

Notes

Peace Initiatives & Demilitarisation in South Asia

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Introduction

Much before the end of cold war in 1990s, the nations and people of the world had realized that the human progress and well-being could only be achieved by economic development alone in the world's socio-political environment. It was also assessed and accepted that for economic development, regional trade and socio-political cooperation has a significant value. So during the last decade of 20th century a number of regional alliances came into being, like NAFTA, ASEAN, and European Union etc. These alliances proved to be of pivotal importance in building better relations among the states of the region and in bringing socio-economic prosperity among the people of the region. South Asian countries also realized the importance of these alliances and tried to join hands in the shape of SAARC (South Asian Alliance for Regional Cooperation) in 1984 but this alliance has been continuously ineffective since the day of its inception due to the hostile relationship between the two important countries of the region i.e. India and Pakistan. There are numerous other sources of dissonance between the states of South Asia, for example India is a secular state while its neighbours in a way or other give primacy to religion in state politics. The Indian federation is organized along linguistic lines and affords a large measure of autonomy to its states, while its neighbours have more centralized regimes dominated by the majority ethnic group. India and Sri Lanka have fairly well established democratic traditions; authoritarian regimes have tended to dominate other states. The organizing principles of one state are viewed as a threat by another. Moreover, authoritarian regimes, which lack legitimacy and have no popular support, become more dependent on external help. They are thus more amenable to pressure and manipulation from outside the region. Secondly, the internal and external conflicts of the states of the region have also played an important role in making SAARC an ineffective organisation. Thirdly, there is a direct linkage between rising intensification of poverty in South Asia and the absence

of peace in the region. Peace is linked with demilitarisation of state and society including the dismantling of authoritarian regimes of all kinds. Continued militarization in the region has led to increased defence expenditures and corresponding cuts in social sector funding, making the poor of the region more vulnerable. Diversion of economy away from its humanitarian purposes is also a hindrance to the socio-economic development efforts and a threat to democratic process in the region. In many cases the state is itself violating basic human rights of the citizens in gross contravention of all the international human rights instruments including the UN Charter. What we need today is regional peace and justice. We also need human security which can help in bringing sustainable progress in the region.

Religious revivalism in the region

Religion has been one of the most powerful and emotional instruments of politics for centuries in the world. It is like racialism, a sharp tool for mobilizing communities, nations and people of different regions in their struggle for domination and survival. In the case of South Asia it proved a vital weapon of dividing people and a serious matter of human security since 1940s. In India Muslim nationalism resulted in the formation of Pakistan and in the later years Bengali nationalism resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. Hindu nationalism was characterised by the rise of Hindu Nationalist Party, the BJP, especially its demand for Hindutva and frequent attacks on Muslims and Christians. In Sri Lanka Buddhist Sinhalese are not ready to give any rights to Hindu Tamils. Even in Pakistan where Muslims are in majority, the parliament in 1974, declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims and the other sects like Shias and Sunnis, two very much politicised religious sects of Islam remain in continuous clash with each other for many decades. Muslim hardliners in Pakistan have been trying to enforce Shariah laws in the country, which will ultimately suppress the rights of the religious minorities. Now it has been proved that that religious fundamentalism is a social phenomenon that occurs during rapid social change; is marked by profound experience of crisis, and tries to overcome that crisis by a revitalisation of religion and a search for authenticity, as it happened in Afghanistan during their war against Soviet invasion. In the present day world religious fundamentalists are creating obstacles in the process of secularisation of society and state.

As mentioned above, major part of Indo-Pakistan strife has a long history of religious differences and has been marked by attempts of the religious extremist groups to gain more and more political power and to destabilise each other by getting fullest control over the statecraft.

There is a general feeling in both the countries that Pakistan is the offspring of that Hindu-Muslim strife, which started in the third decade of 20th century. After the creation of Pakistan the strife remained alive in the shape of Kashmir dispute and strained Indo-Pak relations.

Afghan war and rise of militarization in Pakistan

The process of Islamization in Pakistan could only start after the death of its founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah because he was totally against the formation of a theological state and dreamed of a liberal, secular and democratic Muslim state of Pakistan. After his death his successors and religious clerics in Muslim League, ignoring his ideas, presented Objective Resolution in the Constituent Assembly and thus Pakistan was given a religious identity. It reached to its peak in 1970s, when the army dictator General Zia-ul-Haq used religion as a tool for strengthening his rule. Soviet Union's military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 was the second event, which further strengthened the Zia regime and the religious groups in Pakistan. The Soviet action in Afghanistan was considered as a territorial threat to Pakistan, so the Pakistani rulers approached USA and the Muslim world for help. USA and Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan in provoking *jiḥād* against USSR in Afghanistan. Ironically while Americans were interested in the defeat of USSR and winning the war in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia had its interests in promoting ideological and sectarian designs in the region. Pakistan promptly supported the militant groups and tribal warlords fighting in Afghanistan against the USSR. It allowed its land and military skill to operate *jiḥād* in Afghanistan and hosted millions of Afghan refugees in the country. It was for the first time in the Muslim history that the concept of *jiḥād* by non-state actors was allowed. With the financial support of USA and Saudi Arabia, a large number of militant youth from all over the Muslim world poured into Pakistan to fight a holy war (*jiḥād*) in Afghanistan. These militants were hosted and provided latest guerrilla warfare by the *madaris* (religious schools) in Pakistan. It would be of great interest that before the Afghan episode, there were a total 1,100 religious schools in Pakistan and the majority of them belonged to Bareilvi sect but during the Afghan war the number of these *madaris* increased to nearly 32,000 (according to a survey in 1999) with a majority belonging to the Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadis schools of thought. According to a conservative survey nearly three million students are studying in these *madaris*. Other than Afghan war requirements, there are also some other important reasons behind the rapid rise in the number of *madaris*. For instance, the majority of these militants belonged to Sunni Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadis sect, so they were deadly against Shia

school of thought. With the support of the state apparatus these groups not only fought against the *force of evil* (the USSR) but also targeted the centres and important personalities of Shia sect for their emotional attachment and support to Iranian clergy, for whom USA has antagonistic attitudes.

In 1988, after the signing of the Geneva Accords, when USSR started to pull its forces out of Afghanistan, there came a big question before the state planners as to how to use those militants who were engaged in Afghanistan after the end of the war. On the one hand, war-torn Afghanistan became a laboratory for experimenting hard-line Islam as a state policy and, on the other hand, Pakistani state operators threw the jihadis to Kashmir for its liberation on the lines of the experiment gained in Afghanistan. Religious political parties supported this idea and also become part of the new strategy on Kashmir. The Arabs, especially the Egyptians, Yemenis and Saudis, who participated in *jihad*, opted to stay in Afghanistan in the greater interest of their faith and to help the people of that country for Islamization of the society and state.

In Pakistan, these religious militants split into two groups, one took the responsibilities of liberating Kashmir from the occupation of *kafir* regime of India, while the other group became active in purifying the society from 'the forces of evil' and obstacles in the way of Islamization in Pakistan, which certainly included the Shia community who rejected the concept of *zakat* introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq and has sympathy with Iranian clergy. Groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Tayyba, Hizbul Tehrir and many others engaged in Kashmir, while groups like Sipah-e-Sahabah, Jaish-e-Muhammad and other smaller groups started taking actions against Shia clergy. In reaction Shias also formed militant and students groups like Sipah-e-Muhammad and ISO etc. Since 1998, a series of target killings, bomb blasts and suicide attacks at mosques and Imambargahs have happened across the country. As a result of the sectarian violence since 1990, thousands of innocent people have been killed and seriously wounded. On the other hand the jihadi outfits caused serious damage to the Kashmiri people's struggle for self-determination. The nationalist movement of the Kashmiri people became a terrorist movement for narrow religious gains.

Background of arms race between India and Pakistan

The hostile relationship between India and Pakistan has a long history and the two countries have been involved in a number of crises since their independence in 1947. Although there remain numerous contentious issues between them but undeniably the core of their hostility

and main bone of contention lies in the dispute over Kashmir. The Kashmir dispute, which is the off-spring of partition of India, has led the two countries to become engaged in three full-fledged wars after independence i.e. in 1948, 1965 and 1971 and some non-traditional wars like the one in Kargil in 1999 but the dispute, is yet to be resolved.

Actually the inherent ideological conflict between the people of India and Pakistan and a clash of civilization between Islam and Hinduism has given rise to the dispute on Kashmir and hostile relationship between the two states, which led to arms race in the region. Other than Kashmir, the two countries also have some disputes of secondary nature or lesser level like that on Siachen, Wullar Barrage and Sir Creek. The dispute on Siachen surfaced in 1984 when two countries faced each other over the glacier nearly 240 km northwest of Srinagar. Both the countries claimed that the other had provoked it into high altitude deployment. At Siachen India is spending Rs.40 million/day while Pakistan is spending Rs.10 million/day. According to independent survey 0.07% of Indian GDP and 0.09% of Pakistani GDP is being spent on Siachen adventure. The Wullar Barrage dispute surfaced in 1985 when India started building a barrage on river Jhelum near Srinagar. Pakistan accused India of violating the Indus Water Treaty of 1960. In the mean time India started building hydroelectric project on river Chenab at Baglihar, which led to another crisis between the two countries. Third such conflict is at Sir Creek, which is an area on the border of Sindh and Gujarat nearly 96 km estuary in the marshes of the Rann of Kutch and both the countries lay claim on it. These issues are still unresolved and low profile talks are continuously going on.

The two countries have their own interpretations of highly increased defence budgets and purchase of highly sophisticated weaponry. Indian clarification in this regard is that it has a huge size, world's second largest population and threats from different borders other than Pakistan. Pakistan, which is much smaller than India feels itself insecure from mighty Indian designs. So when India moves towards increasing its defence budget and includes new weaponry in its armoury, Pakistan also tries to get the same weaponry and also increases its defence budget. The bottom line is that Pakistanis and Indians perceive that the Kashmir issue is responsible for their troubled relationship and well-increased defence budgets.

On 11th and 13th May 1998, India conducted its nuclear tests, just a few days later on 28th and 29th of the same month, Pakistan followed by conducting similar tests. Here again both the countries advanced their own reasons but, interestingly, Pakistani interpretation on becoming a nuclear power was clearly a reaction to the feeling of threat from Indian

military might. These tests led to a fundamental change in the Indo-Pakistan relationship with a new phase of tense diplomatic relations. The nuclear explosions ended more than a decade long period of covert nuclearisation during which the two sides had exercised existential deterrence. The romance and euphoria of nuclear optimism dented in mid-1999, when Kargil episode erupted. Since then both the countries have been engaged in upgrading nuclear missile technology and are continuously enhancing their missile capabilities.

It is important to highlight the essentials of Indo-Pak crises in which the aspect of nuclear deterrence featured in one way or other. Of the four main crises, the first one is the 'Brass-tacks' in 1986-87, when a million Indian troops conducted military exercises very close to Pakistani border in Rajasthan. The second crisis developed when Pakistan conducted huge military exercise in the name of 'Zarb-e-Momin' in 1990. Kartil is the third crisis which took place a year after the nuclear tests. The fourth crisis erupted after the terrorist attack on Indian parliament in December 2001. As a result of this crisis, the largest military deployment took place at the international border in the history of South Asia.

Military expenditures

Since independence, both the countries have been engaged in developing their military might and as a result sufferings of the people have increased many folds. Though India and Pakistan have abysmal social indicators in terms of poverty, infant mortality rate and malnutrition in children, basic education levels, basic health facilities and access to basic amenities, both the countries have been spending heavily on defence and are among the 15 major military spenders in the world. Both the countries have their own perception of military spending. The chart below indicates figures of their military expenditure during 2001-4 and expected expenditure during 2005-07. A comparative picture of the military expenditure during the recent years is given below it shows that both the countries are spending more on defence than on social development.

Annual Military Expenditure of India and Pakistan

Year	India			Pakistan		
	(in bl.) Rs.	As % of GDP	As % of budget	(in bl.) Rs.	As % of GDP	As % of budget
2001 – 02	570	2.7	15.6	149	4.1	23.9

2002 – 03	560	2.5	13.9	158	3.9	22.3
2003 – 04	653	2.7	14.9	160	3.8	19.9
2006 – 07	706	2.4	-	188	3.9	-

Comparison of Military Assets

Category	India	Pakistan
Total combat Aircrafts	744	374
Submarines	19	10
Carriers	01	-
Destroyers	08	-
Amphibious Ships	07	-
Frigates	16	08
Corvettes	24	-
Missile Petrol	08	05
Other Petrol Crafts	16	04
Mine vessels	18	03
Combat Aircraft	35	06
Main Battle Tanks	3,898	2,118
Towed Artillery	4,175	1,317
Self propelled Artillery	80	240
Multiple Rocket Launchers	162	50
Armoured Personnel Carrier	160	1,100
Other Armoured Fighting Vehicles	1590	-

Comparison of Military (Manpower)

Category	India	Pakistan
Air Force	170,000	45,000
Navy	55,000	25,000
Army	1,100,000	550,000
Total Active	1,1325,000	620,000
Reserved	535,000	513,000

Casualties During the Four Wars

Year	India	Pakistan
1948	1,104	1,500
1965	3,264	3,800
1971	3,843	7,900
1999 (Kargil)	522	696
Total	8,733	13,896

Comparison of Military and Development Expenditures

Year	India				Pakistan			
	Military		Development		Military		Development	
	Total (Bl. Rs.)	As & of GDP	Total (Bl. Rs.)	As % of GDP	Total (Bl. Rs.)	As % of GDP	Total (Bl. Rs.)	As % of GDP
2001 – 02	570	2.7	1,279	6.1	149	4.1	126	3.5
2002 – 03	560	2.5	1,369	6.1	158	3.9	164	4.1
2003 – 04	653	2.7	1,479	6.2	160	3.8	160	3.8

Adverse impact of defence expenditure on social sector

The excessive military spending had a severe impact on the social sectors of both the countries especially in the context of Pakistan are very much visible. Some of the adverse impacts are given below:

1. The false concept of security threat allowed the armed forces to seize state power at will.
2. Major portion of national resources are being spent on military purposes.
3. Import of sophisticated weapons has disturbed balance of payments position.
4. Huge foreign debts have been incurred on the purchase of sophisticated weaponry.
5. Development infrastructure is influenced by the military requirements.
6. Spending on education, health care and other services has been slashed.

According to the *Pakistan Human Condition Report* prepared by the Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution (CRPRID), at least six million children between the ages of five to nine are out of schooling; of the remaining 14 million children, majority has not been given quality education; nearly 80 million citizens are illiterate. 45% of the population is without access to adequate healthcare; 40% do not have clean drinking water and 55% are denied sanitation facilities. 30% of the newly born babies die before celebrating their first birthday due to malnutrition; nearly 35% women die during pregnancy or after the delivery due to the non-availability of proper healthcare and diet; 50% are compelled to live in unhygienic houses due to their poor economic conditions. All these factors persist due to the excessive defence expenditure.

Continuous and strict control of armed forces over the state affairs and natural resources, conflicts with India and involvement in Afghan crisis led to increased involvement of religious and sectarian

groups in the political affairs of the country and militarization of society. Since the Afghan crisis, highly sophisticated weaponry easily reached to the lowest level of the society. Sectarian and ethnic groups under the direct patronage of state agencies are involved in killing, murdering and eliminating opponents and hence the law and order situation is more than worst.

Civil society initiatives for peace and stability in the region

Since the independence of two countries, both the governments remained hostile to each other; the civil society organisations and citizens' groups remained engaged in developing an environment conducive for peace and prosperity in the region. Civil society initiatives for peace became more and more assertive during the 1990s. Academicians, writers, journalists, professional organisations (like medical associations, journalists and trade unions and trade bodies etc.) peace activists and concerned citizens came forward to begin a new chapter in people to people contact and peaceful co-existence between the two states. First a well-organised interaction between Indian intellectuals, writers, analysts and journalists with Pakistani counterparts took place in 1984, when Islamabad-based English newspaper *The Muslim* invited some Indian intellectuals and journalists to attend a conference in the capital. In September 1990, Centre for Policy Research of India organised a seminar at Goa, in which it was decided to organize a 'South Asian Dialogue' every year. The first South Asian Regional Dialogue was held at Delhi in 1991. A 54-member delegation from Pakistan attended this dialogue and discussed the issues of peace, development and cooperation. Second such conference was held at Colombo (Sri Lanka) in 1992. Third dialogue was held in 1993 at Lahore (Pakistan). These dialogues were also held at Kathmandu and Dhaka in 1994 and 1997 respectively.

In 1994, peace activists, academicians, intellectuals and journalists of India and Pakistan met at Lahore (Pakistan) and decided to form 'Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPPFD)' to initiate people to people dialogue on both sides of the border. Joint sessions of the citizens of both the countries opened the venue of understanding each other's point of view and resolving disputed matters through peaceful dialogue and negotiations. Seven joint conventions of PIPFPD have been held so far besides country sessions. In 1998, both India and Pakistan underwent nuclear testing and became nuclear powers. Majority of the peace-loving people who were opposed to it formed Action Committee Against Arms Race (ACAAR). The committee was against increasing trends of nuclear and traditional

weaponry in both the countries. ACAAR was then merged into a broad based coalition known as 'Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC)' and this coalition is trying to fill the gulf between the two sides by organizing seminars, visits and activities like peace march between Delhi and Multan in collaboration with the other peace organisations of the country and the region.

The idea of peace march (originally envisaged to start from Karachi, pass through Lahore-Amritsar and culminate in Delhi), with peace activists from the two countries, walking, stopping over and meeting, talking and exchanging views and experiences in the most informal way with ordinary people in the hundreds of villages and townships of the two countries en route was given a tangible shape during the sixth joint convention of PIPFPD, held in Karachi from 12 to 14 December 2003. It received strong support in the forum's organisations, held on 13th December at PILER Karachi. It was unanimously endorsed on 14th December at the concluding plenary session of the PIPFPD joint convention as part of its action plan for 2004. Later it was decided to shorten the distance and duration of the peace march. The peace march proved to be very successful as the people from all walks of life not only appreciated it but also took part in the activities arranged for it. Media highlighted the objectives of the march and it has been proved that the people of both the countries are willing to have good and cordial relations with each other.

In 1996 peace loving working journalists of the region formed South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) to promote dialogue and exchange of ideas in a healthy, democratic, creative and independent manner and disseminate information among the nations and peoples of South Asia. SAFMA has been organizing seminars, symposiums and conferences inviting policy makers, academics, writers and journalists of the region on regular basis, which have very positive impact on the people of the region. SAFMA also brings out a monthly journal regularly on the issues being faced by the nations and peoples of the region and it is also a hall mark in producing dialogue between the states and people of the region.

In 1996, a South Asian consultation on labour rights, in the context of Multilateral Trade Agreements was held in Kathmandu. The consultation affirmed the need for a South Asian Labour Rights Charter and agreed upon the principles and elements for the formulation of the charter. The Kathmandu consultation also reviewed the situations of labour rights in South Asia in the context of globalization, structural adjustment programmes, new trade system under WTO, and general developments in the world economy. It noted with concern that the

process of globalization and structural adjustment programmes in South Asian countries has resulted in a steady increase in unemployment and a drastic deterioration in the living and working conditions of the working people. The consultation was called to explore methods to establish closer cooperation amongst the labour movements in South Asia, in order to effectively face the present challenges. It decided to evolve mechanism to monitor the situation of labour, take up the issues affecting labour rights and conditions, wage common struggles for effective enforcement of these labour rights, utilize all available instruments and opportunities for the advancement of the cause of South Asian Labour and to build a united labour movement. Hence a resolution was passed to evolve a South Asian Labour Charter and South Asian Labour Forum. As a result of this consultation, South Asian Labour Forum (SALF) came into being in May 1996. The main objective of SALF is to link labour rights movement in all member states with peace initiatives in South Asia. SALF has no formal organisational structure so far.

A 'Pen for Peace' conference held in November 2000 at Karachi, which motivated the writers, columnists and journalists to use their skill of writing for searching a peaceful settlements of the issues pending between the two states and bring the people near to each other. This conference was a hallmark for peace initiatives in the region. After this conference a number of different activities took place.

Keeping the hostile relationship between India and Pakistan and the overall situations of the region, SALF decided to organize a regional conference on the role of labour in peace movement in South Asia. It brought together nearly 200 prominent peace and labour activists, scholars and concerned citizens from across South Asia. Main objectives of the Labour for Peace Conference held at Karachi from September 1 – 3, 2003 were:

1. To strengthen regional peace movement and to support peace initiatives in the region in order to defuse prevailing tension among South Asian states.
2. To create atmosphere conducive for denuclearization and demilitarization through increasing people to people contact and cooperation in the region.
3. To strengthen democracy and democratic values in South Asia.
4. To affirm the role of labour in peace building and to integrate regional labour movements with peace movements in the region.
5. To assess the impact of globalization and multilateral trade agreements in the region.
6. To identify common labour concerns of the labour movements in South Asia and to evolve appropriate strategies and action plans.

7. To strengthen people to people contact and cooperation among the countries of South Asia.

The changing world trends and ideas and the role played by the civil society organisations has made the people of the region to realize that militarization of state and society is the main obstacle in building an environment of mutual trust and confidence. They also realized that confrontation would not pay any good to them but only increase their miseries and problems. Now as a result of the efforts made by the civil society organisations, it is hoped that an environment conducive for a better and normal relationship between the nations and people of the region can be achieved and the dream of a developed and prosperous South Asia may come true.

For a better future

To build a better and just social order in all countries of the region, democratisation of state and society in the region has become necessary. Similarly to counter the adverse impacts of corporate globalisation, increasing influences of IFIs on the national economies and rising unemployment in the region, downsizing of defence budgets and comparative increase in development funds and also public participation and debate on defence policy, budget and expenditures is necessary. The governments of all the states of the region should allow free mobility of all citizens of South Asia in all countries of the region, so that social, cultural and intellectual exchange may become possible. To end hostilities among the nations and people of the region, it is important to formulate an unprejudiced, unbiased and pluralistic education policy with emphasis on diversity in all countries of the region. There should be an immediate end to all kinds of violence by state and non-state actors. Protection of women's rights in all conflicts and the repeal of anti-women litigation and practices should be assured. Similarly all draconian laws impinging on civil, political and socio-economic rights of the people should immediately be withdrawn. The governments of India and Pakistan should halt deployment of nuclear weapons.