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## **Securing the Neighborhood: A Sub regional approach to India's security**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary Indian Security dilemma presents the policy makers and the academics with a twofold dilemma. First, given India's aspiration for a growing role in global affairs, how exactly can it get out of the vortex of the region and define security parameters for itself which are global in scope. It is often the South Asian security situation which poses greater challenges and constraints before Indian policy making than the global one. Second, even if it recognizes the regional concerns as inseparable component of its global posturing, how does it approach the question of regional security without antagonizing the immediate neighbourhood with often sees itself as not so benevolent, regional power? The present paper tries to address the above two concerns by looking at the global vs regional security dilemma for India and thereby attempts an alternative sub-regional approach to security guided by Human Security considerations which may provide the necessary clue to making India secure- both with reference to its land and maritime borders.

### **Introduction**

South Asia as a region finds itself at a very critical location in the emerging human security discourse in the developing societies. With a population of around 1.4 billion people amounting to one fifth of global population and considered to be home to half of the world's poor, the region appears to be the ideal test case for a comprehensive human development analysis. The region continues to be plagued with the problems of endemic poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and inadequate health. The successful interventions in these areas are often few and localized. At the same time, the region also appears to be poised for a period of gradual yet sustained economic growth, given the initiation of economic reforms in most of the countries and the promise of the burgeoning middle class. In essence, the region faces a set of unique challenges and opportunities as it locates itself in the unfolding global economic and political environment.

A very critical determinant of how South Asia will be able to meet the challenges and live up to its promises will be the manner in which it would handle the question of security of its people- both economic and political. South Asia is yet to reach a stage where the economic logic takes precedence over the political and this has been manifest both within and outside the national domain. Security by itself has been a political construct around which countries of the region have shaped their national and regional policies. As a result there has often been a traditional divergence of security perception as far as India and her neighbors are concerned. While India has been inclined to take the view of 'geostrategic unity' perspective, implying its own security and that of its neighbours being intrinsically linked, our neighbours have had a rather independent perception of their own security. The idea of a comprehensive security framework for India and her neighbourhood poses fundamental challenges.

Recent propositions on regional security focusing on economic interdependence have been a significant departure, but do not address the issue of human security adequately and consider it to be part of the larger diagnosis. There is therefore a need to look at the Human Security problematique, first as a departure from the conventional approaches to regional security in South Asia and then get on to the specifics of Human Security as they relate to the contemporary South Asian realities. **It is the proposition of the authors that a human centric approach to regional security with its focus on sub-regional land and maritime borders may offer the basis for much needed comprehensive security paradigm for securing India in its neighbourhood.**

### **Human Security: A Shifting Paradigm**

The concept of human security marks a significant shift from the traditional notions of security both in terms of the units of analysis and the nature of security that is perceived. Rather than taking states as the units of analysis, it gives primacy to 'human beings and their complex social, political and economic relations' It differs from the competitive, possessive notions of security of the individual conceived in the contemporary neoliberal sense. In essence, it describes a condition of existence in which basic material needs are met and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the life of the community, can be met.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is the larger social economic and political environment and the way it impacts on the individual's well being that becomes the starting point of the debate on human security.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Thomas *Global Governance, Development and Human Security: The Challenge of Poverty and Inequality* (London: Pluto, 2000) p.xi

While the debate has reached a certain level of maturity in the west, South Asia and South Asians have had their own unique contribution, both as objects of the study as well as principal articulators of the concept. The late Dr Mahbub Ul Haq was among the pioneers of the concept of Human Security as articulated in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Reports*. In the 1994 Report the emphasis on human security was clearly articulated as follows:

“For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential for conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with threats to a country’s borders. For too long, nations have sought arms to protect their security. For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of cataclysmic world event. Job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime, these are the emerging concerns of human security all over the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The UNDP thus played a critical role in setting the agenda for Human Security, which found a clearer articulation in the South Asian context with the initiation of South Asia Human Development Reports since 1997.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, concept was further refined in terms of the larger meaning of human security and how it coexists with the security of the state. The Report of the Commission on Human Security, 2003 saw human security as protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. According to the Report:

“Human Security means protecting fundamental freedoms-freedoms that are essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.7

<sup>3</sup> Till now there have been fourteen such reports with there being a focus on a singular human development theme every year.

<sup>4</sup> Cited from the Asian Dialogue Society Concept Paper on *Building a Better Asia, Dialogue on Culture and Human Security*, held at the International Centre , Goa 14-17<sup>th</sup> February 2005.

Significantly, the Report emphasized on the complementarity between state security and human security and saw the latter as being instrumental in forging a global alliance to strengthen the institutional policies that link the individuals and the state with the global world. Human Security thus brings together the elements of security, of rights, of development.<sup>5</sup>

In a significant addition to the ongoing debate on Human security, the need for an appropriate methodological framework to measure the same was also emphasized. It was suggested that a human security audit can be operationalised both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative measure could be constructed annually on lines of the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Human Governance Index (HGI) thereby leading to a Human Security Index (H S I). The factors not amenable for measurement may be assessed qualitatively and focus more on capabilities rather than threats.<sup>6</sup> In the more recent times, a Human Security Index has been finally formulated by incorporating economic, environmental and social parameters in order to provide greater comprehensiveness and coverage to the idea of Human Security.<sup>7</sup> The index not only covers the national as well as regional contexts but also sub-national and community level scales.

Thus the Human Security debate has been strengthened in terms of both the conceptual framework in which it could be analysed and the methodological construction which will provide a greater empirical rigour. In this light an area which could pose significant analytical challenge would be the extension of this debate in any regional framework. The contours of the debate get widened- first in terms of the contestation between people vs. state security at the national level, and then is the national consensus compatible or congruent with the regional security interests. A case study of India and her neighbourhood therefore becomes a very pertinent one.

### **India and the South Asian region: Divergent Security Perceptions**

South Asian region is marked by a unique commonality of history, culture and socio-economic development, which binds it together in sharing some of the key aspirations and challenges in nation building. The commonalities have however been interspersed with divergent perceptions of both internal and external security, which these countries have imbibed on their respective paths to post independence national consolidation. Almost all countries in South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan have faced security threats which have had an internal dimension in terms of the genesis and an external dimension in terms of the spillover effects that have got created. India, being the only country

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<sup>5</sup>ibid

<sup>6</sup> Kanti Bajpai 'The Idea of Human Security' *International Studies* vol. 40 no.3, p.227

<sup>7</sup> See [www.humasecurityindex.org](http://www.humasecurityindex.org) accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

which shares common borders with all the other South Asian countries has at times by design but more often by compulsions has become a common denominator in several of these conflict situations. Logically so, India has become a critical component of the domestic political-security discourse of its neighbors and has continued to grapple with the image of being a 'big brother' in the region and its 'hegemonic' policies are a perpetual threat to the security of some of the neighboring countries.<sup>8</sup>

This view has gained ground primarily on account the Indian perception of the 'geo-strategic unity' of the subcontinent which makes the security of the entire subcontinent from external forces intrinsic to its own security. It has often appeared to be a localized though ineffective manifestation of a 'Monroe Doctrine' as pointed out in some of recent studies in India's foreign policy<sup>9</sup>. India's perpetual state of confrontation with Pakistan and its role during Bangladesh liberation and the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis are often seen as reminders of its inability to settle regional/bilateral problems in a peaceful manner. Though this has never really prevented the external players from playing a role within the region, yet India is always considered to be the critical player in determining the broad contours of the external engagement in the region.<sup>10</sup>

India's centrality to the security discourse in South Asia has been further compounded by the persisting internal conflicts that have plagued the countries within and their potential to have cross border manifestation. The Maoists insurgents in Nepal at the peak of their movement derived ideological and material support from their counterparts in India. The presence of extremist groups in Bangladesh often enabled the Indian insurgents in the North-east to maintain their supply lines. Similar links have been evident though to a lesser degree in parts of Southern India where the Tamil groups fighting in Sri Lanka used to get consistent support in the past. With Pakistan, the security problematic reflects multiple shades and colours with ideology, history and geopolitics remaining permanent markers in the relationship between the two countries. What makes the situation even more complex is the fact that the regional security paradigm in South Asia remains complicated despite the apparent positive developments that have taken place with regard to internal security structures in most of the countries particularly Sri Lanka, with end of the war against LTTE and Nepal with the mainstreaming of the Maoist movement. India remains in a rather complicated maze when it comes to locating itself in the contemporary regional security framework. Quite unlike in the past when it was more vocal and visible, it has recently preferred to play a silent role in

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<sup>8</sup> Ayesha Siddiqi Agha 'Pakistan's Security: Problems of Linearity', *South Asian Journal*, January-March 2004, p.39

<sup>9</sup> C. Raja Mohan *Crossing The Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2003) p.238

<sup>10</sup> For instance, though India abstained from playing an active role in Sri Lankan ethnic crisis since the 1990s, Norway, the facilitator of the peace process regularly informed India of the ongoing initiatives.

facilitating matters when questions of security in the neighbourhood have emerged and often reconciling once things have gone beyond its reach.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the divergence between the perceptions on external variables to the regional security and the inability to grapple with the internal dynamics of the security problem has left the South Asian countries with almost a nonexistent framework to discuss security as a collective concern. While the South Asian countries, during the last decade or so have tried to arrive at a consensus through cooperation on some social, economic and political issues, in the specific domain of security, such an understanding has been completely lacking. While the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has discussed some key issues such as Terrorism and drug trafficking, an express commitment to implement the same has been lacking. Besides regional efforts and bilateral efforts at discussing some of the key security issues have not found the much needed convergence at times. In essence, security in south Asia is considered to be a zero sum game.

Given the near impossibility of achieving the notion of collective security by arriving at a certain minimum consensus there have been some recent formulations on 'cooperative security' in South Asia. The idea is premised on the reality of profound interdependence among South Asian nations in both security and economic realms.<sup>12</sup> It calls for a sustained effort towards a shared prosperity in the region by depoliticizing the issues of economic cooperation and building the habits of cooperative security. It demands 'walking on both legs-expanding economic cooperation wherever possible and making sustained efforts to resolve political disputes.'<sup>13</sup> In essence, the proposition is that the logic of globalisation will necessitate a certain regional integration, which will automatically pave the way for greater accommodation within the security sphere.

In all such formulations on security in South Asia, state has been the definite and decisive factor in shaping the broad contours of the debate. It has been the central actor, which has to act on the basis of either reciprocity or unilateralism in defining its security parameters. These parameters in turn are expected to make the people secure and thereby pave the way for human security. State security and human security therefore are not seen as exclusive but it is the former, which in a way is seen as providing the basis for the latter. The challenge therefore is to see the two as being interlinked and mutually reinforcing each other- something, which indeed happens when we discuss human security in the regional context.

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<sup>11</sup> Some recent examples corroborate this point. India's role was conspicuous by its absence in the recent coup against the Maldivian President. It also kept a hands off policy in the final stages of the war against LTTE and prefers Nepal to work its own way towards consensus and consolidation for the new constitution.

<sup>12</sup> C. Raja Mohan, 'Cooperative Security in South Asia', *South Asian Journal*, October-December 2004, p.39

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p.40

## Human Security and the Region

Recent years have seen a considerable attention being given to the issues of both human development and human security in the South Asian region. The South Asian Human development reports have very comprehensively documented the challenges and opportunities, which the region faces in meeting the expectations of the 1.4 billion people of the region. The central argument was that economic growth was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for human progress. The governments need to actively focus on human development goals, and direct and use their resources efficiently, so that economic growth leads to empowerment of people. Thus people's needs and their aspirations have to be at the center of all development efforts.<sup>14</sup>

Though South Asia did show considerable progress in maintaining some economic development parameters, it continues to be plagued with colossal human deprivation. The region is home to nearly one-fifth of the global population but forty percent (515 million) of the world's poor subsisting on less than \$1 a day. The GDP per-capita of the region is US\$ 2000, much less compared to other developing regions of the world. Compounding the problem is the existence of very high rates of illiteracy (54 percent) in the region. In terms of basic human development indicators, south Asia ranks only above sub-Saharan Africa, but below Latin America and the Caribbean and South East Asia. The Human development Index for the countries varies considerably between different South Asian countries. While Bangladesh and Nepal were at the bottom, for Sri Lanka the HDI values were far in excess of the regional average.<sup>15</sup>

The low levels of human development in South Asia pose a challenge not only in terms of policy formulation but also have significant implications for order and stability in the region. Most of the current conflicts in the region have their genesis in a certain economic and political deprivation, which has led to the demands of secession and autonomy. The inability of the state to address some of these core issues has led to the greater marginalisation of a section of people who have been easily lured countervailing political beliefs. Economic reforms and globalisation have done little to address this question of the increasing gap between the promise and the reality of economic development.

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<sup>14</sup> Human Development in South Asia 2002, (Karachi : Oxford,2003) p.8

<sup>15</sup> In the year 2007, HDI values for South Asian Countries were India 0.612, Pakistan 0.572, Bangladesh 0.543, Nepal 0.553 and Sri Lanka 0.779. Cited from human Development in South Asia 2009, p.171.

At a more fundamental level, the problems relating to lack of human development and the concomitant challenge of providing Human security are of a universal concern and necessitate an approach, which cuts across the limits of 'national terrains'. With the human beings as the focus of analysis, the very idea of human security places a great deal of emphasis on collaborative efforts which address the issues from a regional perspective, particularly when the nature of the problem and its associated impact has a regional context. Such a perspective automatically takes care of the 'national' context of the problem, thereby thinning the apparent divide between the security of the state and that of the people.

Unfortunately, the existing mechanism of regional cooperation provided by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) does not provide the appropriate framework to address the questions of human security, though the institution is very much mandated to do that.<sup>16</sup> Political differences within the region and the bureaucratic pace with which the SAARC machinery performs have together made the organization incapable of having a visionary approach to collective human security. The real efforts to addressing the challenges to Human security therefore have to be initiated at different levels where commonality of interests and the stakes for enhanced cooperation are much deeper. The mechanism of sub-regional cooperation rather than regional cooperation appears to be one such one such principle, which may hold a better promise. Such a sub regional approach could have the following components:

- a) **Land borders as hub of human security:** Borders have conventionally been source of much tensions and discord in South Asia. They have conventionally been perceived as dividing lines between countries often ignoring that borders are also human settlements where ties of history, culture and economy necessitate a greater easing of movement and interaction rather than creating greater barriers. While the national security perspective demands that borders must be protected and preserved, the human security dimension calls for easing of borders to make best use of local resources, connectivities and aspirations. Development of contiguous border areas as hub of cross border economic, social and cultural connectivity could help in checking those factors that are inimical to national security and create pressures in interstate relations. Hence there could be a clear linkage between the national security objectives and the sub-regional human security actions that could make prosperous borderlands as intrinsic components of national security. There have been some limited initiatives already in this direction, but not enough to bring the convergence between the two security

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<sup>16</sup> The SAARC Charter places considerable importance to social and economic well-being of people of South Asia, and has an explicit social agenda. There has also been a SAARC Independent Commission for Poverty Alleviation which has outlined the plan of action to tackle poverty.



paradigms. The project of a South Asian Sub-regional Cooperation supported by Asian Development Bank's South Asia Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program set out five key operational objectives: to improve connectivity, to facilitate trade and investment, to develop regional tourism, to facilitate cooperation in energy, and to promote private sector cooperation. One such program included creating a South Asia sub regional information highway network across and within rural border communities which could help in governance, education and health by providing access to information and facilities.<sup>17</sup> Besides, India too momentarily shedding its inhibition towards SAARC has in the past emphasised on enhancing regional connectivity as key to developing greater linkages within South Asia. The SAARC Summit held in New Delhi in 2007 gave regional connectivity a serious consideration with the Indian Prime Minister himself giving a call to make border as connecting points for people, ideas and commerce. While the movement on regional connectivity projects remained limited, India's desire to pursue them has sustained. A more recent example is the unprecedented visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Dhaka last year along with four Chief Ministers of the Northern Eastern states. The North Eastern part of India requires easy transit facilities across Bangladesh to ease its own economic constraints, and Bangladesh could do well by sourcing its power requirements from the North eastern states which have huge untapped hydro power potential. Sub-regional cooperation pursued in right earnest in this 'human insecure' region can indeed lead to a win win situation for both, reducing the pressures on illegal migration and conflicts across borders.<sup>18</sup>

#### **b) Maritime Human security concerns**

In addition to the land frontiers as discussed above, maritime security is one of the other vital areas which has a very important human security dimension. Marine trade and resources across the sea line of communication and coastal routes offers an access to energy resources and merchant traffic , which in fact amount to 80% of all global economic interaction .Therefore there is an urgent need for Comprehensive approach to the economic, political, environment and nutritional aspects of human security as it pertains to sea and the ocean. The immediate players which contribute to above aspect are the fisherman. This community continues to

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<sup>17</sup> <http://pid.adb.org/pid/LoanView.htm?projNo=40054&seqNo=01&typeCd=3> accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012

<sup>18</sup> Swadesh Roy, Sub regional Cooperation : Northeast India and Bangladesh, Times of Assam , February, 2012, <http://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/sub-regional-economic-cooperation-north-east-india-and-bangladesh/> accessed on 21 March, 2012

explore challenges and threats in the sea, some time they got arrested for fishing in wrong waters or some time got highjack for ransom, but still they have to pay the cost for contribution to economy. The root causes of their appearance are stemming from the lack of human security, ineffective social security and bad governance in their home land.

Unfortunately in South Asia, concerns relating to maritime security have totally ignored the essential human concerns when it comes to the predominant national security concerns. Maritime zones contiguous to two countries often create problems to the communities like fishermen, who get caught between the competing claims which the two nations may have over maritime borders.

Hence there is a need to understand human security from the coastal and marine point of view, keeping human involved directly or indirectly through sea. According to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), which makes provisions for innocent passage, the captured crews should be repatriated as soon as they are arrested on account of border violation, but, in reality, the fishermen are kept for long periods in prison and their release often depends on the overall political climate between the two neighbors.

### **Fishermen and human security**

#### India and Sri Lanka

The narrow Palk Straits separating India and Sri Lanka have served as traditional fishing grounds for both countries. A long-standing dispute over the ownership of a 3.75-square-kilometer island, Kacchativu, 12 nautical miles off the Indian coast and 10.5 nautical miles off the Sri Lankan coast, was resolved in 1976 by a bilateral agreement awarding the island to Sri Lanka. Two maritime agreements of 1974 and 1976 define the maritime boundaries between the two countries.

Since then there has been several incidents involving fisherman from both the side poaching over both sides. During the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, in order to put check the increasing activities of the LTTE, the Sri Lankan navy intensified its surveillance in this area. According to them, they have to be strict because of security reasons and due to this the innocent Indian fisherman often became the victims. Art 73 of the UN Law of the Sea prohibits shooting of straying fisherman but Sri Lankan navy had been quite trigger happy.

The fishermen issue has affected the history, economic and culture of the coastal region of both India and Sri Lanka. For the fishermen of both the sides it has been a question of livelihoods which appears to be coming in the way of national security concerns of the two countries. What is even more distressing is the fact that even in the post LTTE scenario, the instance of shooting at innocent fishermen has continued. Perhaps there is a strong case for declaring the Palk state

area as a Maritime human security zone, where rights of traditional fishermen to secure their means of livelihood should be jointly recognized with security assurances and guarantees given by both the Navies.

### **India and Pakistan**

The 60-kilometer-long Sir Creek lies on the boundary between Pakistan and India in the marshes of the Rann of Kutch and flows into the Arabian Sea. It was not included in the 1968 Tribunal Award on the Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary because both sides had agreed to exclude the area from the deliberations of the tribunal.

The area adjoining the creeks is rich in fish, is a breeding ground for prawns, and may also be rich in hydrocarbon deposits. Any change in the land boundary will greatly affect the Extended Economic Zone (EEZ) of either country. Though Sir Creek involves a disputed area of only about 4–5 kilometers of marshy swamp, resulting changes with respect to the ocean and ocean bed could be significant.

The dispute is over the interpretation of the boundary line dividing the creek. The Pakistani view is that a mid-channel boundary (Thalweg Doctrine) is not applicable as the creek is not navigable. Therefore the boundary should run along the eastern bank of the creek, giving it full possession of the creek. The Indian view is that the creek is navigable at high tide and is in fact being used by fishing boats. Therefore the mid-channel principle should apply. The two countries' proposals for resolution are not mutually acceptable. As per the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas, India and Pakistan must demarcate the Continental Shelf by 2004 or they will be subject to third-party arbitration. In the meantime, fishermen of both countries are being regularly apprehended and jailed by both sides in the creek area, leaving their families without breadwinners and the release often being delayed due to prolonged security and bureaucratic procedures. While one cannot envisage a common maritime zone between India and Pakistan because of a host of extraneous issues involved, certainly there could be a mechanism for greater sensitivity to the cases of transgression on a mutually acceptable basis as the ultimate sufferers are the poor fishermen again.

A more human centric approach as applicable to both the cases could include:

### **Blueprint for Comprehensive maritime Human Security**

- 1) The need for horizontal and vertical interaction, trust and an accepted rule of law to allow for increased information exchange incorporating all stakeholders.
- 2) Strategies for catch of fish based traditional fishing ground and risk to reduce conflict by integrated socio-economic assessments from both the side.
- 3) Need for Integrated Coastal Management (ICM)
  - Addressing multiple sustainable coastal development issues.

- Resolving multiple use conflicts.
  - Resolving trans-boundary issues.
  - Providing integrated planning and management frameworks for rural and urban coastal cities.
  - Providing a “soft approach” to coastal management.
  - Being applicable in different local conditions.
- 4) Ocean and sea governance to create awareness and implementation of various studies for welfare of the fishing community.
  - 5) Need a *change in perception* regarding what constitutes maritime human security; moving from an overarching focus on state-based defence to a maritime approach to understand multi-disciplinary approach that incorporates the ideals of human security including coastal community, fisherman, and sailor who in fact are the pulses of growing economy of country, as well as which define the environmental, and maritime security network in the sea.