

Making of New Order in South Asia: Challenges and Border Disputes

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Abstract

In a globalised world of interconnected societies and transnational dangers, where borders appear to be more a geographical expression rather than the delineation of national interests, regional disputes are here to remind us that sovereignty still matters in the world. Throughout history, large and small states have built walls and fortifications in their frontier areas. The border remained a highly emotive issue even today, its very location contested in many places and some groups refuse to accept its legitimacy. The new border created a volatile region, linking India, Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, that has experienced wars, border conflicts, regional revolts and many forms of everyday resistance. In South Asia, among all other issues border disputes is the sensitive cause of the concern, that too regional balance got the negative impact. The main focus of the present study is to identify the factors responsible for the border disputes and Regional Order in South Asian, particularly India's border disputes with Pakistan and China.

Keywords: South Asia, Border Disputes, Regional Order, India, Demarcation, Region.

Introduction

South Asia is the most complex, unstable and one of the most socially and politically divided region of the world. The region comprises of eight states: India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. It is home to 1.4 billion people that is more than 20 per cent of the world population. Thus, about one-fifth of humanity lives between the western reaches of Afghanistan and Pakistan on one side, and the Eastern reaches of Bangladesh and India on the other. The poverty-stricken states face the worst hit of many adversities in terms of securing peace and security. The extent of human deprivation in

the region contrasts with the massive armies, modern weapons and increasing defence budgets, arms race, and nuclear power struggle, which keep the region seething with growing unrest. The criminalisation of politics and corruption undermine the democratic principles of the electoral system. It is a region that lies between the sea routes of the Indian Ocean and the land routes of Central Asia connecting Europe to the east. It is the vast reservoir of natural and human resources, making it a prime destination for financial capital, a lucrative market for trade and a source of cheap raw material. It also sits at the confidence of the richest sources of oil, gas, rubber, manganese, copper, gold, tea, cotton, rice, and jute and is the transit point for most of the resources and manufactures that criss-cross the world. It is also the most heavily militarised and bureaucratised zone in the world and it has a variety of complex and violent primordial ethnic groups.¹

The region continues to be one of the most volatile regions of the world. It is characterised by multi-ethnic societies with striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal, and sectarian lines, externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Even though it has a shared cultural background and shared political experience, challenging the national governments and frustrating their nation-building efforts, such as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The negative effect of ongoing ethnic conflicts, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, communal and political violence, terrorism, counter-terrorism, religious extremism, militarisation, gross and systemic violation of human rights, unresolved inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and subversive economic interests, etc., are visible today more than ever before in the region.²

Statement of the Problem

Border disputes are sensitive issues to be tackled with extraordinary care. The legacy of the British Empire has caused great havoc in the sub-continent since there is no clear-cut boundary of territories. The contentious issues like Indo-Pakistan and Indo-China are in a serious relationship which is worst affected due to pre-occupational and as well as interventionist activities. In South Asia, among all other issues border dispute is the sensitive cause of the concern, that too regional balance got the negative impact. The very purpose of SAARC itself got severely affected due to the survival of “we” or “you” attitude of the relevant countries.

South Asia: Border Dispute

South Asia is a region with India towering over and sharing borders, with the rest of six other countries in the area while none of them has common borders with each other. Partition, the mother of all kinds of border disputes and conflicts; of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was a defining moment in South Asian history. Communities were constituted, de-constituted and reconstituted. Nations were born. Thus partition was the terminal point of political negotiation in which the communal schism between Hindus and Muslims appeared to have been decisive policies to sustain its rule. The separation was not forced upon the subcontinent, but it emerged as the best possible alternative at a particular historical conjuncture. Although some scholars argue that it was out of the vested interests of some selfish politicians to grab the power.

Today the problem has reached an alarming proportion in some parts of Asia, particularly in South Asian sub-continent that poses a severe threat in the region. The contentious issues like Indo-Pakistan and Indo-China are in a serious relationship which is worst affected due to provocation and as well as interventionist activities. The story of this region does not support the idea that the world is becoming borderless as it globalises.

India's land borders have become one of the most severe challenges to the South Asia's stability and security due to influx of border disputes, territorial disputes, and ceasefire violations along the border sides, infiltration, human rights violations, illegal migration, terrorism, insurgency movements and their trans-border network. Secondly, the spreading of small arms throughout the states of North-East India and from there to other parts of India, the border crime, illegal border trade and trafficking of drugs, becomes the region more volatile than the whole world.

- **Present Geo-strategic Scenario**

In the current situation, India faces danger from all the nations with which it has its land boundaries, in one or the other form. The form of risk varies from purely carrying weapons to a mixture of military and non-military. India has land borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal, and China, out of which two are nuclear powers, they are Pakistan and China.³

India covers the total land area of 3, 2287,263 Km² (1,269,219 sq mi), is the second biggest country by area and second-largest country in the world. The land border of the

country is running through 92 districts in 17 states and a coastline of 7,516.60 Km's and is touching with 13 states and Union Territories. The country has 1197 beautiful islands that cover the total area of 2,094 Km's of additional coastline. Of all the states in the country, except Haryana, Delhi, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madya Pradesh, have one or more international borders or a coastline; and can be regarded as frontline states.⁴

- **Length of Indian land borders**

The total length of Indian land borders with neighbouring nations is as under.⁵

Table 1.1

| Name of the Country | Length of the Border |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Bangladesh | 4,096.70 Km (2,545.57 mi) |
| China | 3,488 Km (2167 mi) |
| Pakistan | 3,323 Km (2,065 mi) |
| Nepal | 1,751Km (1,088 mi) |
| Bhutan | 699Km (434 mi) |
| Afghanistan | 106Km (66 mi) |

Source: <http://www.britannica.com>

These borders comprise a vast variety of terrain encompassing deserts, plains, hills, mountains, high altitude and riverside areas.

South Asia: Regional Order

South Asia can historically see as a contiguous civilised area which is bound on the south by the seas and in the north by the Himalayas. The eastern and the western boundaries of the region can be found in the inhospitable Karakoram and the Hindu Kush ranges in the west and the tropical forests and the Arakan Yomas in the east. The region gained unity and legitimacy over centuries through the various empires in South Asia, demarcating its geographic and civilisational reach. The British Colonial Empire (BCE) in India was probably the most hegemonic and successful in bringing this vast swathe of land under a single sovereign space.

India's defence policies and strategic vision since Independence has been tied umbilical to the legacy of the British Empire in India. However, there were remarkable spatial differences in the post-Partition Indian state and BCE and for that matter in South Asia. The strategic unity that the British gave to the subcontinent was broken in the east and

the west. Second, the ancient Chinese empire found its feet and, by early 1950, was knocking on the doors of Tibet. These two factors are most crucial to understanding the challenges to the defence of India in the new geopolitical world. With the Chinese integration of Tibet, the strategic insulation of South Asia from China had changed forever.

Despite these differences with the BCE, India is the most enormous power in South Asia in terms of size, population and resources. India is also more significant than the rest of the South Asian states combined. Moreover, none of the South Asian countries has common boundaries with each other and India borders almost all the states in the region. Apart from its sheer size, the geographic constraint makes India the most important country in the subcontinent. In a region, the dominating power is expected to define the configuration of regional order according to its ideology and identity.⁶ The political elite in India has always believed that the country should aspire to be ranked among the great powers of the world with that belief anchored in its superior attributes including its geo-political status, hegemonic presence in South Asia, the perception of its potential economic and military capabilities, and civilisational ethos. In the past half a century, India has been obsessed with security concerns within the region and especially so in the smaller states like Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. In the steps towards the elusive excellent power status, it is essential that India manages its neighbourhood to achieve its ends and secure the region for itself.

Regional order can be maintained in two ways. The first is when the pivotal or the dominating power acts as the security manager for the entire region. The dominating power draws its legitimacy by providing public goods for the other members of the system. Such power has the potential to dramatically exacerbate the contours of conflict if disputed or challenged. In the absence of consensus and challenges to its legitimacy, the region will suffer from chronic instability. In simple terms, the pivotal power gives region cohesiveness, provides a sense of security and keeps interfering external power out. The second path to regional order stems from equal powers contending with each other to maintain stability by checking each other's ambition.

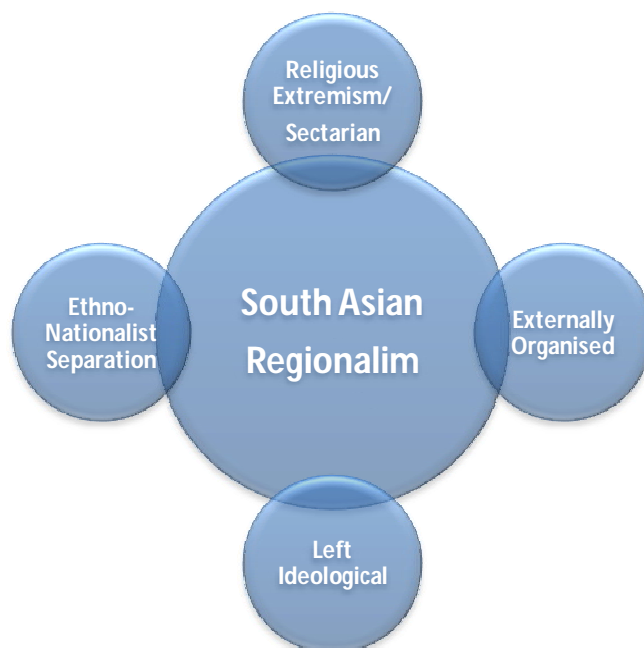
The Situation in South Asia is that none of these conditions holds. Neither has India succeeded in dominating the entire region nor has the Pakistan challenge managed to countervail India's superiority. This gap between the two positions is what is responsible for the instability in the region which precludes predictable behaviour or successful resolution of disputes. India's position in the region has been variously described as that of 'weak

unipolarity’ or ‘arrested unipolarity’. The contested unipolarity has been as much a result of an underdeveloped economy as it has been a result of the challenge from Pakistan.

The states in the region face numerous challenges that they are not in a position to overcome on their own, and certainly not by pursuing a policy of hostility towards India that only aggravates the political, security and economic problems. They need the cooperation of other major economies-US, Japan, China, Europe, Southeast Asia and the oil-producing states. However, it should be kept in mind that their political, security, economic, environmental, ethnic and cultural realities tie them to India. Efforts to construct a balance of power with the US or China with an eye to India, a standard option of the regional regimes for many years is full of hazards as Pakistan has repeatedly found in its conflicts with India, and one of diminishing returns as India’s ties with both countries grow. Given the specifics of South Asian geopolitics, anti-Indianism and balance of power diplomacy multiply the very security problems that the regimes seek to overcome through such arrangements. India too needs the cooperation of its neighbours and the rapid development of the region as a whole. India cannot be peaceful, secure and prosperous if its immediate neighbours are in disarray and conflict mode.⁷

Achieving South Asian unity of ideas on regional cooperation and security policy would mean a fundamental break with an unfortunate past. The task is arduous, daunting and likely to be time-consuming. However, if the region succeeds in overcoming its internal divisions to do so, it will almost certainly become a more thriving area, a zone of peace rather than violent conflict, and more influential on the global stage. A more united and integrated South Asia will, in turn, affect changes in the world’s geopolitical landscape in ways that are still unknown but undoubtedly positive for the people of the region and the world community.

Figure 1.2 Regional Disorder in South Asia



Source: <https://www.orfonline.org>

India-Pakistan border dispute

The boundary to be protected on India-Pakistan borders is running along with the areas of Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. It is isolated except for about 900 km of borders in J&K categorized as Line of Control (LOC) and Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) which divides the State, held off India and Pakistan-further helps it to threaten the security of the State.⁸

The two countries India and Pakistan belong to a single geopolitical unit. Their territories are interlocked. Pakistan and India, respectively, emerged as separate states on 14th and 15th of August 1947. The actual territorial award prepared by Cyril Radcliffe was an extremely hurried exercise, and both India and Pakistan resented the outcome. If the partition were intended to bring peace to the sub-continent, this would not be achieved until India and Pakistan settle their differences and begin to live together as good neighbours.⁹ The main factors which contributed to the strained relations between the two countries have been disputes over the borders and the question of Kashmir. Kashmir provides vital access to the strategic area of North-west. It is rich in mineral, hydro-electric energy and forest wealth. Its

national strategic and economic importance and the ideological differences made it the core issue of India-Pakistan relations between 1948-1965,¹⁰ and even afterwards till now.

The stalemate which had developed between India and Pakistan over Kashmir took the state out of the limelight after Nehru's death, and trouble broke out in a different area along the India-Pakistan border, known as the Rann of Kutch. Fighting occurred in the Rann of Kutch on April 9, 1965, involving infantry, tanks and heavy artillery. Early in February 1965, Pakistani armed personnel made intrusions south of the boundary between Kutch and Sind and set up two posts near Kanjarkot. The government of India protested against these intrusions and demanded that the status quo ante be restored. The then Prime Minister said in May 1965, "Pakistan had invaded and occupied Indian Territory by force...for them to sit on Indian soil and say that all outstanding matters relating to the Indo-Pakistan border should be discussed first rounds highly improper."¹¹ It was true that the exact boundary line dividing the Rann of Kutch had not been drawn. India had agreed in 1960 to discuss the matter with Pakistan and settle it through talks, but rather than adopt that course Pakistan had chosen mount an attack on India.

From 1965 onwards, the divergence between east and west wings of Pakistan in almost all matters, including that of foreign policy, increased at a higher rate. At the beginning of August 1970, the tension on the India-Pakistan border mounted again. This was followed by severe Skirmishes between Pakistani and Indian troops at some places in Uri and Tithwal in Kashmir and Poonch and Mendhar in the Jammu region during the first two weeks of September. And after the violation of the ceasefire line by Pakistani soldiers in Kargil, Naushera, Chhatnb and Akhnoor, Indian troops deeply entrenched themselves in these areas by the end of November 1970.¹² Outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan immediately after an attempt was made by a few fighter aircraft of both the Air Force to destroy on December 3, 1971 brought about a complete change and sourer relationship between the countries.¹³

Numerous measures were taken to boost the bilateral relationship, which includes the Shimla Summit, Agra Summit and the Lahore Summit. The relation between the two countries soured particularly after the Siachen conflict, the intensification of Kashmir insurgency in 1989, Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in 1988 and the 1999 Kargil war. Specific confidence-building measures-such as the 2003 ceasefire agreement and the Delhi-Lahore Bus Service-were successful in deescalating tensions.

However, these efforts have been impeded by periodic terrorist attacks. The 2001 Indian Parliament attack almost brought the two nations to the brink of nuclear war. The ‘Samjhauta Express’ bombing in 2007, which killed 68 civilians, most of whom were Pakistani, was also a crucial point in relations of both. In the 2013 BBC World Service Poll, 11% of Indians view Pakistan’s influence positively, with 45% expressing a contrary view, while 19% of Pakistan’s view India’s power decidedly, with 54% showing a negative view.¹⁴

India-China border dispute

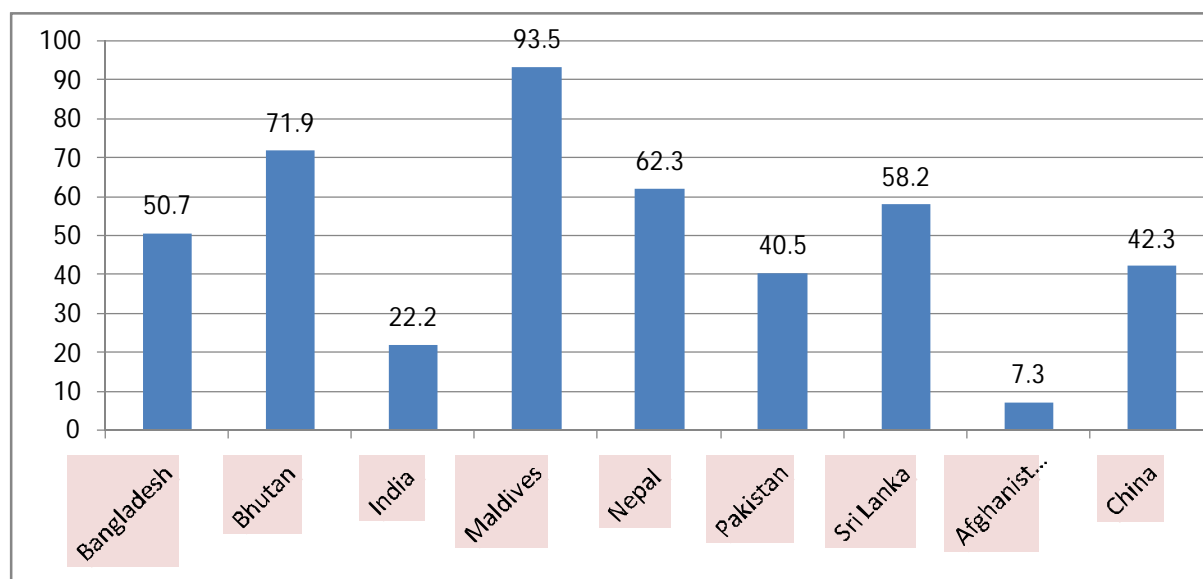
The Indo-China border can be analysed from three different sectors. The Tibetan, or now the Chinese, the frontier is a very long one, over 2000 miles. The border moves from Kilik Dawan Pass at the Afghanistan border to Mintaka Pass. Then along the ridge come Khunjerab Pass, Aghil Pass. Marpo La. Shaksgam Pass, Karakoram Pass, Qara Togh Pass, Hali Langar Pass. L. anak La, Kone La, Jara La, Charding La, Imis La in Kashmir; Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh; Thog La, Tsang Chowk La, Mana Pass, Tun Jun La. Shaishal Pass, Barcha Dhura Pass, Kiogad Pass, Kungribingri Pass. Dharma Pass and Lipu Lekh Pass in Uttar Pradesh. In NEFA the famous passes are Bum La near Bhutan border and Kangri Karmo La. These passes have been considered for a long time to be the landmarks along the Indo-Tibetan border.

It can be conveniently analysed by dividing the border into three sectors:

- a) The boundaries of the dependencies of Kashmir, viz: Gilgit Baltistan and Ladakh; (Western sector)
- b) The Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh boundaries. (the Simla Hill States, Garhwal-Kumaon in U.P) (Middle sector)
- c) Sikkim and the North-east Frontier (Eastern Sector)

The Indo-China border is controversial in all three sectors. But this border is most sensitive in the state of Arunachal Pradesh which continues to be the major source of irritation for Indo-China relations.¹⁵

Figure 1.3. Political Stability in South Asia



Source: www. TheGlobalEconomy.com

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it stated explicitly that regional cooperation could not become, directly or indirectly, the basis for a hegemonic presence of any one country. It should be created and strengthened amongst all the sovereign nations of the region because each one is an equal partner in this endeavour. The large countries in the sub-continent; India and Pakistan in particular and China's importance as a geopolitical scenario in the region. The most significant contribution to regional cooperation in South Asia will be to build trust. Will South Asia heed the call of history and rise to the occasion? Or, will the nations of the region instead prefer to keep on with their petty squabbles and risk consigning themselves and the region to the dustbin of history? The choice is crystal clear. It is that the culture of conflict and confrontations that has hitherto characterised inter-state relations in which to ensure this. South Asia must give away to a culture of consensus and cooperation. The journey from confrontationist to consensual politics is possible if the peoples of the region, as individuals and as nations, recognise the supremacy of the universal human values evolved over centuries of arduous struggle against the forces of violence, hatred and exploitation.

Findings

- Delimitation and demarcation on the ground is an essential element of management of international relations.
- The dispute between India and Pakistan has proved severely opposed to resolution because, at the bottom, it is infused with the self-images of the two states.
- The Sino-Indian dispute over their shared border along the Himalayas is unique. It is a major international dispute and one that has led to war once (in 1962) and brought the two countries to the brink of hostilities on others.
- China expressed her concern that India's operation reflected another step in its long history of expansionist border activity. Although China's sympathy was clearly with Pakistan, it supported negotiations as long as they were based on national sovereignty. China expressed its historical discomfort with intervention operations and stressed that conflict should be resolved without the further use of force.
- Pakistan noted that Kashmir was only one of several issues affecting the India-Pakistan relationship. Most participants, however, believed that the introduction of nuclear weapons has added a new dimension to the situation and that resolving the tension over Kashmir is the key to lasting peace.

Suggestions

- South Asia is home to one-fifth of humanity. Around 20% of the world's population lives in this region with plenty of problems and disputes like border disputes, territorial disputes, religious issues, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, etc. India and Pakistan peace will help other regional states to overcome their common, specifically, non-traditional problems and issues.
- India and Pakistan need to constantly engage with one another to understand each other's regulatory regimes.
- Both India and China should stand on resolving outstanding differences, including on the boundary question, through peaceful means and in a fair, reasonable, mutually acceptable and proactive manner, while ensuring that such differences are not allowed to affect the positive development of bilateral relations.

- The Special Representatives of India and China should come to take steps forward on the settlement of disputes through agreements.
- Confidence Building Measures require continuing exercise. These measures cannot resolve all the issues but can reduce tensions and improve the regional environment significantly. Existing CBMs in the military field also should be strengthened and enhanced effectively according to the requirement.
- “Good offices” will be taken to mean facilitation by a senior international official with a relevant global mandate. Such officials could include the United Nations secretary-general or the secretaries-general of regional international organisations. Concerning a specific technical dispute, good offices could also be offered by senior officials of international organisations with a relevant specialised mandate, such as the secretaries-general of specialised United Nations agencies.

Recommendations

In light of the above suggestions, South Asian countries might take several steps at various levels to improve the settlement of disputes and to ensure a peaceful border between the countries. The following measures can be adopted for efficient border management:

- Simultaneously, people along the border should be sensitised to the strategic importance of the area in the context of national security.
- Greater participation of the people in the border management should be ensured to make developmental plans along with the border areas success.
- Conducting joint training of the government agencies working in bordering regions.
- Border Area Vigilance is another aspect of border management. The concept of Village Volunteer Forces (VVF) helping in border management has a great deal to commend itself and has worked with a reasonable degree of success in areas where it has been tried so far.
- Border Area Development Programme (BADP) should be given more grants so that it can deal with all sectors of development in the border areas.

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