



## RAPPORTEURS REPORT

# South Asia 2020: Towards Cooperation or Conflict? November 04–05, 2009

# Session I - Forging Regional Consensus on Core Areas of Cooperation

Chairperson : Shri N.S.Sisodia

Dr Arvind Gupta	Brig (retd) Shahidul Anam	Dr. Darini Rajasingham Senanayake
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The first session of the conference titled, Forging Regional Consensus on Core Areas of Cooperation, dwelt upon issues ranging from predicting possible future scenarios for regional cooperation to proposing mechanisms for dealing with terrorism and various armed conflicts afflicting the South Asian region. The underlying understanding was that given the unhappy situation in which the region finds itself at present, there is an urgent need for all countries to shun mistrust and enhance greater regional and sub-regional cooperation. The session had three speakers – Dr. Arvind Gupta, Brig (Retd.) Shahidul Anam Khan and Dr. Darini Rajasingham Senanayake, and it was chaired by N.S. Sisodia, Director-General IDSA.

Dr. Arvind Gupta's paper, South Asia 2020: A Futuristic Perspective, presented a snapshot of the present socio-economic and security situation in South Asia. He has constructed four possible future scenarios for the region. Gupta, however, clarified that the objective of building future scenarios is not to predict the future, but to view the present from a distance. This, according to him, is necessary for a better understanding of the problems at hand and for suitable course correction. For building future scenarios, Gupta identifies eight drivers which are critical for shaping the future course of the region. These drivers are demography, internal instability, economic growth, energy, climate change, terrorism, anti-India mindset, and the role of external powers. All these drivers are high impact and high uncertainty drivers. But of these, the most important are the issues of internal stability and the anti-India mindset.

According to Gupta, the four plausible scenarios which might unfold in the future are:

1. *the business as usual scenario*: the present trend of poverty, under development and insecurity will continue to prevail resulting in greater instability in the region;
2. *cooperative scenario*: the present dismal socio-economic and security situation compels the leaders of the region to shed anti-India sentiments, invest greater political will and enhanced regional cooperation to address problems, all resulting in inclusive growth and peace;
3. *mixed scenario* denotes a situation where countries of the region cooperate in some areas while competing in others. South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and energy are identified as areas

of future cooperation. Cooperation in these areas might gradually impact positively on the security and development situation of the region;

4. *worst case scenario* will be a situation in which the countries of the region fail to hold on to the modest benefits and are overwhelmed by negative trends exacerbating energy, food and water security situation and conflicts engulfing the entire region.

Gupta concludes that the mixed or cooperative scenario offer a way out from the present dismal situation, but for this to happen, greater political will and regional cooperation are required.

Brig. (Retd.) Shahadul Anam Khan argues in his paper, *Dealing with Terrorism 2020: Can there be a Regional Approach?*, that given the way terrorism has transformed itself, it is difficult to predict its likely future shape and substance and hence difficult to formulate a substantive plan to deal with it. He also contends that finding a regional approach to deal with terrorism would not bear any fruit given the natural disinclination of the countries to cooperate with each other even on lesser issues. Reinforcing his argument, Khan stated that even though the countries of the region had acknowledged way back in 1987 that terrorism is the greatest threat confronting them, they failed to come together and evolve a mechanism to address the phenomenon. And the more the region waits to cooperate, the more it stand to lose. Khan emphasizes that despite the mistrust among countries of the region, there are strong forces, such as the deleterious effects of Global War on Terror and the inability of a single country to deal with the phenomenon, are compelling them to take a regional approach towards terrorism. He, however, argues that there is an urgent need to understand terrorism in its various manifestations, i.e. religious fundamentalism, Leftist and Maoists ideology, etc. to deal with it effectively. There are many counter mechanisms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and United Nations counter terror mechanism. But such mechanisms have not succeeded because in many cases neighbours are looked at as being part of the problem. There are allegations and counter allegations against each other for fomenting trouble. However, given the present dire situation, it is imperative that South Asian countries forge a cooperative mechanism to deal with terrorism. To achieve this, Khan proposes setting up a South Asian Task Force, which would coordinate the implementation of anti-terror strategies, assist countries to identify and assess counter-terrorism needs, coordinate capacity building and technical assistance, coordinate with international organization, etc. He concludes that it is imperative for the countries of South Asia to cooperate against terrorism rather than continue to suffer from its terrible effects.

Dr. Darini Rajasingham Senanayake's paper on *South Asia between Cooperation and Conflict: Globalisation, Peace Building, Violence* argues that despite enjoying economic growth, vast areas of South Asia are riddled with abject poverty and armed conflicts. According to Senanayake, since there is a strong relationship between poverty and conflict, South Asia has fallen into a "poverty-conflict trap". For the region to get out of this trap, it has to reformulate its current state-centric solutions into a human-centric paradigm of security and development. Because, current state-centric solutions have resulted in the phenomenon of what Senanayake describes as violent peace, uncertain peace, unsustainable peace and highly securitized peace. In her view, the South Asian experience shows that the region has not witnessed many incidences of peace building. And whatever efforts have been undertaken they have resulted in extreme internationalisation of peace building without enough local ownership. As a result, the peace, which was achieved, could not be sustained. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the peace building process in the region which would include greater participation of local communities, especially of women, and curbing of phantom aid and targeted distribution of international aid, de-ethnising the problem, understanding and addressing the political and economic reasons for people getting involved in armed conflicts and remaining sensitive to resource and identity politics. In conclusion, Senanayake stresses that sustainable peace depends upon human security.

## Questions from the floor:

- How does India help Pakistan fight terrorism?
- What is the mechanism to change the anti-India mindset? Are we clear about what kind of mindset change India is looking for?
- Does India have a fair record of containing armed conflicts? Is Pakistan capable of dealing with terrorism since it is in denial mode?
- Is it possible to control some of the drivers to reduce their uncertainty index to give a direction for the future? Should India play a lead role in this? How could India bring about a consensus among its neighbours on any issue?

## Answers:

- There cannot be a mechanism to overcome the anti-India mindset. However, the conviction to cooperate should come from within and once such a conviction comes through, it will pave the way for greater cooperation. SAARC could provide a platform for such cooperation.
- Some drivers can be controlled to give a definite direction for the future to evolve. India alone cannot control these drivers and every country in the region should cooperate.
- For a better future, a human-centric approach should be formulated. Trade could emerge as a major unifying force. If Afghanistan's and Pakistan's economies are linked with India many irritants would smoothen out.
- Policies have to address the mindset. Countries of the region should shun the blamegame.
- Terrorism is a phenomenon unique to every country. Different objective conditions prevalent in different countries create this phenomenon. So experiences on terrorism should not be shared with each other. However, common data on terrorism should be shared and real time intelligence could be exchanged. Cooperative efforts should be enhanced for combating terrorism.
- The future appears optimistic as a younger generation takes charge. They have less historical baggage, which presents greater possibility for cooperation.

*Prepared by [Dr. Pushpita Das](#), Associate Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*

## Session II: Regional Approach to a Cooperative Future

Chairperson : Shri Rajiv Sikri

Dr Sujit Dutta

Dr Kaiser Bengali

Dr. Uttam Kumar Sinha



The theme of the second session of the Conference was “Regional Approach to a Cooperative Future”. Each of the three papers presented in the session underscored the importance of enhancing regional cooperation in the future. The session had three speakers – Prof. Sujit Dutta, Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Dr. Uttam Sinha, and it was chaired by Ambassador Rajiv Sikri.

Prof. Sujit Dutta in his paper titled *South Asian Regional Security Architecture: Creating Order from Anarchy* argued that the lack of substantial regional cooperation in South Asia is a result of divisive domestic politics. Such domestic politics, characterized by an ideological enemy-oriented competition among the elites, weak governance and identity-based conflicts has cast its shadow on thinking about regional security. It has prevented a region that qualifies naturally as a regional security complex, from constructing a viable regional order. This has often resulted in an anti-India bandwagon at the regional level. He identified three main challenges to the emergence of regional security order: first, the lack of elite consensus on regional cooperation; second, the lack of a shared normative order; and third, the lack of a regional approach towards the world at large. He argued that a domestic order based on the norms of democracy, secularism, federalism and welfare state is the key to the creation of a stable, cooperative regional order that could evolve into a security community.

Defending his characterization of anti-India “entities” in each of India’s neighbouring countries, Dutta asserted that such forces were not only anti-Indian, but their ideologies were also against the formation of a robust regional order. Thus they were detrimental to the growth of regionalism in South Asia. He also contended that Pakistan had a highly offensive concept of security, and that a more constructivist model will help strengthen regional cooperation.

Dr. Kaiser Bengali in his paper on *Changing Pattern of Security Threats: Time for Realignment* made a case for a new regional approach that would strengthen democratic forces in each country. Elaborating on his thesis in the context of Pakistan, he argued that his country was distinctly divided into two sections - “establishment Pakistan” and “democratic Pakistan”. As the predominant country in the region, he hoped that India would make a distinction between the two and adopted nuanced policies that would strengthen democratic Pakistan. He argued that the boundaries that divide the two countries are no longer

geographical; rather they are ideological and intellectual. Such boundaries pitched the democratic forces of the two countries against the extremists. He concluded with the hope that democratic elements in India and Pakistan would come together to defeat the extremists.

Bengali's thesis on establishment Pakistan versus democratic Pakistan elicited several comments and questions. He agreed with those who argued that the struggle for democracy in Pakistan must be fought by the democratic forces within Pakistan, but reasserted that sensitivity on the part of India in its policy decisions towards Pakistan would strengthen the hands of the democratic forces in Pakistan. He recounted how the timing of the reduction in water supply to Pakistan due to the construction of the Baglihar dam affected the production of wheat in Punjab and strengthened the voice of establishment Pakistan. This, he said, was very important because there was clear division between the state and civil society in Pakistan, and the costs of the conflict with India were often borne by civil society. Commenting on the current state of politics in Pakistan, he clarified that today "establishment Pakistan" consisted of those living along the Grand Trunk Road connecting Lahore to Rawalpindi and that they perpetuate several myths to ensure that they control state power.

Focusing on an emerging aspect of regional tension, Dr. Uttam Sinha in his paper entitled *Sharing Common Rivers: Is it a Source of Cooperation or Conflict?* argued that riparian relations are likely to emerge as causes of regional conflict. India, which would play the role of an upper-riparian, middle-riparian and lower riparian state vis-à-vis different countries, would thus be the principle actor in the hydrological regime in the region. Water sharing is likely to be used as a bargaining tool in India-Pakistan relations as also in Sino-Indian relations. In comparison, water sharing between Nepal and Bangladesh is likely to be less determined by political considerations. He pointed out that new knowledge of climate change and hydrological scarcity and its linkages with food and energy security may require a reformulation of existing water-sharing treaties among the countries of the region. This in turn would make water a source of cooperation rather than conflict.

Responding to queries on China's impending policy on reversing the flow of Tibetan rivers, Sinha argued that the issue must be raised internationally as part of the debate on the use of the global commons. He affirmed that Chinese actions would be critical to cooperation on water in South Asia and therefore India must have a clear position on how it should respond to the proposed diversion of rivers by China.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Rajiv Sikri highlighted the following salient points that emerged as challenges to regional cooperation in the years to come:

- issues of identity and ideological conflict
- absence of a common regional security perspective
- necessity of subjecting elites to democratic discipline
- lack of visionary leadership
- the need for India and Pakistan to work together, pending the resolution of the Kashmir issue
- the need for the region to accord due attention to issues beyond the India-Pakistan dyad

**Prepared by Dr. Arpita Anant, Associate Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis**

## Session III : Securing South Asia: Country Perspectives

Chairperson : Lt Gen. B. S. Malik

Dr Davood Moradian	Dr. Sumansiri Liyanage	Prof. Krishna Khanal	Dr. Tahmina Rashid	Mr. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki
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This session, chaired by Lt. Gen. (Retd.) B. S. Malik, brought out country perspectives keeping in view the key objectives of the Conference and each speaker highlighted key challenges faced by their respective country and offered a way forward in the spirit of regional cooperation for the coming decade.

**Stabilising Afghanistan: Challenges Ahead?: Dr. Davood Moradian**, emphasized the need to address structural and causal factors for the seemingly endless cycle of conflict and violence in Afghanistan. He identified three main obstacles to the establishment of a strong and a representative Afghan state:

1. Monopoly of state formation by an ethnic group – failure of the earlier political elite to create strong state institutions;
2. Religious factor – unlike other Muslim countries, religion could not be integrated into state institutions and political structures in Afghanistan;
3. Role of external forces in terms of directly or indirectly interfering and meddling in the country's affairs.

Arguing that the objective of the Taliban is to create a *Talibanistan* comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other regions, Dr. Moradian held that the highly institutionalised external support mechanism is responsible for the growth and sustenance of the Taliban movement. Commenting on the post-9/11 political process, he asserted that with assistance from the international community a modern Afghan state has been created and all ethnic groups are well represented in its institutions. He also noted that progressive Islamic forces too are well represented in the Afghan Parliament. He concluded by saying that if the international community remains engaged and committed, Afghanistan would be a major catalyst for regional trade and commerce between south, central and west Asia by the year 2020. He emphasised the significance of SAARC for the region and asserted that the principle of good neighbourly relations and regional co-operation has a priority in Afghan foreign policy.

**Prof. Sumanasiri Liyanage** in his presentation on *The Tamil National Question in Sri Lanka: Current Dynamics and Future Trends* singled out the Tamil national question as the most important variable that has



affected and shaped the socio-political landscape of post-colonial Sri Lanka. He argued that though Tamil Eelam project has been defeated, the Tamil national question remains intact and unaddressed. Prof. Liyanage finally identified four possible scenarios for the post-LTTE Sri Lanka and assumes that the actual developments may combine the characteristics of all four.

**Scenario 1:** Developmental Welfarism – Some section of the ruling coalition and Sinhala elite appear to be thinking that there is no separate or specific Tamil problem. The key problem is of underdevelopment which is common to the Sinhala and Tamil population in peripheral regions. Therefore, special attention to new developmental strategies is warranted.

**Scenario 2:** Assimilationist Strategy – President Mahinda Rajapakse in his speech to Parliament after the conclusion of the war said that there are no divisions in the country between majority and minority. He implied an over-arching Sri Lankan identity making other identities subordinate to it. It is possible that non-dominant communities may come forward to resist such an over-arching identity.

**Scenario 3:** Power-Sharing Arrangement – There is no genuine effort to implement the 13th amendment. The implementation of many development programmes is done by the central government, completely neglecting elected provincial bodies. Finally, there has been a significant Sinhala national opposition within and without the government to any kind of power-sharing arrangement.

**Scenario 4:** Back to Confrontational Politics – If the government gives in to Sinhala exclusivist forces and assumes that a large section of the Sinhala masses are against any kind of consensual politics and are totally unconcerned about the Tamil national issue, the re-emergence of exclusivist Tamil nationalist politics may be unavoidable. The epicentre of Tamil exclusive nationalist politics has been transferred to the diasporic community. Although it may not happen in the immediate future, the presence of trained combatants and stockpiles of arms hidden in various places may facilitate a re-emergence of Tamil militant groups.

**Prof. Krishna P. Khanal, Federalising the Nepali State: Challenges & Opportunities:** Prof. Khanal pointed out that following the success of the historic Jana Andolan II (People's Movement) in April 2006 and the Madhes revolt in January-February 2007, Nepal has decided to transform itself from a unitary state to a federal one. Several models are being floated by political parties, ethnic communities and individual experts. Opinion also differs as to the actual number and names of the proposed federal units, and division of powers between the centre and the units pertaining to natural resources and revenue sharing. Prof. Khanal observed that the demand for federalism in Nepal received momentum when the CPN (Maoist) announced the formation of autonomous regional governments in 2004 to cash in on the ethnic sentiments in favour of insurgency. However, federalism with democratic contents entered into Nepal's federal discourse only after the April Movement of 2006 and the *Madhes Andolan* in the beginning of 2007. Prof. Khanal suggested that the constitution-makers and the advocates of federalism need to take into account ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity of population; geographic contiguity; natural resources and economic viability; administrative feasibility; and mutual interdependence, while deciding on the contours of federation. However, enough homework is required and it should not be motivated by political expediencies.

**Dr. Tahmina Rashid: Radicalisation of Civil Society: A Case Study of Pakistan:** Dr. Rashid brought out the process of radicalisation of Pakistan's civil society and discussed in detail its implications for the future of civil society in the country. She argued that civil society in Pakistan has evolved as a reactive phenomenon since the establishment of Pakistan and is fractured by resurgence of faith and divided along ethnic, gender, class and sectarian lines. State power too was ruthlessly used to curb political opposition and silence civil rights groups. Dr. Rashid noted that both civil and military regimes in Pakistan have generally had an ambivalent attitude towards civil society organisations, despite recognition that these organisations provide vital services to disadvantaged people. This would remain part of the psyche of the



Pakistani elite, which would continue to feel threatened by the former's very presence and advocacy agendas. There was no such pressure on radical elements in the society. Neither these organisations were required to register nor have they had to submit to annual audits or reviews. Civil society in Pakistan is not a cohesive organic whole. It is two tracked – one made up of urban, modern, liberal/secular, educated, and image conscious members, while the other is made up of “ethnic, denominational, sectarian and clan organisations that espouse traditional religious values.” Dr. Rashid suggested that there is a third group that overlaps ‘traditional and modern’ civil society. Members of this group are ideologically driven, primarily urban based and educated professionals. The inability of the state to govern and deliver has expanded the space for this group and has effectively sidelined many liberal civil society groups.

**Mr. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, South Asia 2020: A Maldivian Perspective:** Mr. Zaki, reflected on a wide range of issues concerning the region. He noted that the winds of democracy have been sweeping across South Asia in recent years, with a vigour and vitality that bodes well for the future of the region. Mr. Zaki asserted that today Maldives can proudly lay claim to the fact that it is the one and only 100 per cent Muslim country that is truly democratic, in which individual freedoms and human rights are just as resolutely defended as the rights of the State. This should lay to rest the arguments put forth by many that Islam and modern democracy are somehow incompatible. Mr. Zaki identified climate change as one of the greatest challenges before Maldives, which lies just 1.5 metres above sea level. He felt that for regional peace and prosperity to really take root, South Asian countries need to trade far more with one another. He concluded by saying that as the smallest member of SAARC, and as one of the newest democracies in the world, Maldives takes heart from the recent positive developments in the region and dares hope that cooperation rather than confrontation may indeed become the norm for 2020 in South Asia.

## Discussion

1. The issue of rapidly growing influence of Wahhabis and Salafis, though still in minority in the Pakistan polity, has to be seen with grave concern. It is worth enquiring how the majority of Pakistan people who are Barelvis and believe in Sufism are reacting and responding to this trend.
2. On the question of what more needs to be done to stabilise Afghanistan, it was said that the international community will have to first grasp the enormity and immensity of the challenges of governance in the country. There is a need to strengthen the state institutions at various levels, and avoid weakening them for purpose of proxy politics.
3. It was said that the US is not re-abandoning Afghanistan and that the West needs to take a long-term view of the need to stay the course in the country. In view of the rising Taliban challenge, more troops definitely need to be inducted provided this is accompanied by a comprehensive strategy that includes massive civil reconstruction assistance and a broader regional strategy to counter obscurantist and terrorist forces active in the region.
4. On India-Afghan relations, it was said that India's commitment to the ongoing political process and its reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan is widely appreciated. It was also observed that India should not be defensive about its presence in Afghanistan which is legitimate and essential to its security. If there was a note of caution on India's increased involvement in Afghanistan, there was also the view that India should be more confident and assertive about its Afghan policy.

Interestingly, there was complete consensus on the view that India's strong democratic credentials show the way forward for the region. If democratic institutions are strong in India, it is beneficial for neighbouring countries as well, especially countries that are either young democracies or are undergoing political transition.

*Report prepared by [Vishal Chandra](#), and edited by [Sreeradha Datta](#), Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi.*

## Session IV : Role of the Regional Organization in the future of South Asia

Chairperson : Amb. I.P.Khosla

Dr Amita Batra	Dr. Nitya Nanda & Mr. Souvik Bhattacharjya	Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik
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This session examined the role of regional organizations in shaping multilateral cooperation. Multilateral cooperation is weak within South Asia. The speakers explored ways in which multilateral cooperation can be enhanced and the challenges regional states confront in overcoming impediments to greater cooperation.

**Amita Batra: “Future of regional Cooperation : case study of BIMSTEC”** Dr. Batra examined the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in terms of its potential for widening the network for outward oriented growth. She argued that BIMSTEC can emerge as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. She highlighted that the agenda and membership of BIMSTEC overlaps with other groupings such as SAARC and ARF, so a cautious step is needed before India embarks on so many regional groupings. Dr. Batra, however, disagreed with India’s position that BIMSTEC would provide greater linkages to India’s Northeastern States and thus it will lead to overall development of the region and instead suggested that India should take the initiative to link the region on its own rather than depending on countries such as Thailand.

**Nityananda and Souvik Bhattacharya: “Regional Economic Integration and SAFTA: What does it portend?”** SAARC members’ initiative to promote regional trade has achieved “limited success”; they cited reasons such as weak governance, political frictions, limited tariff reduction and prevalence of sizeable informal trade for this state of affairs. They stated that the trade imbalance between India and some other regional partners are another contentious issue that remains from the inception. They opined that the size of India and its economic policies, with huge diversification, have resulted in restricted complementarities and reduced trade opportunities. However, citing the European example, they argued that trade integration is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for promoting regional peace and cooperation. They also stated that SAARC countries suffer from poor communications links, which prevents them from being connected to the global economy and suggested that communication within the SAARC countries needs to be expedited to make it a strong regional economic bloc. One suggestion they made was that India should try to dispel the misperception of its dominance in the region and opined that it would be difficult for India to secure a better place in the global community if it is not able to take its neighbours along. They also said that other countries can gain by joining forces with India as it often gets

more attention due to its size, population and market. Thus a win-win situation can be created where both India and its neighbours can mutually benefit.

**Smruti Pattanik: “Does SAARC have a future?”:** Dr. Pattanaik noted that SAARC summit meetings do not generate excitement either in the people or draw the attention of the media and opined that SAARC has not achieved its potential given various political impediments stunting its progress. Her thrust was to highlight the fact that the people of the region should be involved in the process and it should not be driven by the Foreign Ministries of member states. NGOs and civil society should also be involved, so that people feel that it is their initiative. Highlighting the need for “people to people contact,” she advocated that the existing liberal visa regime is only limited to Members of Parliament and Judges of the SAARC countries and should be extended to academics, journalists, and common people and warned that unless the common man benefits regional cooperation will be doomed. Dr. Pattanaik highlighted that SAARC continues to be relevant. First, the forum provides a meeting ground for all the leaders of South Asia to meet in a regional context. Second, the SAARC process has established the sovereign equality of member-states for determining the regional agenda. For instance, both Nepal and Bhutan joined SAARC to play a visible regional role and enhance their foreign policy choices. It also creates a sense of involvement of all states thereby creating stakeholders in the process. Third, SAARC provides for sub-regional cooperation (Articles VII and X of its charter) among geographically contiguous countries, thus providing scope to go beyond the India-Pakistan bilateral context which tends to stymie any progress. Dr. Pattanaik hoped that sub-regional cooperation would be the new term for regional co-operation and opined that regional co-operation cannot be kept hostage to intractable bilateral problems. It needs to be kept in mind that when the SAARC charter was signed, except for India and Sri Lanka all other countries were non-democratic. With democracy now established in all SAARC countries, synergies can be reached on issues.

## Q&A and Comments

1. It was suggested that SAARC should have a permanent Secretariat, that it should take up doable joint ventures and complete these within a time frame.
2. SAARC should have a Secretary General with a status equivalent to a Cabinet Minister.
3. SAARC should form a joint peace keeping group to participate in UN Peacekeeping.
4. Think tanks in the region should sit together and work as a nodal agency, presenting their suggestions to reinvigorate the agenda of SAARC.
5. It is not as if India and Pakistan do not co-operate at all. There are instances where India and Pakistan have taken a common position in WTO, on climate change, etc. This could be emulated in other areas as well.

*Prepared by Shamshad Khan, Research Assistant at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis.*

## Session V : Role of Extra-regional powers

Chairperson : Prof Madhu Bhalla

Mr. Nishchal Nath Pandey	Dr Ahmad Shayeq Qassem	Prof Rajesh Rajagopalan	Prof Swaran Singh
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This session explored the role of extra-regional powers in South Asia. The critical import of this session related to power relations between the primary actors within the region and external powers. The key issues flagged related to (1) how regional powers manipulated extra-regional powers to advance their own regional interests; (2) China's role in the region and how China relates to South Asia; (3) how smaller regional powers such as Nepal and Afghanistan have coped with internal unrest, instability and the role other powers have played in influencing domestic political order in these countries. The session also addressed whether regional strategies can be pursued to deal with the region's vexing problems.

**Professor Rajesh Rajagopalan (JNU):** Extra-Regional Powers and Emerging Security Scenario in South Asia: According to Prof. Rajagopalan, the general assumption in much of the literature on regional security is that it is a sub-set of global security concerns of extra-regional powers. Regions and regional powers are generally seen as victims or subjects of global power political machinations. But regional powers have been dexterous in utilizing global interests of extra-regional powers to pursue regional interests. Indeed, they have usually been more successful in securing their way than global powers have been at advancing their global agenda at the regional level. South Asia presents good examples of this phenomenon, both during the Cold War and after. In essence, then, the key driver of extra-regional involvement in South Asia is likely to continue to be the regional security agenda of local powers much more than that of extra-regional powers. Examples: Pakistan joins US-led SEATO and CENTO to countervail India during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period Pakistan leverages proliferation, geography and terrorism as instruments to manipulate bigger powers such as the United States.

**Professor Swaran Singh (JNU):** China and South Asia: China's South Asia policy remains predominantly India-centric and security-centric. Under this wide bandwidth, there has been an undulating trajectory in Sino-Indian relation with crests and troughs. But the relationship is also pragmatic and favourable towards India. Supporting people in Kashmir in the 1960s and insurgents in North-eastern India in the 1970s marked the low-point of Cultural Revolution radicalization of China's foreign policy. China's celebrated neutrality during the Kargil War (1999) was the epitome of Beijing's pro-India leanings. This has been the result of rapprochement since the late 1970s followed by India's rise as an emerging economic power since the 1980s. India's neighbours, especially Pakistan, still continue to be an important pillar of China's South Asia policy. The credit must go to India's continued engagement and China's often reluctant

yet positive reciprocity, that the two sides have assiduously evolved and codified a whole set of confidence building measures that form the base of their ties. However, some vestiges of old habits and equations continue to create difficulties. So these like 'String of Pearls' and encirclement of India remain an integral part of analysis on China's South Asia policy, often fuelling scepticism in their mutual perceptions and policies.

**Mr. Nishchal Nath Pandey:** The Role of Extra-regional powers and the Future of the Peace Process in Nepal: Mr. Pandey noted that the Maoist leadership's decision to shun a decade-long armed insurrection and embrace competitive multi-party politics through participation in the first-ever elections to the Constituent Assembly was a welcome change. There was anticipation that lasting peace would return to the country. The first elected Prime Minister under the republican order Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' managed to instil a new spirit of confidence and optimism, but his tenure of nine months was barely enough to tackle the enormous challenges that the civil war-ravaged country faced at multiple levels. According to Mr. Pandey, certain powers got anxious with the possibility of a prolonged dominance of an extreme leftist outfit in the polity of Nepal. In addition, he noted that the reckless decisions made by an inexperienced Maoist leadership triggered a constitutional crisis. While regional powers urged all sides to put aside their differences and work together for a new Constitution within the stipulated deadline of May 2010, others such as the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) have been more assertive. The issues of federalism, integration of ex-Maoist combatants into the Nepal Army, wider debate on security sector reforms, crisis in the Terai, rising religious intolerance and ethnic tension remain challenges. These challenges, according to Mr. Pandey, require deft handling by all political parties. But these challenges involve other powers whose interests clash with one another. This could turn Nepal into another Lebanon.

**Mr. Ahmad Shayeq Qassem:** Afghan Conundrum: Can there be a Regional Approach?: Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Afghanistan came under world attention. According to Mr. Qassem India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asia and China all took part in the enterprise to cooperate. The Afghan government amended many of its laws and signed numerous agreements in a bid to foster greater regional cooperation. Yet stability has eluded Afghanistan and remains a millstone around the necks of its neighbours. A narrow security-centric concept premised on the notion that an over-centralized political system would best serve the interests of stability is misleading.

Afghanistan should confront the concerns of the Pakistani leadership. Pakistani interests would be better served in Afghanistan if it stopped patronizing the Afghan Taliban. Mr. Qassem noted that as two sovereign independent countries, India and Afghanistan have a right to decide for themselves as to how they conduct their relations in pursuit of their national interests and in accordance with the principles of international law. However, some aspects of the bilateral relationship need to be revisited for greater peace.

## Q&A and Comments

1. US has no choice but to stay engaged with Pakistan. It is the only access point to Afghanistan, because relations with Iran are fraught with tension. This is a situation the US has created for itself due to the disastrous invasion of Iraq.
2. US strategy in Af-Pak is al Qaeda-centred. Taliban is unlikely to sunder ties with al Qaeda and other transnational terror groups, including Kashmiri groups operating out of Afghanistan.
3. During the Cold War, US power also boosted Pakistan, thereby constraining Indian power. Extra-regional powers also had influence over regional powers. Nevertheless, India countervailed through the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1971, secured Soviet vetoes at the UN and dismembered Pakistan in 1971.

4. India-Pakistan need to create an effective mechanism for relating with each other in the context of Afghanistan.
5. China is a bigger player in Afghanistan than India. It has plans to invest three billion dollars. Chinese strategy is calibrated and it is not in favour of any solution that excludes the Taliban, thus bringing back the China-Pakistan nexus. Nevertheless, Afghanistan-India relations are more multifaceted than China's relations with Afghanistan.
6. US interest in Afghanistan seems to be waning, but it cannot extricate itself completely.
7. China's political context is different from India's. There has been limited liberalization in the political sphere, but China is reluctant to allow full fledged political parties. China's democracy will not be like India's. The CCP ten years down the road will still be important and there will not be any vestige of communism. Aims, motives, and sentiments are different.
8. Tibet will be a far more limited issue between India and China after the departure of the Dalai Lama. Only the Dalai Lama is a force against the Chinese, because of his global profile and widespread popularity.
9. Water and trade will be among the key drivers in Sino-Indian relations. India's river navigation system needs improvement. On trade, the export basket between India and China is not evolving. There is a trade imbalance against India. India cannot deal with China on its own; must coordinate with others and should avoid direct confrontation.
10. China should be brought into SAARC. Beijing is not very excited to join and common ground has to be found among SAARC members as well. China's foreign policy has encouraged 'independence' of foreign policy among India's smaller neighbours. China has tilted away from defence-centric relationship with Pakistan to trade-centred relations. It has concluded an FTA as well.
11. China does not have a regional vision or approach to South Asia. It is India-centric, which is both positive and negative. China's operational policy is based on a single pillar: engaging the No.2 power of the region - Pakistan. China defines its relations in terms of clear territoriality.
12. Increasing links between Maoists and Naxals in India.
13. Unlike the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Maoists never rejected a political solution.
14. A comprehensive peace has been hard to achieve.
15. Recruitment to the Nepal Army has become a problem. Nepal Army demanded that ex-Maoist combatants give up their ideology as a pre-requisite for entry.
16. The 12-point agreement has been challenged by all.
17. The issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is a complicated problem that cannot be resolved quickly.

***Prepared by Kartik Bommakanti, Research Assistant at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis***



## Session VI: South Asian Conference: Way Forward: Building a Common Future

### Panelists

Mr. Asad Sayeed	Dr Rahmatullah	Ms Swadesh M Rana
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**Dr M Rahamatullah:** “Regional Connectivity: Getting Past the Impediments”. Dr. Rahamatullah, though basic infrastructure in South Asia is available the transport connectivity is very fragmented. Regional connectivity through land connecting the North Eastern region existed before 1965. Connectivity was also available through ports.

In the context of Pakistan there are two passenger trains from India and Pakistan bus connections between New Delhi and Amritsar. However in the case of India and Bangladesh their locomotives are connected to the trains to Dhaka or Kolkata. Immigration remains a huge problem. Transportation of goods takes place through waterways. Transporting goods from Dhaka to Delhi through rail will take only three days whereas the route presently followed takes 30-45 days.

Pakistan does not allow India to use its roads to export its goods to Afghanistan. Hence a container from India goes to Chahbahar and then to Afghanistan. This is a very costly operation for India.

The entire northeast is landlocked. If one travels through the Chicken’s Neck from Calcutta to Tripura then the route is very long. Bangladesh is yet to provide transit facilities to India therefore to overcome this problem India is developing Sitwe port in Myanmar. But that is a complicated route. Bangladesh and Nepal are separated only by a distance of 22 km. Similarly, India is not allowed to use Mongla port.

Route and roadmaps have been proposed by SRMTS. The Islamabad Summit of 2004 had also decided to develop multi-modal transport connectivity among SAARC countries. Transport integration in south Asia will end the landlocked status of Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and northeast India. SRMTS had identified 10 road corridors, 5 rail routes, 10 maritime and 16 aviation gateways. The new rail routes can revolutionize connectivity. Dr. Rahmatullah also proposed new rail and road routes. He pointed out that water transport was given as protocol in 1972 but it has not been extensively used.

Roadmaps have been proposed by SRMTS. But the main problem is political commitment and physical problems are of a very minor nature. On road transit, agreement is yet to be inked. Land ports are not well developed. On both Bangladesh and Indian sides the conditions of the roads are bad. The countries also lack standardized rail tracks i.e. meter gauge and broad gauge.

There is a need to renew IWT (Inland waterways) protocol between India and Bangladesh. The maritime gateways can be improved by expanding port capacities. Similarly, aviation gateways can be improved by expanding terminal facilities and by promoting low cost carrier service.

All SAARC countries have obligation to implement the road map. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are transit countries. They have special responsibility in this regard. This will create win-win situation for both transiting and transit countries.

### Implementation of Roadmap

Bangladesh can do the following things to implement the roadmap.

The Calcutta port is only serving Nepal and Bhutan. Haldia port is no more a viable option. Here Bangladesh can offer its Mongla port as an option.

Bangladesh could benefit by 'transport services.' Currently Bangladesh has a trade deficit. This can be overcome by offering the use of Mongla port for a fee. These transport services has no market outside sub-continent. This should be offered to all the three countries – India, Nepal and Bhutan. Ashuganj port facilities can be opened up. Bangladesh also needs to build expressways to match Indian roads which can take 10-12 axle loads. In general land ports in Benapole and Petrapole need to be developed with adequate warehousing facilities which will help trade. BIMSTEC route can also be used for greater economic development.

Pakistan needs to provide transit facilities to India for its trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. It can levy transit fees to provide such facilities. For this there is a need for the two countries to develop better understanding.

India is a transit country for all countries in the sub-continent. Bhutan and Nepal have not been allowed to use Bangladesh's port facilities. India can take steps to improve the situation. Dr Rahmatullah said the cost of non-cooperation is very high. There is a need to undertake a study which can indicate gains for each country as a result of improved connectivity. Not only strong political commitment of leaders is needed but involvement of people is also a necessity. Transit and regional connectivity can not be resolved in isolation. Countries should also try to resolve other irritants.

## Q&A and Discussion

- It is important to keep in mind the cost that will be incurred to dredge rivers in northeast India. Leadership is critical to achieve this objective. In the absence of political will, none of the frameworks are going to work. The primacy of infrastructure can never be over-estimated.
- Earlier there had been reluctance on the part of Bangladesh to accept an Indian offer to dredge the port at Indian cost. Bangladesh has the manpower, India has the resources; both can cooperate
- India, Bangladesh, Nepal should come together to deal with China
- Afghanistan has been very supportive of transit traffic. The problem however is Pakistan, which has been extremely reluctant to extend this facility. The issue is how to induce change in Pakistan's thinking so that south Asia can trade with central Asia

**Dr Swadesh Rana:** "Regional Framework for Non-state Actors in South Asia": Dr Rana noted that international advocacy groups have some achievements to their credit. For example an advocacy group in Geneva is trying to make non-state actors abide by landmine agreements. Similarly, international protocols can also include terrorism. Currently we are dealing with a very fluid situation. It will take two to three years for the dust to settle. India must think of how it is going to retaliate in case another 26 / 11 take place. At present Pakistan is suffering much more than India from terrorism.

Speaking of the US military engagement in south Asia she stated that in future American public is going to demand exit strategy more clearly. The better prepared India is to deter another 26/11 or Naxals, Pakistan would be more confident of dealing with the Taliban and come to an agreement with India.

In days to come terrorists will be more elusive. Pakistan has no intention of declaring Osama dead or alive because then they would not get economic assistance. In future terrorism will become nebulous. Once the dust-settles down the problem of terrorism would not be confined to India and Pakistan and the whole of South Asia would be affected.

Armed or unarmed non-state actors can incite violence. Resource wars might also grip the region. South Asia is also very vulnerable to food and water shortages. This region is also plagued by illicit weapons trafficking. There are enough arms to sustain a low level insurgency for two decades. Most of the illicit weapons are in south Asia. Another major concern for the region is money laundering. A large part of the money comes into Pakistan through money laundering.

The region may also witness the derailment of the electoral process. This could be the most serious concern. Protecting civilians under situations of armed conflict will be a major issue. Though none of the South Asian countries is under armed conflict, the situation might change if the state ceases to exist a few kilometers outside the capital.

She suggested a few measures for the South Asian countries to ponder. Intellectuals of South Asian countries should start thinking about 2020.

1. Monitor compliance by South Asian countries of International agreements
2. Document anti-state activities of non-state actors
3. Explore the possibility of retrieving illicit weapons
4. Follow-up on the national initiatives taken by each countries
5. highlight the supporting international climate in which we are functioning

## Q&A and Discussion

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- Earlier there had been reluctance on the part of Bangladesh to accept an Indian offer to dredge the port at Indian cost. Bangladesh has the manpower, India has the resources; both can cooperate
- India, Bangladesh, Nepal should come together to deal with China
- Afghanistan has been very supportive of transit traffic. The problem however is Pakistan, which has been extremely reluctant to extend this facility. The issue is how to induce change in Pakistan's thinking so that south Asia can trade with central Asia
- State monopoly over use of force is being challenged by non-state actors.
- Non-state actors were initially taken as civil society, but now it is being used for terror groups. It gives a bad name to civil society.
- Often there seems to be a suggestion that violence is the only way out. This framework legitimizes violence.

**Report prepared by [Dr Anand Kumar](#), Associate Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses**