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EXTRA-REGIONAL INFLUENCES AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

South Asia has been under direct and indirect interventions and policy influence by major powers since long. The colonial legacy that South Asian states carried is embedded in their political structures and socio-economic fabric. Coupled with structural problems and inter and intra-state conflicts, the undermining impact of the confounding shifts and turns in international politics, particularly since the Cold War era, culminated into challenges to peace and security in the region. Consequently, security architecture of the region remains vulnerable to violence and stability, security and development appear to be unlikely scenarios. The assessment of the role of extra-regional actors and its deteriorating impact on the security and politics in South Asian politics forms the basic premise of this paper. Also, the humble intention is to highlight the intra-regional structural weaknesses and a room for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to deal with the issues of peace and security in the region.

1. Introduction

The Cold War, end of Cold War and the incidents of 9/11, have been detrimental to international politics from various perspectives. Many regions underwent drastic political changes both in terms of foreign relations and domestic politics in each phase. On the one hand, states were compelled to develop new equations and policy adjustments, on the other, they were faced with the problems related to security, peace and development. The wave of political changes vibrated across South Asia as well, where the politics in the region has been greatly shaped by the extra-regional influences.

In the post-World War II (WW II) era, the British withdrawal and the partition of the subcontinent was not only the turning point in the region's politics but also posed formidable challenges to both states and societies in South Asia, especially India and Pakistan. Since then, the security architecture of South

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Asia remains fragile and vulnerable to violence. The Cold war politics among the major powers also had a dire impact on South Asian security arrangements. Subsequently, peace, stability and security appear unrealistic and unlikely scenarios. Having originated as independent states during the most critical period in the history, Pakistan and India, apart from inheriting the partition-oriented rivalry, have carried the colonial legacy in terms of their political structure. Particularly, Pakistan is faced with severe structural problems. Other countries in the region are also faced with the dilemma of peace, security, political instability and resultant underdevelopment as a consequence of extra-regional influences.

The post-Cold War era was no different for South Asia in terms of extra-regional influences and the issues related to regional security. The third phase of drastic political changes followed the incidents of 9/11. Not only had it jolted the concept of traditional security but also brought new challenges and risks. The intrusive policies pursued by the United States in many regions, especially South Asia and interplay of several other factors further destabilised the already fragile security scenario of the region. With the US-led war against terrorism in place, there was a clear shift in international politics with rapid twists and turns and reshaping of several alliances between and among the major powers. Yet again, South Asia faced the worst consequences of this shift in international politics.

Keeping in view the intricacies involved in the security architecture of South Asia and the challenges South Asia is facing in this regard, the humble intention of this paper is to address the questions: how have extra-regional influences culminated into the quandary of peace and security in South Asia? Also, it aims to highlight the dilemma intra-regional security architecture faces while focusing upon the vulnerabilities and risks coupled with the structural problems in South Asia. The paper also identifies the role of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a medium to deal with the problem of peace and security in the region.

The paper has been divided into five sections including the introduction and conclusion. Section 2 discusses the security architecture of South Asia. Section 3 covers the central argument of the paper that is, extra-regional influences and the problem of peace that the region is currently facing in the wake of these influences. The section also discusses the intra-state security challenges. Section 4 explores the options and possibilities to deal with the challenges to security in the region and the role SAARC can play in dealing with these challenges hence promoting regional peace and development. And finally, section 5 comprises conclusion.

2.   South Asian Security Architecture

Ever since the British withdrawal, the South Asian regional security architecture remains fragile owing to two main reasons: first, the space that withdrawal of colonial power apparently left was tried to be filled by other

major powers of that time, second, the rivalry that the major states in the region−Pakistan and India−inherited at the time of the partition. The major conflict between the two states over Kashmir which is rightly regarded as the 'bone of contention' continues to pose risks of warfare in the region. This scenario has not only created insecurities for Pakistan and India, but also generated concerns among rest of the states in South Asia. However, what constitutes the security architecture in South Asia is the interplay of military, bureaucracy and now the nuclear weapons.

2.1 Institution of Military

The greatest responsibility of ensuring security, from a traditional security perspective, lies with the military. In South Asia, apart from ensuring security, military remains to be the largest stakeholder in intra-state politics. During past six decades following the independence, Pakistan experienced military rule for years and democracy had never had a chance to prevail. In India, military has never taken over the government but is the major institution behind the decision making circles in politics.

As for the security apparatus in Pakistan and India, a notable scholar Stephen P. Cohen elaborated a fact about the militaries of the two states:

> The fact that the Indian and Pakistani military establishments shared a common beginning in the old British Indian Army led many outsiders- both before and after partition-to view the two states as logical members of a regional security arrangement. However, plans for a unified regional defense also underestimated the ambitions of Indian and Pakistani officers. Their eagerness to take command over their respective armies was not due to Bonapartist ambitions but was simply a manifestation of their professional confidence and pride.[1] This had been instilled by the British and refined and purified in WW II. These Indian and Pakistani officers owed allegiance to craft and profession and were quick to apprise their new masters of their own expectations. Thus, early efforts at joint security arrangements came to nothing and the British were gradually phased out of senior command positions, removing the last link between the Indian and Pakistani armies. From that point on, defense questions have remained at or near the focus of attention for the two governments. The level of their weapons has steadily increased as have their external military ties and the frequency and magnitude of armed conflict.[2]

2.2 Hierarchical Set Up

An important feature of regional security make up in South Asia is the hierarchical influences. The legacy that was inherited by the British has been penetrated and influenced the South Asian society, especially Pakistan to the

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[1] As quoted in Stephen P. Cohen, "Security Issues in South Asia", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 3, March 1975, p. 202.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

core. The post-colonial set up in states retained the basics of the colonial structure of government and the functioning of state apparatus also remained the same. Hence, the military-bureaucracy oligarchy is a common phenomenon in post-colonial states.[3]

Other than military, it is bureaucracy and the political elite that enjoy writ in political governance at the highest level. "Looking at South Asian experience it appears that this region inherited a relatively strong state at independence. This manifestation of state power originated in all-power bureaucracy established by the British in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka as a *steel frame* to sustain imperial rule. The legacy of the *steel frame* served to establish the ascendance of the state in South Asia and enabled it to exercise considerable authority in their relation with civil society. In post-colonial South Asia, the authority of state was used to empower particular fractions of the feudal elite and bourgeoisie through dispensation of state patronage".[4]

The all-power bureaucracy and feudal elite, therefore influence the government decisions not only in foreign policy but also national security strategy leaving no room for pluralistic consensus.

2.3   Nuclearisation of South Asia

Another important factor that has both negative and positive security implications on the region is the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Pakistan and India. The two nuclear states have different policy perspective to justify the acquisition of nuclear weapons. For India, the weapons are for deterrence against the security threat posed potentially by Pakistan and also China although there is no mention of these states as potential threat in its nuclear strategy. Also, India aims for 'No First Use' with regards to its nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Pakistan rather has an India-specific agenda. The country established deterrence against India seeking a balance of power in the region; however, it aims for the first strike in the wake of attack or a potential threat posed by India. "In the face of the nuclearisation and the missile development in South Asia, one was beginning to see the sub regional Asian divides move towards dissipation especially given the extensive missile programme of India, which has enhanced its operational capability to include East and West Asia within the striking range of its missile deployments.[5] The growing military dimension of South Asian

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[3] Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", available at http://www.newleftreview.org/, accessed on 20 January 2012.

[4] Rehman Sobhan, "South Asia's Weak Development: The Role of Governance", available at http://www.eias.org/publications/briefing/1999/weakdev.pdf.pdf, accessed on 18 April 2012.

[5] As quoted in Shireen Mazari, "South Asian Security: International Context", *Policy Perspectives* (Islamabad), Vol. 3, No. 1, January 2006.

security has raised the stakes of major International actors in peace and stability of this region".[6]

For developing countries like Pakistan and India, the development of nuclear weapons, though had dire economic consequences, have been successful in using them as a tool for deterrence for more than twelve years. The necessity of arms spending and development of nuclear weapons as part of the 'national security interests' in Pakistan and India was driven by the continued rivalry between the two states. As noted by Stephen P. Cohen:

> With very few exceptions South Asians accept their present levels of arms spending as necessary.[7] The nuclear explosion programme in India was a domestic political triumph, and Pakistan's response has merely been to threaten emulation. There is thus a difference in perspective between regional elites and outside observers, especially those in the West, about the necessity of national security. That this difference is not recent, but rooted in the very origins of India and Pakistan, is made evident by even a cursory examination of the history of strategic thought on the subcontinent.[8]

On the other hand, the non-nuclear states of South Asia have raised and unequivocally expressed their concerns on the perils and challenge the presence of nuclear weapons technology in the region poses to the security of states and societies.

3.   Extra-regional Influences in South Asia

To further exacerbate the already prevailing colonial legacy and related structural problems, the United States, Soviet Union and China, throughout the Cold War era and in post-Cold War era gradually and steadily increased their stakes in the region. "But the events of 9/11 have altered the strategic milieu of South Asia with a greater intrusiveness from extra-regional players, especially the US through its war on terrorism. Despite its much proclaimed victory in Afghanistan, the overall result of the present US war on terrorism has destabilising the effects on many parts of Asia".[9] However, except the British, the intrusion by the major powers is not always uninvited. The political, economic and strategic milieu of states in the region and nature of interstate relations are such that major powers have been 'called for help' on most occasions by countries in South Asia, including the smaller states of the region.

With the war against terrorism, the US brought a multiple agenda. Among other interests, the salient features of the US agenda in the region were: it wanted a stronghold in Afghanistan; utilise Pakistan's strategic base and strengthen

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] As quoted in Stephen P. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Shireen Mazari, *op. cit*.

strategic alliance with India, mainly for securing access to Central Asia, containing China's growing influence in international politics, especially in South Asia and also the possible resurgence of Russia as a competitor to the United States. Since the Cold War era, the US has been actively involved in South Asian politics. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided the US with an opportunity to expand its agenda as a major player in the region.

Whether invited or uninvited, the extra-regional influences, largely, have far reaching destabilising impact in the region. This destabilising impact of extra-regional influences at inter-state level is manifested through imbalance of power, dependent or dictated foreign policies and perils to strategic assets. At intra-state level, the consequences of inter-state level extra-regional influences led to political instability and economic strangulation which has further posed a number of challenges to security and peace in the region leading to underdevelopment.

Ever since the partition of the subcontinent, the imbalance of power has been the most dominant feature of South Asia. There has been a stark asymmetry among the states in the region houses in terms of politics, economy, military and geography, where India assumes the position of the major state owing to its vast geographical land, comparatively managed politics and huge military size. During the Cold War, India managed to maintain considerably good equation with both the superpowers. However, the country experienced rift in its relations with neighbouring China for decades to follow.

On the other hand, Pakistan, the second major state in the region, had a clear tilt towards the US and also developed friendly ties with China as the two had battering relations with India. The kind of alliances both Pakistan and India entered into with major powers during that time achieved less perks for the two states and greater benefits were reaped by the major powers in the long run. The destabilising impact of these partnerships was not only felt in Pakistan and India but also resonated through the smaller states in the region. The most prominent impact was the deepening imbalance of power which was in favour of India and against Pakistan, eventually posed greater perils and challenges to the regional security.

Extra-regional powers have known to influence the foreign policy decision making in the region. India and Pakistan, on many occasions, have amended or crafted their foreign policies to suit the interests of major powers. During the Cold War era, after having fought two wars, Pakistan and India were considered as the most unpredictable rivals and increasing defense spending and military dimension of security not only alarmed the major powers but also had increased their stakes in facilitating peace and security in the region. However, with more political stake the major powers acquired in the region, their policies, to a great extent, turned out to be intrusive, especially in the wake of 9/11 incidents.

The Cold War and post-Cold War era embedded the military dimension of security in South Asia. The proxy war phenomenon and the inherited rivalry between Pakistan and India left states yearning for more weapons and hence entered into an arms race.

> The role of both the US and China in strengthening militarism in the region is by now well-documented. Having aided the jehadi groups against the Soviet Union, the US is today struggling to overcome them in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The US is deeply tied to the fate of the region as a result. So is China, as its interests in trade, strategic roads and consolidation of its influence in Tibet and Xinjiang drive it towards involvement in the region.[10]

In post-9/11 scenario, the US with its agenda of war against terrorism in Afghanistan poses greater challenges to South Asian security, particularly Pakistan. The drone attacks and counterterrorism military actions are not only undermining the sovereignty of Pakistan but also a threat to regional strategic assets. India has successfully developed better equations with the US and Afghanistan and now has concluded strategic partnership agreements with the two states. Pakistan, on the other hand, is at a vulnerable position. Given the strengthening triad of the US, India and Afghanistan, not only the balance of power in the region would be shattered but it would also exacerbate the political complexities in the region.

China and Russia, both have been conscious of the consequences of the growing US influences and its presence in the region, had alarmed the two states far before the US found its stronghold in Afghanistan. Apart from other policy measures, the countries are struggling to curtail the US influences through strategic and economic alliances, for instance, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS (a group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), etc.

Among other organisation and institutions, the European Union (EU) since last decade has been increasing its stake in the region through cooperative arrangements in collaboration with India. By doing so, the organisation tended to worsen the already existing balance of power. The economic asymmetry by the presence and collaboration of the EU has created economic insecurities which will have far reaching consequences.

The imbalance of power, manipulated policies, political maneuvering and strategic perils have marred the domestic politics and policies in South Asian states. Multiple factors in the wake of major powers influences have embedded political instability in South Asia, especially Pakistan where polity appears

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[10] Sujit Dutta, "South Asian Regional Security Architecture: Between Anarchy and Order", in Smruti S. Pattanaik,
South Asia: Envisioning a Regional Future, New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2011, p. 32.

fractured making consensus difficult on all important issues.[11] This fractured polity further instigated political polarisation and weak governance.

Moreover, there is an essential level of economic strangulation in the region which as a consequence of major power's influence in the region has further culminated into the problem of underdevelopment. Rising inflation, poverty, unemployment and deteriorating economies are leading the region towards near collapse or bankruptcy. Besides major powers, the international financial institutions and transnational corporations have penetrated into South Asian economies increasing their stakes in economies as well as politics and now appear as formidable challenge to economic growth and development in the region.

3.1 Intra-state Challenges to Security

The above-mentioned factors have culminated into intra-state security challenges. Besides structural and institutional problems, the region's frail polity and political instability have resulted into political, economic, socio-cultural and ethnic polarisation. This polarisation further led to intra-state armed conflicts which are posing challenges to regional security.

3.1.1   State of Democracy and Political Instability in South Asia

It appears crucial and extremely critical to understand the relative problems of the "degree of democracy" in countries of South Asia, in particular, which are plagued by a number of problems, primarily political violence. Countries in South Asia are vulnerable to military and political opposition groups largely because of their weak political architecture. Where the weakness of domestic political structures lie in their political history that is colonialism.

India, by and large, managed to sustain the democratic form of government and a military-bureaucracy oligarchy does not appear 'instrumental' in case of India. Despite having diversified society and socio-economic and cultural backwardness, the country never fell to the military rule.

India's democratic record suggests that two sets of political processes have guided the management of power conflicts in that country. First, a delicate balance has been struck and re-struck between the forces of centralisation and decentralisation. Second, the interests of the powerful in society have been served without fully excluding the weaker. The record on both these fronts is far from perfect; the failures have actually put a great strain on Indian democracy. Nevertheless, accommodation of those who mount powerful challenges by

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

granting them greater autonomy and/or a share of resources has been central to strengthening of democracy.[12]

Moreover, the country is, indeed, faced with communal riots, extremism and ethnicity all in form of extreme political violence but the government managed to continue with democratic setup. Many analysts tend to appreciate the federalism as force behind the stability or sustenance of democracy as a system of government in India.

In Pakistan, record of democracy has been very poor. The country, an ideal case of post-colonial military-bureaucracy oligarchy, has been marred with repeated take over by military and democracy had never had a chance to prevail. In addition to this, initially, religion has been the defining feature and later on it became the driving force for a large section of society in Pakistan. The colonial apparatus coupled with polarised society not only was a perfect recipe for political instability but also made the entry of military easier into politics.

On the other hand, the feudal system has also marred the democratic tendencies and has been quite instrumental in disabling *pluralism* in Pakistani society. Resultantly, there has been a silent penetration of intolerance, extremism and violence in Pakistan that is now demonstrated through a number of violent activities, including terrorism.

Being part of post-colonial arrangement, initially, Bangladesh also inherited the basic structural apparatus of state from colonialism since 1971. Religion being another important aspect in Bangladesh politics which guides a good number of population.

Sri Lanka has also been a case of pseudo-democracy. Authoritarianism has been an apparent feature even under democratic governments since the independence in 1948.[13] The country is striving to exploit the peace dividend and give democracy primacy in post-insurgency politics.

In Nepal, democracy is in its premature stage. The country adopted democratic system of government following the abdication of 250 year-old rule of monarchy in 2006. Essentially, Nepal predominantly is a Hindu but heterogeneous society, however, the caste system has plagued the political apparatus in the state. Upper-caste Hindus form and dominate the political elite and lower castes are segregated politically as well as socially. The institution of democracy in a country that has never experienced it in its letter and spirit before appears to be difficult and enduring process.

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[12] Atul Kohli, "Introduction", in Atul Kohli, *The Success of India's Democracy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 1-2.

[13] K. Ratnayake, "The Decay ofPparliamentary Democracy in Sri Lanka", available at www.wsws.org/articles/2010/feb2010/, accessed on 30 January 2012.

The most critical is the case of Afghanistan among all South Asian states. In the post-9/11 geopolitical shift, Afghanistan was formally regarded as part of South Asia with its inclusion as the eighth member in SAARC. The country, throughout the history has experienced turbulent times. Till 1973, the country was governed under monarchy.[14] Later on, it experienced socialism under President Daoud Khan who enjoyed greater support from the Soviet Union. Following the Saur Revolution in 1978, in which President Daoud was assassinated; Afghanistan amid political chaos was invaded by Soviet forces a year later.[15] The Soviet invasion not only changed the political landscape of the country but also had dire implications on regional politics. The Soviet invasion in 1979 and withdrawal in 1989 both 'was a disaster for Afghanistan'.[16] The country not only faced economic devastation but also political deformation.

The Taliban takeover of the government in 1996[17] was another critical phase in Afghanistan's politics. The international community due to a number of reservations on the policies and political conduct did not recognise the Taliban government. Another blow to the country's politics was the US-led war against terrorism that began in October 2001.[18] In the wake of the war, the Taliban were overthrown from power and a US-backed government was employed in Afghanistan. The war-torn country, where the US forces are still combating the Taliban militia, is said to be experiencing democracy under US vigilance. The political transition to democracy in Afghanistan from 2001 has been an enduring process. The country and its people were never accustomed to democratic values. It indeed is a challenging task to create inroads for democratic traditions in Afghanistan.

3.1.2 Intra-state Armed Conflicts

India is faced with anti-government armed violence led by Maoist groups (Naxalites) in an indigenous insurgency in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar. The country also faces outbreak of ethnic and inter-religious violence on a regular basis. In Pakistan, The Western frontiers are problematic with armed conflicts in Balochistan and Waziristan. Moreover, ethnic and religious/sectarian violence is also considered as a challenge to the writ of the government.[19] Especially, in the wake of war

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[14] "Afghanistan's Turbulent History", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1569826.stm, accessed on 22 March 2012.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Dawn* (Karachi), 8 October 2001.

[19] Nabiha Gul, "Intra-state Conflicts and Small Arms Proliferation in South Asia: Case Study of Nepal", *Pakistan Journal of International Relations* (Karachi), Vol. II, No. 2, 2010, p. 5.

against terrorism, repeated incidents of political violence in the form of suicide bombings and targeted killings have marred the security of the state and pose a formidable challenge to peace in the country. Bangladesh has also faced an armed conflict in Chittagong Hill Tracts for 20 long years from 1977-1997.

Sri Lanka has been under an unfortunate long-standing separatist movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Movement, led by one of the two major ethnic groups—the Tamils, calling for a homeland for ethnic Tamils, who feel persecuted by the ethnic majority—the Sinahalese. LTTE had been active since 1980s and it had been a daunting challenge to the state and security machinery of Sri Lanka.[20] The insurgency not only had impacted upon the demography of the country but also battered the socio-economic conditions. The insurgency ended with the defeat of LTTE by Sri Lankan military in May 2009 and first general elections were held in January 2010.[21]

Nepal suffered a decade-long armed insurgency in the name of People's War (Jana Yudh) from 1996.[22] It was an armed conflict waged against the institution of monarchy to replace it with democracy. The insurgents belonging to the Maoist faction of Communist Party of Nepal succeeded in the abdication of monarchy. However, the society is still vulnerable to armed conflict for two major reasons. One, the ethnic minorities are denied equal representation in politics and society. Two, a large section of the society has been exposed to arms culture and to completely disarm the Maoist cadres and other sections of society remains to be a formidable task.

4. Challenges to Security: Options and Possibilities

There is no denying the fact that the world today has increasingly grown interdependent. The extra-regional influences in South Asia are a reality. However, master-subordinate and the donor-recipient equations need to be altered. Looking at regional scenario, only India to an extent has succeeded in securing benefits and interests through its alliances with the major powers. Other countries in the region continue to be falling prey to the intrusive policies of major powers and financial institutions.

The role and influence of bureaucracy needs to be curtailed through constitutional amendments and socio-political reforms through devising pluralistic mechanisms. Rigorous political reforms are also required to be

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[20] Preeti Bhattacharji, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam", available at www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations/liberation-tigers-   tamil-eelam-aka-tamil-tigers-sri-lanka-separatists/p9242, accessed on 31 January 2012.

[21] Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "The Sri Lankan Elections and the Tamil Politics after the LTTE", available at www.futuredirections.org.au, accessed on 31 January 2012.

[22] Anindita Dasgupta, "The Peole's War in Nepal", *Policy Studies* 38, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

introduced in order to mend structural abnormalities and recover the fractured polity.

India and Pakistan are required to exercise sincere political will towards resolving their decade old disputes, especially the Kashmir dispute. They will continue to exist as neighbours and this must be accepted by all quarters in India. This is the high time that the two countries must move from conflict to cooperation in all possible spheres. Certain quarters have a strong belief that Indian government or political elite has lost interest in Pakistan as a potential partner for any future economic venture.[23] Being the largest state in the region, India holds the responsibility of regional security and integrity more than any other state does. The country, while excluding its immediate neighbours from any economic and political ventures, at large, would not be able to achieve a favourable security scenario.

On the other hand, major powers in the long-run, must facilitate the resolution of disputes between Pakistan and India. International diplomacy has been effective in averting the deadlock between Pakistan and India on many occasions and therefore, can instigate cordiality between the two rivals. What societies can relate with the Western powers and other outside players in the region is the practice of democracy. They are also required to facilitate the governments in strengthening the institution of democracy and pluralism in the region not through intrusion or use of force but through diplomacy and policy measures.

The US and China, as the major stake holders in South Asia, will continue to exercise their influence in the region. However, keeping in view the growing trends in the region, especially against the US, the country must decide its future course of policies which ought to be less intrusive and giving respect to sovereignty of states.

4.1 Dealing with Challenges to Security: Role of SAARC

In dealing with the challenges to security in South Asia, SAARC can be opted as a panacea. Though Article X of SAARC's Charter refrains from member states from discussing bilateral disputes[24] at the organisation's forum, this is the high time that the Charter should be amended. On several occasions, the meetings or deliberations of SAARC have been hampered owing to the

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[23] The assessment is based on arguments put forward by analysts and members of civil society in India during the
 author's interactions with them on few occasions.
[24] SAARC Charter, available at http://www.saarc-sec.org, accessed on 27 March 2012.

bilateral disputes between India and Pakistan. The member states through devising an interstate conflict resolution mechanism from the forum of SAARC would achieve possibilities of multilateral cooperation and ensure security of the region.

A collective security mechanism can also be facilitated through SAARC. To deal with the intra-state armed conflicts, or armed threats to state security, a SAARC task force can be established to counter the miscreants and then provide rehabilitation.

Another important area which requires serious consideration and efforts is the educational reforms. South Asian states can deal with the issues of underdevelopment and social polarisation through free access to education. SAARC through South Asian University has already taken the first step but it must also start some small projects facilitating education in rural areas in all member states. Scholarships and funding should also be facilitated to provide students, researchers and practitioners with easy access to resources required for higher education and research in different fields in order to further progress and development.

Lastly, economic progress through SAARC is achievable. The Association can fund some projects related to small and medium industries in the region. Also, South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement, if employed and incorporated in national policies as required, holds promising prospects for regional progress and prosperity. The agreement through integration of economies would not only stabilise the deteriorating economies but would also be helpful in averting the influences of international financial institutions.

5. Conclusion

The politics in South Asian region has been marred by a number of factors; some of them owe their origin to British Raj and some of the problems were instigated by the succeeding rulers of international politics, especially following the WWII. The region has been unfortunate for the countries, for past six decades, have been unable to device policies to compliment the trends and tasks prevalent in the international politics. Moreover, the extra-regional influences and their consequences embedded political instability and hence the region lags behind the rest of the world politically and economically.

A fair analysis of politics in South Asia establishes a fact that the major powers have been unfair to states in South Asia with their intrusive policies towards the region. On the other hand, the underlying diplomatic weaknesses and intrigued policies which were designed to serve the vested interests of political elite in South Asian states in turn undermined the peace in the region. As peace is the common interest that the South Asian states share, concrete efforts would be

required to amend the intra-state political structure and policies vis-à-vis major powers. Interstate relations in the region are also required to be strengthened to serve mutual interests. Till the time South Asian states work towards regional peace collectively, peace and security in the region would not possibly be established.