repatriation as a matter of 'great relief' in Hamid Ansari's case, expressed the hope that Pakistan would take action to also end the misery of other Indian nationals and fishermen whose nationality has been confirmed and who have completed their sentences but

continue to languish in Pakistan jails. Ironically, the poor illiterate fishermen who 'fish in troubled waters' are supposed to cautiously observe the boundaries in the vast ocean or large water bodies which usually is the forte of naval security officials. India has called upon Pakistan to organize a visit of the joint Judicial Committee, which has now been reconstituted, to deal with the issues related to the prisoners that both countries continue to hold. This initiative has the prospect of reducing the tensions between the two countries. Recently, India and Pakistan have exchanged list of civilian prisoners who have completed their terms of punishment and are awaiting repatriation. It may be noted that *espionage* is the first suspicion that determines the behavior of States, particularly in South Asia, in dealing with such cases. Be that as it is, varied security challenges which are being faced by these states and which are supported by available data, has added to the quagmire.

### **Non-State Actors**

It needs to be recognized that risks of major armed conflicts and inter-State wars are on decline. However, the emergence of armed conflicts involving non-State actors are becoming pervasive. This phenom-

enon has acquired, in the post cold war phase, its own dynamics which establishes the feature of covert State engagement in its promotion and operation particularly in South Asian region. It is high time that these States address this issue seriously. The complexity is heightened with the involvement of global powers in this nefarious game. Some South Asian States which have acted as pawns in this game should concede that their short term diplomatic and security permutations with the so called big powers have had a spiraling effect on their own societies. The big powers might have been able to settle their scores but the tools employed in such operations which let the genie out of bottle has made South Asian region a zone of perpetual overt and covert conflicts. The strategy adopted by U.S. in driving out the then USSR from Afghanistan by raising a global Islamist Force and preparing an Islamist capsule to brainwash the young minds provides an illustration to the point. Ironically, literature prepared at the behest of the U.S to brainwash young recruits was smuggled in Tajikistan and other Central Asian areas to organize the extremist groups to drive out 'infidel' Russians from their lands. This strategy is still producing results to the peril of the entire region. The latest US initiative to engage *Taliban*

for negotiating peace in Afghanistan, which is a confirmation of according legitimacy to the group, does not augur well for peace in the region. It will encourage such groups in the region to claim legitimacy and seek a role in running the affairs of State on their own terms. Moreover, the political - social and cultural 'Action - Plan' of *Taliban* should be brought in the global public domain and discussed on its merits.

### **Religious Extremism**

The growing and expanding phenomenon of religious extremism in South Asia is a formidable non-Traditional security challenge which invites serious consideration and appropriate response. Promotion of social constructs based on religious fundamentalism is driving certain South Asian societies towards instability and exclusion. Historically, the division of sub-Continent on the basis of religion, blurring the cultural- linguistic specificities and attempts to build an uniform social identity, have proven amorphous. Pakistan provides an illustration to the point. The initiatives assiduously pursued by the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in building an abstract Muslim Identity, weakened the democratic order and strengthened

the military dictatorship in that country. The imposition of fundamentalist religious identity and diluting the linguistic-cultural identity led to the secession of almost half of Pakistan territory to emerge as what is now Bangladesh. The ideological and doctrinal tutelage provided to Afghan Mujahideen by Pakistan security experts created modules within Pakistan which have acquired enough autonomy to operate independently and/or in cohorts with the sections of the establishment to impose their own code of conduct and world view on hesitant sections of population. It has resulted in cataclysmic episodes in the region and even beyond which has attracted the global scrutiny. Some of the Pakistan based groups have been designated as Global Terrorist groups and their leaders as Global Terrorists. The Paris Based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has placed Pakistan in a 'gray list' regarding terrorist financing. According to daily *The Hindu* (20 December, 2018), in case FATF adds Pakistan to a list of countries which are non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing, it would have grave economic ramifications for Pakistan. The other regional grouping like OIC, generally invoked by the Islamic Republic, may provide a rhetoric solace to

Pakistan diplomatically although without any tangible outcome in such situations.

### **Human Security**

It is well established that in this era of globalization the focus has shifted to human security in which *people and society* have acquired center stage. In this regard the use of religious extremism as a diplomatic weapon is drawing international consternation. The UNDP Human Development Report (1994) provides a broader frame work for development and priority which among other issues include personal, political and community security. An analysis of the operation of fundamentalist religious groups reveals that they are threatening the peaceful existence of these very dimensions of human society. The threat equally brings the human rights angle to the fore. The available data provides the details of human rights abuses committed by extremist groups on civilian populations across the board. The response to this threat by the States equally results in human rights abuses which is defended by the States as *collateral damage*. It is emerging as a vicious circle which International Human Rights Organizations are unable to deal with.

### **The Opportunities**

The challenges before South Asian States are enormous but they equally provide opportunities also. Firstly, South Asian States need to recognize that the use of religious extremist groups as instruments of covert wars is a vicious game which in the long run would hurt the sponsoring states themselves. Secondly, attention and

focus towards human security would bring in larger dividends. It is high time that South Asia re-visits liberal and neo-liberal International Order and address the potential and scope of mutual interests. There is an urgency in moving in this direction. The softening of borders, cultural exchanges and inter-state trade deserve a priority in strengthening the South Asian Cooperation. ■