

Zohra Akhter
Mohammad Towheedul Islam
Mohd Aminul Karim

IMPEDIMENTS TO COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION IN SOUTH ASIA: A THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

Abstract

South Asia as a region has been facing the challenges of transnational terrorism and extremism – be it religious fundamentalism, separatist or left-wing – for more than three decades. The irony, however, is that escalation of terrorism in South Asia along with its political division has made it easier-said-than-done to have meaningful regional collaboration on the issue. The purpose of this paper is to find out the factors, which hinder effective counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia. Based on the “Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)”, this paper argues that the security structure in South Asia is uniquely characterised by historical mistrust among its members, specially its bipolar conflictual power structure. It further argues that the nature of conflict formation in South Asia has facilitated the rise and sustenance of transnational terrorism. Finally, it contends that extreme reliance on the zero-sum notion of security by South Asian states prevents the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to emerge as an effective counter-terrorism organisation on a regional basis.

1. Introduction

Terrorism has emerged as one of the greatest challenges to the security and socio-economic development of all South Asian nations. In South Asia, terrorism has a relatively long history that emerged on the security landscape of the region at a time when the focus of international security was on deterrence, nuclear disarmament and strategic weapons. The multi-ethnic social fabric with historical mistrust and violence along religious, communal and linguistic lines both within and between nations make South Asia a complex political region. The security issues, therefore, often have external and internal dynamics. As a corollary, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, leftists or insurgents have a transnational dimension. Geographical proximity and porous borders naturally facilitate cooperation among the terrorist groups. Moreover, the laxity in legal and financial regimes, the proliferation of small arms, drug trafficking, poor socioeconomic conditions and corruptions in South Asian

Zohra Akhter is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Relations, East West University, Dhaka. Her email address is: zakterbd@gmail.com; **Mohammad Towheedul Islam** is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. His email address is: towheedul@gmail.com; **Mohd Aminul Karim, PhD** is Senior Research Fellow at the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His email address is: mdaminulkarim1967@gmail.com.

© Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), 2015.

countries have created an advantageous context for these groups to burgeon and spread their extremist ideologies. South Asian countries, thus far, have addressed the issue of terrorism individually without much cooperation and coordination with other countries in the region. Due to the transnational character of terrorism in South Asia, it is not possible to combat terrorism effectively without meaningful regional counter-terrorism cooperation. The irony is that though terrorism has been identified as a common threat to all the South Asian countries, they have failed to formulate a common policy to tackle this transnational threat.

As such, the main purpose of the paper is to identify the factors that hinder effective counter-terrorism cooperation among South Asian nations. It is to be noted that an effective counter-terrorism policy is to be linked with a well-articulated strategic communication plan and a more sophisticated development policy that imply addressing ideological drivers of terrorism and should attempt to: a) mitigate existential anxiety, b) provide a compelling counter-narrative, c) address environmental factors conducive to radicalisation, d) prevent the formation of radicalised groups and e) de-radicalise existing ideologues.¹ South Asia seems to be away from such initiatives. The paper attempts to analyse the impediments to counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia under the theoretical underpinning of Regional Security Complex (RSC). The research questions of the paper are thus set as to why South Asian states have failed to forge an effective regional counter-terrorism initiative including regional cooperation/integration? Is the bipolar security structure of the region hindering such an initiative? Are terrorism and insurgency that thrive in the region linked up with the security structure of the region? Is the transnational character of terrorism and insurgency making the scenario complex?

Keeping such formulation in perspective, the paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 provides an introduction while Section 2 presents a brief description on terrorism/insurgency in South Asia. Section 3 offers a conceptual framework on the basis of Regional Security Complex and would explore preconditions for successful regional cooperation for counter-terrorism. On the basis of the conceptual framework, Section 4 explores the power and security structure in South Asia through the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Applying RSCT, the Section 5 analyses the context of the rise of terrorism/insurgency and reasons for lack of counter-terrorism cooperation. Section 6 finally concludes the paper.

2. An Overview of Transnational Terrorism in South Asia

South Asia, a region with eight nation-states,² has a rich history of culture, civilisation and politics. The region is home to thirty percent of the world's population

¹ Megan K. McBride, "The Logic of Terrorism: Existential Anxiety, the Search for Meaning, and Terrorist Ideologies", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2011, pp. 560-581.

² Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

and is surrounded by Central Asia, East Asia and the Indian Ocean. At present, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, religious fundamentalism, in transnational mode, is presumably considered the gravest threat to the security and stability of South Asia. Four out of eight South Asian nations namely Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh experience menace of religious fundamentalism intermittently. This form of terrorism has become more complex over time because of the interplay of global, regional and local security dynamics in these countries.

These dynamics have been reinforced by multiple types of religion based terrorist groups - global, regional and local. *Al-Qaeda*, the most globalised and diffused terrorist network to date, has been heavily engaged in South Asia, mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, since one of the main goals of this network has been to fight the United States and its western allies (the far enemy) as well as to overthrow their friendly regimes in other parts of Muslim world (the near enemy) including South Asia.³ The areas including Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Af-Pak border have been considered as a stronghold of *Al-Qaeda*, which make it easier to carry out terrorist operations simultaneously in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴ *Al-Qaeda* also inspired many to establish quasi-global terrorist organisations⁵ with *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)* of Baitullah Mehsud being a glaring example.⁶ Founded in 2007, this terrorist organisation embraced *Al-Qaeda's* global agenda of a global caliphate and establishing *sharia* in Pakistan even though it is primarily concerned with local tribal issues.⁷ Along with these international terrorist groups, a handful of regional terrorist groups have also been operating in this region with *Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)* and *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI)* being the most active groups across Pakistan and India. These regional groups primarily aim at establishing an Independent Islamic state in Kashmir⁸ while their regional agenda also includes the enforcement of *sharia law* in Pakistan and some other parts of South Asia. Because of such reformulation, it actively supports and collaborates with other terrorist groups that are active in this region. Besides, some terrorist groups in this region emerged focusing purely on local agenda.

Among others, *Afghan Taliban*, *Pakistan Taliban*, *Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB)* and the *Hizbut Tawhid* are pursuing their local agenda of making their respective countries of operation into theocracies, which understandably relates to *Al-Qaeda's*

³ C. Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones, "Securing Afghanistan: Getting on Track", USIP Working Paper, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2009, p.4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ R. D. Howard, "Understanding Al-Qaeda's Application of the New Terrorism - The Key to Victory in the Current Campaign", in R. D. Howard and R. L. Sawyer (eds.), *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Understanding New Security Environment*, Boston: Mc Graw Hill, 2006, p. 95.

⁶ Isaac Kafir, "Pakistan and the Challenge of Islamist Terror: Where to Next?", *Middle East Review on International Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2008, p. 3.

⁷ International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey*, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 47.

⁸ R. Eric, N. C. Fink and J. Ipe, *Countering Terrorism in South Asia: Strengthening Multilateral Engagement*, New York: Centre for Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and International Peace Institute, 2009, p. 3.

goal of establishing caliphate in this region. It is widely believed that there is a clear convergence of the objectives of all the terrorist groups, be it global, regional or local, in the region. Here the dichotomy over whether *Al-Qaeda* is “leaderless” (Sageman)⁹ or “leader-led” (Hoffmann)¹⁰ may be contextualised. Perhaps both the assertions are relevant in such milieu. But Neumann, Evans and Pantucci’s thesis, that does not contradict either Sageman or Hoffmann (meaning a bit of both), that “a group of middle managers who provide the connective tissue that links the top of the organisation with its bottom and, thus, makes it possible for *Al-Qaeda* to function as a coherent and operationally effective entity”¹¹ also deserves recognition here. As it is noticed that their preferred tactics of attacks are also the same. They draw inspirations from top and seem operating independently through some links like the middle managers. Middle managers are, nonetheless, “experienced and skilled”¹².

Thus said, because of ideological and operational convergence, there is understandably a high degree of collaboration among these organisations that make counter-terrorism efforts more challenging. The Former US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates once alleged that “*Al-Qaeda*, the Taliban, the *Haqqani network*, *Hizb-e-Islami (Gulbuddin)* and other affiliated groups are ‘all working together’ in safe havens on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line.”¹³ However, McCauly and Moskalkenko argue little differently, somewhat similar to the earlier argument, “The original *Al-Qaeda* was an organisation of groups or cells, but today the groups are mostly on their own and disconnected from any larger organisation.”¹⁴

Over and above these organisations, the menace of left-wing terrorism often affects South Asian nations specially India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Maoist insurgency is more volatile in India and Nepal. In Nepal, Maoist insurgency which was launched against the monarchy for ensuring land rights of the Nepali people that ended with the formal integration of them into national politics in 2006.

Maoist extremists have been active in India since 1960s. They target the rural ruling class who have oppressed the common people over the years. Indian security personnel are directly targeted by these groups. They killed more than 200 security personnel during the first half of 2010.¹⁵ The then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan

⁹ M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

¹⁰ B. Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama Bin Laden Still Matters”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3, 2008, pp. 133-138.

¹¹ Peter Neumann, Ryan Evans and Raffaello Pantucci, “Locating Al Qaeda’s Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 34, No. 11, 2011, pp. 825-842.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 829.

¹³ K. A. Kronstadt, “Pakistan-U.S. Relations”, CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC: Library of Congress, 2009, p.11.

¹⁴ Clark McCauly and Sophia Moskalkenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways towards Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2008, p. 417.

¹⁵ M. Kugelman, “Looking In, Looking Out: Surveying India’s Internal and External Security Challenges”, in M. Kugelman (ed.), *India’s Contemporary Security Challenges*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011, p. 7.

Singh once identified left-wing Maoist extremism as “India’s gravest security threat”,¹⁶ Maoist insurgent groups of India namely the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI), the People’s War Group (PWG), *the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)*, *the Jharkhand Disham Party (JDP)* and others are more active in the red corridor, an area which is adjacent to Nepal in the North and Andhra Pradesh of India in the South.¹⁷

These groups often attack the patrolling paramilitary forces and apply other terror tactics. Indian Maoist insurgent groups still receive support from their Nepalese comrades. The Nepali Maoist leader Prachanda played a key role in the merger of the two principal groups, the CPI and the MCCI in 2004.¹⁸ The Nepalese Communist Party publicly admitted that they provide support to the CPI (Maoist) with arms and sanctuaries.¹⁹

Though not as strong as they are in India, left-wing communist extremist groups are active in rural areas of the southwestern and the Northwestern parts of Bangladesh.²⁰ As Bangladesh and India share common borders in those regions, leftist extremists of both countries ostensibly often collaborate among themselves across the borders in terms of providing shelters and arms. The left-wing extremist groups in general have been strengthening their regional coordination. For example, in 2001, Nepalese Maoists, MCCI, People’s War Groups, *Purbo Banglar Communist Party* of Bangladesh, Communist Party of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and many Indian leftist extremist groups formed the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA).²¹

Northeastern part of India has been the hotbed of different types of insurgency over the years. One of the widely known groups is the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The insurgents of ULFA have been using violent means to achieve ‘national self-determination’ for the Assamese people since 1979. They pose security threat to India along the vulnerable area called “Chicken’s Neck”, a narrow strategic route in the northeastern part of India. They mainly target Indian security personnel. Due to this insurgency 10,000 people lost their lives over the last two decades.²² Apart from the ULFA, there are other insurgent groups like *the National Democratic Front for Bodoland (NDFB)* that made security concerns for law enforcing agencies in the Northeastern part of India. Like the ULFA, these groups are also involved in insurgency to achieve

¹⁶ Shalendra Sharma, “India in 2010: Robust Economics amid Political Stasis”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 51, No. 1, January/February 2011, p.112.

¹⁷ Alpa Shah and Judith Pettigrew, “Windows into a Revolution: Ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia”, *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 33, No. 3-4, 2009, p. 225.

¹⁸ J. Harriss, *The Naxalite/Maoist Movement in India: A Review of Recent Literature*, Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Working Paper, No. 109, Singapore: ISAS, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁹ A. K. Kristian, “The Naxalite Insurgency in India”, *Geopolitical Monitor*, 17 May 2010, available at <http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-naxalite-insurgency-in-india-3823>, accessed on 3 April 2011.

²⁰ Zohra Akhter, “Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh”, in Farooq Sobhan (ed.), *Trends in Militancy in Bangladesh: Possible Responses*, Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 2010, p.18.

²¹ C. H. Singh, *South Asia Defence and Strategic Year Book 2010*, Pentagon Press, 2010, p. 63; J. K. Ray, *Aspects of India’s International relations, 1700 to 2000: South Asia and the World*, Pearson Education India, 2007, p. 236.

²² “Five Killed in Assam Bomb Blast”, *The Dawn*, 02 February 2011.

their goals. Such groups are understandably, ideologically or logistically connected to each other. Moreover, the porous border of this region facilitates to establish regional connection among these groups.

As far as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are concerned, separatist movements in these countries have lost their momentum. The separatist movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh and the separatist movement by *the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)* in Sri Lanka were defused after the Government of Bangladesh had signed the CHT Peace Accord with the insurgents in 1997 and following the defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan government forces in 2009 respectively. Tamil insurgents were successful in establishing transnational connections across South Asia and beyond. Their strength was augmented partly due to "their ideological, economic, and technological ties to other insurgent groups"²³ The LTTE had close connections with Sikh insurgents, Kashmiri *Mujahedeen* and several Tamil Nadu separatist groups.²⁴

Babbar Khalsa (BKI), Khalishta Zindabad Force (KZF), Khalishta Commando Force (KCF) or other *Khalistan Sikh* insurgent groups in India have been engaged in such movements to create an independent Sikh state. The root of this insurgent movement dates back to the 20th century which was inspired by religious nationalism. However, the movement got momentum in 1980s with the raid of the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar and the death of Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

3. Conceptual Framework

The world consists of sovereign nation-states that emerged through the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Because of this century-old Westphalian system, states jealously guard their sovereignty and territorial integrity in the anarchic international system. Security defined in terms of territorial integrity and national sovereignty has been the focus of states' strategic thinking. Realist scholars argue that the possibility of security cooperation among the states is very slim in this anarchic structure where threats to states' national sovereignty emerge from other states. Regional security experts, however, argue that as states within a region share more commonalities amongst themselves, the possibility of security cooperation at regional levels is greater.²⁵

²³ Cécile Van de Voorde, "Sri Lankan Terrorism: Assessing and Responding to the Threat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, May, 2005, p. 192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. d. Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; B. Buzan and O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 44.; A. D. Lake and P. M. Morgan, "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs", in David A. Lake and P. M. Morgan (eds.), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.; A. D. Lake, "Regional Hierarchy: Authority and Local International Order", in R. Fawn (ed.), *Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.; E. Adler, and M. Barnett, "Security Communities in Theoretical Perspective", in E. Adler and M. Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.; E. Adler and P. Greve, "When Security Community Meets Balance of Power: Overlapping

As states value their national sovereignty and territorial integrity most, the first and prime prerequisite for regional cooperation is the assurance of national sovereignty. Deutsch's idea of "pluralistic security community" which is dependent on real assurance that the members of the community will not fight each other physically, but settle their disputes in some other ways,²⁶ therefore, has to be implemented at the regional level. This implies the importance of trust and the policy of non-interference for enhancing regional security cooperation. According to Acharya, the development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) exemplifies this principle when consensus building and mutual respects for state sovereignty to address disputes help to flourish ASEAN as a nascent security community.²⁷ However, community-building is a great challenge and that may even take a long time.

Common threat perceptions and a shared identity, the two mutually dependent prerequisites, are also pertinent for regional security cooperation. Common threat perceptions play a pivotal role in uniting nations within the region are necessary for creating common interests that "are important in determining elementary goals"²⁸ and a shared identity. The creation of a common identity, as seen through the lens of structuralism, depends on a binary: "self" and "other" where "self" is considered to be good and 'other' to be bad. Derrida²⁹ often speaks of this relationship in terms of a structural parasitism because the existence of "self" depends on the existence of "other".³⁰ Therefore, identifying 'other' in security relations involves securitisation process while 'we-ness' of the actors of the region "links their securitisation together".³¹ Thus, "shared interests and purposes among nations create and maintain demand for interdependence and cooperation"³² and facilitate the environment for common security policy against the "other".

All these preconditions for regional security cooperation are dependent on the RSC of a particular region. As security is a "relational phenomenon,"³³ the consideration of

Regional Mechanisms of Security Governance", in R. Fawn (ed.), 2009, *op. cit.*; R. Fawn, "Regions and Their Study: Wherefrom, What for and Where to?" in R. Fawn (ed.), 2009, *op. cit.*

²⁶ W. K. Deutsch, S. A. Burrell, R. A. Kann, M. Lee, Jr., M. Lichteman, R. E. Lindgren, F. L. Loewenheim and R. W. Wagenen, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 5.

²⁷ Cited in Andrew Chau, "Security Community and Southeast Asia: Australia, the US, and ASEAN's Counter-Terror Strategy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2008, p. 627.

²⁸ M. Alagappa, "Constructing Security Order in Asia: Concepts and Issues", in M. Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, California, USA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 35.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978.

³⁰ Cited in R. Devetak, "Postmodernism", in S. Burchill, A. Linklater, R. Devetak, J. Donnelly, T. Nardin, M. Paterson, C. Reus-Smit and J. True (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, New York, USA: Palgrave, 2009, p. 169.

³¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, "Macrosecritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2009.

³² Rasul Bakhsh Rais, "Integration and Community Formation in South Asia: Need for Institutions, Norms and Values", *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2001. p.119.

³³ B. Buzan, "A Framework for Security Analysis", in B. Buzan and Gowher Rizvi (eds.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986, p. 4.

a significant common security challenge in a given region as an “other” by the countries concerned depends on the nature of the conflict formation and security structure of the region. In other words, the creation of “we-ness” depends on both historical and current relationships among and between nations of the region.

RSCT defines RSC as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another.”³⁴ As RSCT focuses on the “amity and enmity” on the basis of historical analysis, its constructivist root tends to identify the security structure of the region³⁵ and what happens in the region.³⁶ As such, RSC is the result of the interplay between “the anarchic structure and its balance-of-power consequences” and “pressure of the geographical proximity” while the structure and character of the region are determined by the power relations and patterns of amity and enmity.³⁷ This helps to identify the polarity – unipolar, bipolar, tripolar or multipolar structures of power and the pattern of relationship – enemy, rival or friend that dominates the regional system.³⁸

Depending on the nature of polarity and the pattern of relationship, region and securitisation can be linked positively or negatively.³⁹ In a positively developed relations, the possibility of creating “we-ness” in response to the threat of “other” is higher while in negatively developed relations security problem cannot emerge as “other” to create “we-ness” but rather states perceive each other as threats. Moreover, insecurity issues which are identified as common security problems can be used by state(s) as a means to counter the opponent state(s). Lake identifies that bipolar regional structure is more prone to conflict.⁴⁰ Therefore, in such a security structure the possibility to develop positive relationship to tackle security threats within a region is limited. Applying this conceptual framework, the next section will explore the security structure of South Asian region; the context of the rise of terrorism within the structure; why states in this region fail to develop a shared identity of “we” to counter the “other” (terrorism) and the failure of SAARC to have emerged as a vibrant regional institution and its failure to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation within the region.

4. RSTC and Regional Security Structure of South Asia

Focusing primarily on historical developments, the RSCT identified that security structure of South Asia has been mainly characterised by conflictual relations

³⁴ B. Buzan and O. Waever, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Peter Jones, “South Asia: Is a Regional Security Community Possible?”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2008, p.184.

³⁷ B. Buzan and O. Waever, 2003, *op. cit.* pp. 45-49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

³⁹ Amer Rizwan, “South Asian Security Complex and Pakistan-United States Relations Post 9/11”, *IPRI Journal*, Vol. X, No. 2, Summer 2010, p. 41.

⁴⁰ A. D. Lake, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

between India and Pakistan and India and other small neighbouring states. Moreover, as India and Pakistan are the two biggest powers in this region, conflictual relations between the two forms a bipolar regional power and security structure. According to Buzan and Waever, "India and Pakistan were born fighting each other in 1947 which had been a social security problem of religious conflict between the Muslim League and the Congress Party; it, however, transformed into an interstate, military-political one between an Islamic Pakistan and a secular, multicultural, but dominantly Hindu India. Political rivalry based on religion was long-running in South Asia and in that sense represented continuity."⁴¹

India's secular constitution was an ideological and practical challenge for Pakistan polity which was based on religion. In fact, there was heightened suspicion on the part of Pakistanis that India had an intention to reunite the subcontinent under its hegemonic cloak. On the other hand, Pakistan's consolidation on the basis of religion was also, in turn, considered a challenge to Indian polity based on fragile multiethnic social fabric.⁴² Since the partition in 1947, the relations between the countries have been mainly deteriorating over the Kashmir issue because it was not merely a territorial dispute but was deeply intertwined in the domestic politics and ideologies of India and Pakistan.⁴³ This Kashmir problem in particular provoked three wars between India and Pakistan in 1947-1948, 1965 and 1999 and created war-like situations in 1984, 1987 and 1990.⁴⁴ Moreover, India's support to the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 against Pakistan further complicated their relations. All these "intensified Pakistan's perception of India as its chief adversary."⁴⁵

South Asian RSC is mainly dominated by India. India's geographical size, its resources, market structure and military strength create an asymmetric power structure vis-à-vis its neighbours. Moreover, when the British colonial power left the region, it did not consider ethnic homogeneity in demarcating national boundaries which created ethnic heterogeneity for each state of multiethnic South Asia.

India shares not only common borders but also ethnic, religious and cultural similarities with all its neighbours.⁴⁶ Rather than affecting positively, such closeness and similarities create tensions and troubles in their relations. Among other things, territorial and maritime boundary disputes, tensions over water and resource-sharing, cross-border migration, terrorism and transnational crime affect their relations on a regular basis. For instance, with regard to Indo-Bangla relations, water sharing of common rivers have created bilateral tensions and led to "an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust."⁴⁷

⁴¹ B. Buzan and O. Waever, 2003, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁴² Barry Buzan, "South Asia Moving Towards Transformation: Emergence of India as a Great power", *International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2002, pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Gowher Rizvi, "The Rivalry Between India and Pakistan", in B. Buzan and G. Rizvi (eds.), 1986, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁴⁴ Shekhar Gupta, "India Redefining its Role", *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 35 |, issue: 293, 1995, p. 52.

⁴⁵ Richard J. Kozicki, "The Changed World of South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India After September 11", *Asia-Pacific: Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Gowher Rizvi, "The Role of the Smaller States in the South Asian Complex", in B. Buzan and Gowher Rizvi, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁴⁷ K. V. Vinayaraj, "India as Threat: Bangladeshi Perspective", *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, 2009, p.103.

5. The Rise of Terrorism / Insurgency and Lack of Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in South Asia

South Asian states, in general, have been severely affected by the challenges posed by terrorism. Though its transnational character provides sufficient ground to create shared interests and an identity of “we-ness”, it has not emerged as the “other” and thus fails to bind all the South Asian nations together for a common counter-terrorism policy. Political leaders, regional security experts and the members of civil society have been repeatedly urging that terrorism cannot be effectively tackled without regional cooperation and common counter-terrorism policy. Therefore, the question remains why has not a practical breakthrough for effective counter-terrorism cooperation yet been possible? The answer is complex and largely rooted in the regional security and power structure of South Asia. Baral, for example, argues that cooperation on a regional scale in South Asia seems to be a daunting task due to the “past prejudices, inherited complexes and identity crisis”⁴⁸ The continued tensions among these nations provide “fertile ground for securitisation of national identities on both sides and governments found it convenient to cultivate threat perceptions of other for their domestic political purposes.”⁴⁹ Thus, enduring threat perceptions and trust deficits create an anarchic security structure.

In the anarchic structure without any effective institution to manage conflicts, South Asian states rely heavily on “self-help” system. Their chauvinistic attitude is further fuelled by the perceived threats from other states.⁵⁰ Hence, unmanaged security dilemma led to ever growing arms-race and nuclearisation that have characterised their security relations.⁵¹ Buzan rightly pointed out that religion while was the main basis of the conflict between them before the partition in 1947, territorial disputes specially on Kashmir, balance of power, mutual accusation of interference in each other’s domestic affairs have become the core of conflict formation in South Asia.⁵² Therefore, even though terrorism/insurgency has been identified as a common threat for each of these states in this region, it can be argued that due to the anarchic bipolar regional power and security structure this common challenge has failed to create an essential “we-ness” among themselves. Rather, they provide support to terrorist/insurgent groups operating in their rival states in order to have a strategic advantage. The following sub-sections discuss the context of the rise of religious fundamentalism and other insurgency movement as well as lack of regional cooperation in addressing these threats. The role of SAARC as a regional institution in addressing threats has also been critically examined.

⁴⁸ Lok Raj Baral, “Reconstruction of South Asia: A Precondition for SAARC”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2003, p.72.

⁴⁹ B. Buzan and O. Waever, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Eric Gonsalves, “Regional Cooperation in South Asia”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2006, p. 205.

⁵¹ Gauvar Rajen and Michael G.Vannoni, “Battlefield Nuclear Weapons in South Asia: The Case for Restraint”, *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 91, 2005, p.96.

⁵² B. Buzan, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

5.1 *Religious Fundamentalism*

Religious fundamentalism, as one sees it in South Asia in contemporary times, got substantial momentum since the Afghan war of 1979.⁵³ Following the war, this close cooperation between Pakistan's quasi-autonomous ISI and Taliban militants resulted in greater cooperation in overthrowing President Najibullah's regime in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Even after the fall of Najibullah's regime in 1992, subsequent regimes in Pakistan continued to back *Pashtun* forces in the inter-ethnic Afghan civil war.⁵⁵ The underlying reason for Pakistani regimes to support these militants was that by overthrowing Najibullah's government, that was supported by India, it seemingly wanted to curtail India's influence in Afghanistan for which both these states had been competing since 1947. *Pashtun* nationalists in the frontier provinces of Pakistan had very friendly relations with Najibullah's government in Afghanistan. As Afghanistan presumably made a traditional claim over the *Pashtun* and *Baloch*-inhabited territory of Pakistan, this suited the strategic interest of India, while *Pashtun* nationalists had a strong relationship with India's National Congress Party.⁵⁶ For Pakistan, the defeat of Najibullah's government by the Taliban militias was in their strategic interests. According to Khan, "Pakistan's Afghan policy, at least since 1989, had aimed, at the minimum, to prevent the Afghan connection to India and ideally, to have control of Afghanistan to the extent that it could provide "strategic depth".⁵⁷ Ayooob went one step further when he opined that "Pakistan's support for the Taliban was not merely a major pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy, but an important element of its domestic policy as well. The Taliban was deliberately fashioned as a military and political force by the ISI for the purpose of ensuring a client government in Afghanistan that would provide Pakistan with strategic depth during the times of conflict with India."⁵⁸

After the 9/11 incidents, Pakistan as a strategic partner of the US led "Global War on Terror" was presumably compelled to help the US government and the international coalition to overthrow the Taliban government from Afghanistan. The uprooted members of Al-Qaeda and Taliban have moved to the border areas of Pakistan which were their sanctuaries during the Afghan civil war and started using the areas as their bases for operation.⁵⁹ Moreover, these foreign terrorist groups have been developing tactical and strategic alliance with the domestic terrorist groups which were created by the Pakistani political elites especially during the tenure of President Zia-ul-Huq, who used religion as a means of legitimising his regime. As part of this strategy, militant religious groups mushroomed during his era.⁶⁰

⁵³ Brahma Chellaney, "Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia: The Lessons of History", *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Winter 2001/02, pp. 96-99.

⁵⁴ Kanti Bajpai, "Crisis and Conflict in South Asia after September 11, 2001", *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003, p. 200.

⁵⁵ Vanni Cappelli, "The Alienated Frontier: Why the United States Can't Get Osama Bin Laden", *Orbis*, Fall 2005, p. 722.

⁵⁶ Ijaz Khan, "Pakistan's Post September 11 2001 Afghan Policy Shift: Impact on Pak India Afghan Geopolitics", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 2007, p. 466.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Mohammed Ayooob, "South-west Asia after the Taliban", *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Spring, 2002, p. 5.

⁵⁹ H. Haqqani, "Al-Qaeda's New Enemy", *Financial Times*, 8 July 2002, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Mohammed Ayooob, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism in this region has often been questioned. After the death of Osama bin Laden, relations between the US and Pakistan have significantly changed as far as counter-terrorism efforts are concerned. In the changed scenario, "Pakistan apparently calculates that by fighting the Tehrik-e-Taliban but providing tacit support to other groups such as the Haqqani Network, Pakistan (1) stays close to a bloc that could emerge as a key power-broker in Afghanistan; (2) sustains asymmetric proxies harassing an Indian presence in Afghanistan and Kashmir; and (3) secures Pakistan's northwestern border by restraining some Taliban groups from coalescing with others to oppose Pakistan's secular authorities"⁶¹

The dispute over Kashmir may be seen as the single most important factor that fuelled the growth of terrorism in South Asia. Kashmir has been the bone of contention between two rivals, India and Pakistan, since the partition of the subcontinent. India wants to incorporate Kashmir to fulfil its fundamental ideal of establishing a secular union while for Pakistan it would fulfil its vision of establishing a homeland for South Asian Muslims.⁶² It has been enunciated time and again by the international community that combating terrorism in South Asia would remain a real challenge without a solution to the Kashmir problem.

Initially, the opposition of the nationalist movement in Kashmir joining Indian state in 1947 was secular in nature. It, however, lost its secular character over time and took the form of Islamist insurgency.⁶³ In explaining the transition, Victoria said that the allegedly rigged election of 1987 in Kashmir intensified protests among Kashmiri Muslim population which eventually transformed into an insurgency by 1989.⁶⁴ Pakistan took the advantage of this insurgency and tried to take control of this movement by providing necessary support. Bruce noted that "the ISI, fresh from victory in Afghanistan, used the same tactics and strategy against India that it had used against the Soviet Union and provided training, and weapons for the Kashmiris."⁶⁵

For strategic manoeuvring, Pakistan also created its own Kashmiri groups. All together, three violent groups have been active in Kashmir: *Hizb-ul Mujahideen*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)* and *Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)*. While *Hizb-ul Mujahideen* is mainly composed of native people with an aim of achieving autonomy of Kashmir, the rest two groups chiefly composed of Pakistani recruits have a greater agenda of undermining Indian state.⁶⁶ Through aiding the insurgency, Pakistan has linked the cause of Kashmiri's

61 Michael Spangler, "Pakistan's Changing Counterterrorism Strategy: A Window of Opportunity?", *Parameters*, Vol. Spring, No. 4, 2014, p. 40.

62 R. Eric, N. C. Fink and J. Ipe, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

63 Jugdep S. Chima, "Ethnic Subnationalist Movements in Contemporary South Asia: An Introduction", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 6, 2009, p.916.

64 Schofield Victoria, *Kashmir in Crossfire*, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996, pp. 231-34.

65 Bruce Riedel, "Pakistan and Terror: The Eye of the Storm", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 618, July, 2008, p. 34.

66 R. Eric, N. C. Fink and J. Ipe, 2009, *op. cit.* p. 3.

self-determination with the global *jihad* propagated by global and regional terrorist groups.⁶⁷ Following the 9/11 attacks, the Kashmir problem further aggravated due to the link between the Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Pakistan-based terrorist groups.⁶⁸

This is a clear depiction of mistrust among the nations of this region and such mistrust is rooted in the RSC of South Asia. As such, in this weak regional security structure, terrorism, may be impliedly, aggravates the conflictual relations between the states. For example, after the terrorist attack on Indian parliament in 2006, Indian government held Pakistan-based terrorist organisations responsible for the attack and this eventually led them to the brink of inter-state wars.⁶⁹

5.2 *Insurgencies*

Intra-state separatist movements which are prevalent in South Asia have a regional dimension in the sense that such movements receive encouragement and material supports from another neighbouring country.⁷⁰ There are allegations and counter-allegations from India against its neighbours and vice versa with regard to the support for such secessionist movements. For example, the left-wing extremism or other forms of insurgency has its roots in domestic socio-political structure. Though its rise did not have any direct link with South Asian RSC, its continuation sometimes is facilitated by rivalry between and among neighbouring states which use it as a strategic card against one another in a weak regional setting. India routinely alleges that Pakistan supports the Sikh *Khalistan movement* in Punjab, Indian Muslim movements in Kashmir, India.⁷¹ It also alleges that Nepal supports *naxalite* movements in the red corridor. On the other hand, Sri Lanka believed that India used to support the LTTE's movement in Sri Lanka.⁷² Therefore, terrorism/insurgency is often employed by one state against another in this region to take strategic advantage vis-à-vis its perceived rival. Since the rise of these home-grown insurgencies has no direct link with the South Asian RSC, their subsidence may have little effect on RSC itself. However, it needs to be acknowledged that support of regional neighbours in managing such conflicts would facilitate the trust-building process in the region.

⁶⁷ H. Haqqani, 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, 'Terrible Tuesday and Terrorism in South Asia', *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2003, p.216.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Raju G.C. Thomas, "South Asian Security in the 1990s", *Adelphi Paper*, 278, July 1993, p.20.

⁷¹ V. Van Dyke, "The Khalistan Movement in Punjab, India, and the Post-Militancy Era: Structural Change and New Political Compulsions", in J. S. Chima (ed.), *Ethnic Subnationalist Insurgencies in South Asia: Identities, Interests and Challenges to State Authority*, New York: Routledge, 2015; P. Swami, "Failed threats and flawed fences: India's military responses to Pakistan's proxy war", *India Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2004, pp. 147-170; S. P. Winchell, "Pakistan's ISI: The invisible government", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol.16, No. 3, 2003, pp. 374-388.

⁷² V. Suryanarayan "Indian- Sri Lanka Equation: Geography as Opportunity" in D. M. Malone, C. R. Mohan and S. Raghavan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 417.

5.3 *Role of Regional Institution- SAARC*

The formation of regional institutions as a mechanism for conflict prevention and management⁷³ is significant precondition for regional security cooperation. According to Rais, "effective and orderly management of cooperation that requires regular mutual adjustment would depend on the creation of appropriate rules, norms, principles and acceptable standards of behaviour."⁷⁴ Simon and Martini noted that norms are not only moral guidelines, but also "very powerful ordering principles with very practical implications"⁷⁵ while behaviours create the conditions for accountabilities among the state parties of the institutions. In this way, effective regional institutions in turn help to build trust among the states that leads to mitigate conflicts in the region. However, in the context of South Asia, the mistrust and differences among the South Asian states act as a barrier to SAARC to emerge as a viable and action-oriented regional institution. As a consequence, these states have failed to foster meaningful cooperation on countering terrorism/insurgency.

Following the first wave of regionalisation, South Asian nations established SAARC, the only regional forum in this part of the world, in 1985. Its charter included the "desirous of promoting peace, stability, amity and progress in the region through strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter and Non-Alignment, particularly respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, national independence, non-use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other states and peaceful settlement of all disputes."⁷⁶ This regional body has not yet worked effectively and its progress fails to go beyond signs and symbols.⁷⁷

The idea of SAARC was first mooted by Bangladesh in order to seemingly create a level playing field for all the actors including India and Pakistan based on the principle of sovereign equality. Indian attitude towards this multilateralism, therefore, has been sceptical since the beginning. So has been Pakistan's attitude about it thinking that SAARC might be helping India to gain more against Pakistan.⁷⁸ The discussion of bilateral political disputes has been kept out of the purview of SAARC which, therefore, deals with peripheral issues only. As explained by the structure of the South Asian RSC, the bipolar conflictual power structure of South Asia has, thus, acted as a major impediment to the success of SAARC.

⁷³ R. Fawn, 2009, *op. cit.*, p.22.

⁷⁴ Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁷⁵ S. Simon and J. Martini, "Terrorism: Denying Al-Qaeda Its Popular Support", in R. D. Howard and R. L. Sawyer (eds.), 2006, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ SAARC Charter 1985.

⁷⁷ K. K. Bhargava, *EU-SAARC: Comparisons and Prospects of Cooperation*, ZEI Discussion Paper, C 15, Bonn: Center for European Integration Studies, 1998, p. 7.

⁷⁸ Kishore C. Dash, "The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in South Asia", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 2, Summer 1996. p.187.

Regional cooperation is a public good. As the hegemonic stability theory posits, the role of a hegemon is important to offer such public goods. With its given power endowment, India can assume an important leadership in making SAARC an effective organisation.⁷⁹ Ironically, India does not “make any proposal for such institutional cooperation because it anticipated suspicion and/or resistance from its neighbours particularly Pakistan.”⁸⁰ Thus, the extreme reliance on the zero-sum notion of state-centric paradigm which considers “state as the sole viable units and legitimate agents”⁸¹ by the SAARC states prevents SAARC to be developed as an effective regional cooperative institution in this region. Hence, this institution has not been successful in addressing mistrust and mutual suspicions among its member states.

The forgoing analysis of the inertia in SAARC does not mean to suggest that the organisation has not taken any concrete step to address terrorism. In fact, the recognition of terrorism as a threat to the stability of the region was documented by SAARC as early as late 1980s. When SAARC adopted its Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism in 1987, terrorism did not even prominently feature on the international security landscape. Soon after the adoption of the Convention, the SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) was created to facilitate the implementation of the Convention by collecting, analysing and disseminating information about terrorist incidents, tactics, strategies and methods. To further enhance the implementation process, legal experts from SAARC countries met twice to sort out legal issues and urged the member states to adopt comprehensive domestic legislations. Keeping the issue of terror financing in perspective, SAARC countries adopted an additional protocol to the Convention in 2002. In 2008, a SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance was approved.

South Asian leaders time and again reiterated their commitments to the enhanced cooperation on the issue at various SAARC summits. Very importantly, SAARC countries decided to share intelligence for curbing terrorism and other transnational crimes.⁸² The irony is that as SAARC has not functioned as a successful institution and failed to build trust amongst its member states, none of these initiatives for countering terrorism under the SAARC framework has made any breakthrough in addressing the issue. Therefore, it can be argued that the ineffectiveness of the regional institution, SAARC, is a major impediment towards developing any effective common counter-terrorism cooperation in this region.

⁷⁹ J. N. Dixit, “Prospects of South Asian Cooperation in the Transformed World – Post-11 September”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2003, p.44.

⁸⁰ J. N. Dixit, “The Future of Security in South Asia”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001. p.126.

⁸¹ Bhupinder Brar, “SAARC: If Functionalism has Failed, Will Realism Work?”, *South Asian Survey*, Vol.10, No.1, 2003, p. 32.

⁸² Alistair Millar, “Developing Regional Counter-terrorism Cooperation in South Asia”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2009, p.19.

6. Conclusion

In course of time, terrorism has posed a significant security challenge to South Asian nations. Terrorism in South Asia is multi-dimensional and transnational in character. Because of its transnational character, individual states' counter-terrorism policies have thus far remained ineffective to tackle a regional problem. Hence, an effective counter-terrorism strategy in South Asia requires the political will of SAARC member states to adopt and implement a well-defined counter-terrorism cooperation/policy at the regional level.

An analysis on the basis of RSCT shows that a weak structure is deeply embedded in the South Asian region due to historical mistrust among countries. Moreover, the use of terrorism as a strategic tool against one another is one of the main causes of the rise and sustenance of transnational terrorism in the region. Though SAARC in its early days identified terrorism as a threat to its member states and accordingly adopted anti-terror conventions and many different types of policies, which was not functional. The role of an effective regional institution, however, cannot be exaggerated as it helps to create and strengthen norms, rules necessary to address the threat. In this respect, South Asian states have to transform their weak structure into a cooperative one that would facilitate the implementation of counter-terrorism measures. For enhanced regional cooperation to address terrorism (the "other"), the creation of a shared identity or promotion of a feeling of "we-ness" is essential among South Asian nations. To facilitate the creation of such "we-ness" what these nations fundamentally need is to strengthen trust-building among themselves.