A Comparative Study of the Solutions and their Practicability

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War failed to bring with it the large peace dividends which many analysts and political scientists had expected. Instead, the new scenario gave birth to new internal conflicts and aggravated old ones with intra-state conflicts recurring far more than inter-state conflicts. Perhaps, it will not be an exaggeration to state that in all such conflicts more often than not it is extremism that plays its central role. According to an observer, "as the century draws to a close, terrorism is becoming the substitute for the great wars of the 1800s and early 1900s."¹

The region of South Asia is also facing multi-faceted challenges, both as a region and as inter-state relations. On the one hand, the region is plagued with varying degrees of intra and inter-state conflicts and on the other, it is confronted with the menace of extremism and terrorism which has emerged as the most important security issue. While from the greater geo-strategic perspective, the conflict between India and Pakistan over a number of contentious issues is held responsible for vitiating peace and stability in the region, the fact remains that the region as a whole has turned into a medley of conflicts. The manifestation of such conflicts is along various lines, such as inter-state strife, communal disharmony, ideological tensions, terrorism, democracy deficits, poor performance of governance, lack of distributional justice, legitimacy crisis of the regimes, identity conflicts, sub-national conflicts for the
reinvention of social boundaries, armed struggle for national self-determination etc. While the typology of conflicts in South Asia is varied in nature and that their occurrences vary from state to state, the common factor discernible in all the stated conflicts is extremism in different forms with their dramatic and devastating consequences for the people of the region and their respective human security. The region is now infested with a number of extremist groups and their violent activities with serious implications for regional peace, on the one hand, and for the human security of each individual, on the other. South Asia, long considered as a region of peace and where Gandhi's principles of non-violence emerged, is now pointed out as one of the most conflict ridden spots in the world. Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and his ideals and views seem to have now relapsed into a mere piece of history.

Although it is true that extremism in South Asia is country-specific and a complex web of factors peculiar to each of the South Asian states determine its shape, nature and intensity, it is the human security deficit that lies at the root of each of the extremist activities in the region. In other words, domestic conditions that create 'want and fear' have not been addressed properly in South Asia.

In view of the above, the paper argues that state-centric approach towards addressing extremism in South Asia should give its way to the human security approach that focuses on vulnerability of the people and aims to address the root causes to prevent extremism in the region. Once an understanding of the vulnerabilities and the root causes of extremism is gained, it becomes easier to find a solution and root out this menace.

A Glimpse of Extremism in South Asia

All the major countries of South Asia have witnessed, over the past two decades, the rise of dangerous forms of extremism.
India has seen the rise of an extremist Hindu nationalism. Pakistan is seen to have promoted Islamic militancy and terrorism and has become a hotbed of terrorist activities despite being a partner in the US global war against terrorism. In Sri Lanka, although the extremist activities of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are over, the island is not free as yet from political and religious extremism in its post-conflict phase. In Nepal, democracy has not yet consolidated and infighting between the various political factions may pave the way for extremism at any time in the future. In Bangladesh, the threat of Islamic militancy and extremism still remains in force. Moreover, extreme leftist groups are still active with their extremist agendas in few parts of the country, however disorganized and splintered they may be. While the rise of extremism is explained by the politico-economic, socio-cultural and psychological factors peculiar to each of the South Asian polities, the fact remains that the phenomenon has, in recent times, manifested itself in some macabre forms. South Asia is now faced with the challenge of countering extremism without inciting new ones. The catalogue of various extremist activities in South Asia is a long one, and to grasp it better, a country wise scenario of extremist activities is presented below in a tabular form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Nature of Extremism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Communal violence (Babri Masjid Affair, Gujrat holocaust of 2002), militant activities by the organizations oriented with Hindutva ideology, Sikh nationalism, separatist movement in Kashmir and Northeast, inter-caste and ethnic violence etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Religious extremism (against the Shiite and Ahmadiya Communities), terrorism, Islamization of politics, sectarian and ethnic strife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Culture of violence (crime and violence), Islamic militancy, ultra-left extremism and low key ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Extremism Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Ethnic, communal and linguistic violence, Buddhist chauvinism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Rise of Maoist extremism, inter-caste violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Ethnic violence and separatist movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Tendency towards radical Islam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As depicted in the table, the typology of extremism appears to be of same nature in so far as violent and terrorist activities accompany the phenomenon. Globally speaking, the phenomenon of extremism in South Asia finds its deep root in socio-economic inequalities and politically manipulative processes. This would include political and social perpetration by tyrannical, aggressive and undemocratic regimes and groups of rebels, oppression of cultural norms, social injustice, ideological contradictions, rigid religious beliefs\(^2\), gender bias etc. A host of socio-economic factors like abysmal poverty, unequal job opportunities, hunger, diseases, backwardness, unemployment, environmental degradation etc. have contributed to make the regional extremist scenario even worse. It is also important to take note of two other important factors for boosting extremism in South Asia. First, frequent interference by the extra-regional powers and second, interference and intervention by the neighbouring countries as extremism has cross-border implications in the region due to complex geographical, historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic reasons. A study on human development in South Asia sponsored by United Nations has held the governments responsible for the declining human security situation in the region. Declaring the region as one of the worst governed in the world, the study criticized the ruling elites for corruption, inefficient bureaucracy, and discrimination against women.\(^3\) Under these precarious conditions the rise of extremism was but a predictable phenomenon, threatening the security and stability of the whole of the South Asian region.
The Solutions and their Practicability

What have been the approaches of the respective South Asian governments in encountering extremism and terrorism in the region? It may be mentioned that extremism being a specific national problem of the respective South Asian countries, each government dealt with the problem on its own accord. It has been observed that on most occasions, the policies adopted by the South Asian governments for arresting extremism were faulty both politically and economically. At the outset, there had been the 'blame game' played by all the regional actors as each blamed the other for either spawning, encouraging or sustaining extremism and terrorism to the detriment of the other. Nevertheless, some of the approaches that the South Asian governments undertook to arrest the scourge of extremism and terrorism are discussed below:

Use of Force: At the operational level, both short term and long term strategies of the South Asian countries stressed on the use of force or resorted to coercive means to suppress extremist activities in the region by overlooking or remaining indifferent to the political and economic components of the adopted strategies. The argument put forward in favour of such approach is that extremism or for that matter, terrorism is primarily a security concern that requires military response. If terror is not confronted forcefully and urgently, it will spread, get entrenched, become more powerful getting out of control. Little importance is attached to getting in depth and look for the root causes of such menaces ailing the region. It is argued that looking for root causes is a long term strategy which needs time. Hence, the emphasis is put more on dismantling and destroying the structure, leadership, resources and capabilities of the extremist outfits by the use of force. As such all the South Asian countries are strongly inclined toward this approach emphasizing more on the visible and operational aspects of extremism and terrorism. They argue that even if the
root causes of deprivation and discrimination are not addressed, terrorism will cripple down if their organizational structures are destroyed by military means. Although the use of force has been a dominant form of response of the South Asian states, it has not yielded the desired results except in very few cases. The cases of Punjab and more recently of Sri Lanka are often cited as success stories of quelling down of extremism by military means. But the fact which is overlooked in these cases is that it was not only the use of force that doused the fire of extremism. Political action, particularly holding elections and an agreement between the central government and the local Punjabi leadership, also played a very important role in ending the crisis in Punjab. In the case of Sri Lanka, one observes a multilogue of strategies ranging from containment and devolution package to international pressure. At the international level, categorization of the LTTE after 9/11 as terrorist organization put the LTTE under tremendous pressure isolating it literally. Moreover, there was also the war fatigue on the part of the Tamil population suggesting LTTE losing support. It is pertinent to point out also that the ongoing conflict in the Northeast region of India is a testimony to the fact that military means is of no avail unless pursued simultaneously with other efforts.

It is quite apparent by now that a purely military solution will not quell extremism. The use of military force to solve extremism in any of its forms alone will not suffice; it can at best be an enabling instrument. If extremism is understood as a state of mind, then it is not only a military problem and that military solution would prove to be simply counter-productive. As the sage says, “You can’t bomb ideas”. Responses need to be found by examining the root causes of the problem. Destroying the structure of terrorism, its capabilities, leadership organization, credibility etc may give respite from violence and restore peace and order for a while but for any
enduring resolution of terrorism generating conflicts, the root causes have to be addressed, grievances and alienation have to be mainstreamed and redressed.\textsuperscript{4} The use of force strategy can also sometimes violate and impinge on human rights. Furthermore, the use of force approach has also serious economic consequences. The defence burden of the countries facing the menace has grown disturbing other sectors because the increase was at the cost of economic and social sectors as resources had to be diverted.

\textbf{Political Accommodation:} The South Asian states have also responded to deal with extremism through offers of political accommodation or peace accords. The main purpose was to deal with the issue politically through negotiations while buying time to address underlying socio political causes of the conflict. This approach has essentially been a follow up of military options and has helped in containment of insurgency. Mizoram and the Chittagong Hill Tracts accords are the two examples. It may be mentioned that this approach can also prove futile if political commitments are not honoured or there is a lack of seriousness in implementation.

\textbf{Third Party Mediation:} Yet another response mechanism has been third party mediation. Norway was involved in the peace process between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE since 1997. The basis for the peace process was the acknowledgement by both parties that the conflict, which claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1983, cannot be resolved militarily. In February 2000, Norway agreed to a request from President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the LTTE leader Vellipulai Prabhakaran to assist the process as a third party. After the December 2001 parliamentary election, both the new Sri Lankan government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE officially requested Norway to continue to assist the parties in the peace process. The role of Norway was to assist the parties in their efforts to reach a
political solution. Norway's activities focused in large part on help to facilitate communication between the parties, minimize misunderstandings, and seek common ground between their positions as the foundation for a peace process. Norway also supplemented the regular communication activities of the parties, by briefing various actors in Sri Lanka and internationally. The intervention, however, failed to produce any tangible result essentially due to certain basic contradictions in the approach that has affected public perceptions.

**Civil Society Intervention:** The role of civil society organizations in peace building and peace making in conflict situations are also often cited. A number of civil society organizations have attempted to involve themselves in track II diplomacy between India and Pakistan. However, mostly the civil society has either been absent or has played only a subsidiary role in such situations. However, a relatively higher degree of civil society activism has been witnessed in India's Northeast. The Church took a leading role in putting an end to Mizo insurgency in 1996. It also played a significant role in bringing the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) to the negotiating table. Similarly, civil society activities have also been noticed in states like Manipur.

In brief, in the absence of a comprehensive approach for addressing the grievances of the general masses, the menace of extremism and radicalism is yet to be eradicated from the South Asian soil. The imperative for the regional governments is to revise their policies of self justification and redress the grievances of the general population in a genuine manner. In other words, the socio-economic problems and issues of human security need to be placed in the highest priority list by the governments as these are the main causes of frustration among the masses and particularly among the educated, unemployed
youth who become easy recruits for the radical organizations for their extremist and terrorist activities. In addition to the individual state efforts to deal with extremism, a concerted human security oriented regional approach is also required as the problem, as mentioned earlier, has a significant regional dimension. It is only when the state and the people work together and there is a sustained interface between them, can they respond to terrorism in a manner that is most effective and long term. Nothing can affect terrorists more than the critique from the moderate Islamic forces that reject their fanaticism and religious intolerance.

Why Human Security?

The state-centric approach towards addressing the extremist activities in South Asia has not yielded any positive result as yet. It can, rather, be argued that the use of military means has been a push factor for extremism in many cases. By arresting the perpetrators of extremist acts without understanding the root causes as to why such acts have been committed, extremism will remain a threat to the state and its people. Human security is, thus, considered as the most appropriate approach or strategy for understanding the causes of extremism and as well addressing them in an appropriate manner. Perhaps, there is no gainsaying that despite North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) overwhelming military power and successive US surge of forces, the crisis in Afghanistan is still far from being resolved. The growing sentiment now is in favour of massive development works in the country.

The rationale behind adopting a human security approach for understanding extremism and its causes is explained by certain facts. First, freedom from want and freedom from fear, two important ingredients of human security, are relevant in
case of extremism as it originates from ‘want’, i.e., political, economic, social and cultural deprivation of various types. As quite aptly observed by Malek Sitez, Project Manager for Afghanistan at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, “the lack of observance of economic, social and cultural rights in Afghanistan is one of the major reasons, why people are open to manipulation by religious leaders. People turn towards extremism as a means to define a position in life, express dissatisfaction and find a way out of the desperate situation in which they live”. On the fear side, the effects of extremism are simply outrageous in terms of loss of human life, assassination, intimidation, rape, forced expulsion, systematic slaughter, displacement of persons, gross violation of human rights and the like. Second, as human security permits one to delineate the risks, insecurities, vulnerabilities of the state and people at several levels (individual, community, national, regional and international) solutions to such problems can become less problematic as each level is where the problems lay, but also each level is where the solution can be found. Failure to do so encourages risks to accumulate and affect the next level. For example, social exclusion does not allow participation in community decision making whereas national policies can not be properly designed or implemented if they do not involve the community. Third, human security approach permits analysts to understand why people resort to extremism which is not an overnight phenomenon. As the factors influencing extremism are not sudden and that its growth follows a long trajectory, it becomes easy to accurately evaluate its causes through a step by step process. Fourth, human security recognizes individuals as the victims of extremism due to domestic grievances arising out of economic deprivation, political oppression, government repression, ethnic and religious persecution etc. This realization leads to an appreciation of the essential role of the root causes of extremism. Thus, for example, if terrorism is
treated merely based on its symptoms with the primary focus on arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators and without addressing the underlying causes, it will remain a perennial threat to human security. **Fifth**, human security permits vulnerability assessment approach. This helps to identify people, property and resources that are at risk of injury, damage or loss from extremist activities. This information is important to help determine and prioritize the precautionary or preventive measures in order to arrest extremism or conflict in any society. The approach is somewhat analogous to genetic analysis in medical profession done to determine the likelihood of an illness in the hope that it may be prevented or detected earlier. **Finally**, human security approach advocates security oriented development which is holistic, proactive and conflict reducing. It is, perhaps, with this consideration in mind that the United Nations (UN) framed its global counter-terrorism strategy that is regarded as a human security sensitive approach for preventing and combating terrorism. It has a four pillar plan of action. The UN counter extremism strategy has placed emphasis not only on state security but also on human security. When these two are not sufficiently balanced, the four pillar action programme tends to become distorted. For example, the building of state capacity under the third pillar does not mean only the strengthening of the capacity of law enforcement agencies to deal with terrorist threats. It also includes a host of other things such as the strengthening the state’s capacity to deliver goods and services to the people, capacity of criminal justice officials to perform their functions while upholding the values of human rights and the rule of law, human rights education for security forces etc. It was adopted by consensus in the UN General Assembly in 2006, and as such all the SAARC countries have endorsed it. However, as pointed out, the SAARC countries have not paid equal attention to all four pillars of the action programme, particularly the fourth pillar-
commitment to uphold the rule of law and human rights. Therefore, SAARC approach to counter terrorism remains mostly a security and law enforcement approach.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be stated that as there exists an interrelationship between the human security and state security-centric approaches for responding to extremism, the latter in its military form would remain, as stated earlier, simply as an enabling factor. The state-centric approach, in harmony with the ideals of human security, must realize that ‘state system exists to serve the needs of humanity and thus it should be made politically, economically, socially, culturally and morally strong for all time’. Failure to do so will result in a state’s weakness in politico-economic and socio-cultural spheres thereby leading to frustration and deprivation among/of the general masses and keep the South Asian societies vulnerable to all-time risks and dangers of extremism and its grievous impacts. Responses thus need to be found bringing in the concept of human security approach.

Endnotes

1 Walter Lacqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism”, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 75, No. 5, 1999, p. 34.

