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Unpacking South Asian Regional Security in the 21st Century
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South Asia, home to a fifth of humanity, is one of the least integrated regions in the world. The intra-regional trade in South Asia accounts for only 5% of its total trade, manifesting a low degree of economic bonding in the region. Two main states in South Asia were born into an environment marred by mutual antagonism and it continued to remain so as they got locked into a multiple-levels conflict as to the dispute over territory, balance of power, threat perceptions, mutual accusation of interference in each other's domestic affairs and rival foreign policy approaches. The relationship between India and its other neighbors constantly fluctuates in an environment of mutual fear and suspicion. Faltering SAARC process appears to be in limbo since 2016 after the India's boycott of the Islamabad Summit, in retaliation to the Uri attack in Kashmir. Against these ground realities, what is really meant by 'regional security' and 'regionalism' in South Asia? Firstly, to unpack these issues, I intend to raise some fundamental questions pertaining to the construction of the term, 'South Asian region', and of the concept, 'regional security of South Asia'. The polysemy of the term 'South Asia' and processes of its multi-layered construction will be traced. What is the reference point of regional security exactly? It must be made clear that 'regional security' and the 'regional security complex' are not the same; the first is a reference point and the latter is an analytical tool. The regionalism is a process propelled by multi-faceted regional bonding. Later, the issues and processes of South Asian regional security and insecurity in the 21st century will be unpacked with the help of these analytical insights.

The term South Asia bags different notions, depending on the context of its use and the underlying stake of its construction. The term has been presented as a civilizational entity, a geographical description and also as a political idea. The shared cultural heritage in South Asia is a historical fact but culture is a constantly evolving phenomenon. The existence of different religions and paths of civilizations in South Asia also contests the idea that South Asia forms a single cultural region. Many states in South Asia are post-colonial entities and they possess a

similar colonial experience--unification and division. However, the geographical description of South Asia does not correspond with any sense of political belonging. Against this backdrop, what is meant by *South Asian region*? To answer this question, it is necessary to trace the genealogy of concept of 'region' in international studies and evolution of regional security studies.

The concept of region entered into the academic realm of international studies as a unit of analysis only after the Second World War; but its ideological roots can be traced in the geo-political writings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.   In the early Cold War years, an analytical category of region, located in between the individual state and the global system, was recognized in line with global strategic projections of the superpowers.

The concept of 'region' as a heuristic construct to study international relations gained currency with the proliferation of area studies in US centers of higher learning and research after the Second World War.   At the same time, certain scholars in international politics conceptualized geographically distinct group of states as subsystems or subordinate systems. Leonard Binder, then Director of the Near East Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, can be considered the pioneer to use subsystem approach to study regions[1]. He was soon followed by a group of scholars such as Michael Brecher of McGill University[2], William Zartman of SAIS and Larry W. Bowman of Connecticut University[3] who employ systems theory to bring regions to international politics. There are four necessary conditions defining regional subsystems: (1) the actors' patterns of relations exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity to the extent that a change at one point in the subsystem affect other points, (2) the actors are generally proximate, (3) internal and external observers and actors recognize the subsystem as a distinctive 'theatre of operation', and (4) the subsystem logically consists of at least two or, quite probable, more actors.

In the Cold War context, regions were identified mainly in terms of the importance given to the region in global strategic calculations of the Superpowers. South Asia as a region was not

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[1] Leonard Binder, "The Middle East as a Subordinate International System", World Politics, 10 (April 1958), Pp. 408-29

[2] Michael Brecher, "International System and Asian Studies: Subordinate State System of South Asia", World Politics, 15 (January 1963), Pp. 213-35.

[3] William Zartman, "Africa as a Subordinate System in International Relations", International Organization, 21 (Summer 1967), Pp. 545-64.

considered vital to their central strategic balance. However, India and Pakistan as individual states figured to some extent in the containment and de-containment strategies of superpowers. The commonly used term in academic parlance at that time was the Indian Sub-continent. The attention was mainly on the Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

It should also be noted that in the deliberations of Asian Relations Conference in 1947 or Colombo Powers Meeting in 1954, the term South Asia was not used at all. It was in the late 1950s, that the US State Department and the World Bank used the term South Asia. In 1959, US state department published a briefing document entitled 'Subcontinent of South Asia'. It was believed that the term South Asian region is politically neutral, compared to the term Indian Sub-continent[4].

It is with the establishment of SAARC in 1985 that the term South Asia received a new currency. Since then, various agreements were signed and initiatives were launched with South Asian regional focus. The achievements of SAARC in promoting regional cooperation, especially in some functional areas should not be discounted. However, progress in achieving goals and objectives of regional cooperation in key political and economic domains is far from satisfactory.

In this situation, what is meant by South Asian regional security? If security is defined as pursuit of freedom from threat and fear, i.e., a process then, whose security are we talking of when it comes to South Asia? In this regard, three references need to be taken into consideration: South Asian Region as a whole, the states in the region and more importantly, people in the region. South Asia's position in the global system and region-wide security issues that demands regional approach and action constitute the first level. The reduction of adversarial environments linked with fear and suspicion in relations among South Asian States and promotion of trust and confidence through economic interaction and political dialogue would be the concerns under the second level of reference. Security concerns of individual citizen in the region can be included in regional security as many of them are more or less common irrespective of state boundaries.

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[4] See, Aminah Mohammad-Arif, "Introduction. Imaginations and Constructions of South Asia: An Enchanting Abstraction?", Smaj - South Aia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal, 10 (2014). Pp. 1-26

Threats to human security can be cited as a case in point. The discourse on Peoples' SAARC represents this tendency.

In addition, the term regional security can be used to explain present state of security conditions, i.e., an analysis. A rich body of literature is available in South Asian regional security and in particular the contributions of the Copenhagen School must be noted. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, in their highly influential work published in 2003, *Regions and Power: Structure of International security*, developed the regional security complex theory (RSCT)[5]. They argue that security is clustered in geographically shaped regions because threats travel more easily over short distance than over long ones. Furthermore, threats are most likely to be in the region and security of each actor in a region interacts with the security of other actors in the region. They observe "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another"[6]. In analyzing the Regional Security of South Asia from the perspective of RSCT, they observed two points. First, the South Asian regional security complex was slowly moving towards an internal transformation from bipolarity to unipolarity as India got stronger and Pakistan weaker. Second, the rise of China was creating a center of gravity that was slowly drawing South Asia into closer security interaction with the East Asian regional security complex. In his article on the South Asian Security Complex published in 2011, Barry Buzan argued that despite many events in South Asia, but 'little in the way of structural change from the analysis in Power and Region'[7].

Thus, it is useful to bring to focus the difference between two contexts in which the term regional security is employed: process and description. According to Earnest B. Hass, "the phenomenon of regionalism is sometimes equated with the study of regional integration. Regionalism can be a political slogan; if so, it is ideological data that the student of integration must use. Regionalism can also be an analytical devise suggesting what the world's 'natural'

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[5] Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, Regions and Power: Structure of International security, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.45-50.
[6] Barry Buzan, "South Asia moving Towards Transformation: Emergence of India as a Great Power", *International Studies*, 39:1, (2002), p.2.
[7] Barry Buzan, "The South Asian Security Complex in a Decentring World Order: Reconsidering Regions and Powers", International Studies, 48:1 (2011 January), Pp. 1-19.

regions are (or ought to be)"[8].   Regionalism is a process as well as an outcome of the process. Regionalism cannot be imposed; it should be evolved. The primary condition of regionalism would be a common regional identity that is determined by a number of factors.   Having common socio-cultural traits and values does not necessarily generate regionalism.   The perception of having common regional attribute must set in motion of a process of regional bonding. Political and economic dynamics in operation at different levels are critical factors that promote or hinder regional bonding despite the fact that the region claims common regional attributers.

In new millennia, there is a growing tendency towards regional economic integration. As East Asia Forum noted, as of February 2016, 625 notifications of regional trade agreements had been received by the WTO and 419 were in force[9]. South Asia remains out of this tendency. After the establishment of SAARC, a number of initiatives were taken in the direction of regional economic integration such as signing of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement in 2004.   But in real terms SAFTA proceeds very slowly due to trust deficit, insufficient policy-relevant analytical work on gains of regional integration to make informed policy decisions, limited logistics and regulatory impediments and cross-broader conflicts. Economically South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world at present. Intra-regional investment in South Asia is smaller than one percent. Its intra-regional trade accounts only for 5 percent of its total trade whereas intraregional trade in Southeast Asia makes up 25 percent of ASIAN's total trade. South Asia is a region where the highest interstate barriers exist to trade and it suffers from prohibitive tariffs. If these barriers are removed, intra-regional trade in South Asia could increase from the current $23 billion to $50 billion. According to some survey, at present it is 20% cheaper for India to trade with Brazil than with its neighbor, Pakistan[10]. Economic gains of deeper economic integration in South Asia are not unknown. But, the region still falters in making a breakthrough. It could be explained in terms of political logic unique to South Asia.

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[8] Ernest B. Hass, " The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pre-theorizing" in Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold, eds., Regional Integration-Theory and Research, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 8.

[9] "Intra-Regional Trade Lagging in South Asia", Economic Watch, May 11, 2016 WWW.economicwatch.com/.../Intra-Regional-Trade-Lagging-in-South-Asia0511.html

[10] "The Potential of Intra-regional Trade for South Asia", www.worldbank.org/en/news/.../the-potential-of-intra-regional-trade-for-south-asia.

It should be pointed out that fundamental to the conflict between India and Pakistan is the contradictory ideologies upon which the two states are based. The ideological rationale of the state of Pakistan has been the homeland for Muslims in the Indian sub-continent while founders of the Indian state asserted multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic character of the state based on a federal constitution to maintain the unity of India's diverse social patchwork of collective identities. The idea that Hinduism and Islam formed two separate civilizations, a view that is shared by Hindu nationalists in India as well, sets roadblocks to the growth of regionalism with regional bonding.

The chronic rivalry between India and Pakistan is just one dimension of the pervasive trust deficit in South Asia. Incidents reported from time to time in both sides of the boarder keep the pot boiling at all times. It has now become a socially constructed phenomenon. Lack of trust among states in South Asia can't be attributed wholly to Indo-Pakistan conflict. The trust-deficit in the region is also an outcome of some architectural realities of South Asian states. The unchangeable and undeniable regional reality in South Asia, the term used by late Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, is the central and asymmetrical presence of India in various domains. India's preponderance over all others in South Asia is based on its size, power, resources and development[11]. Further, India's centrality in South Asia is geo-political. None of the South Asian countries interact with another without touching or crossing Indian land, sea or air space. In addition, India has special ties with each of its neighbors with regards to language, religion, ethnicity, kinship, economic nerves or common historical experience. The states around India fear that India could use some of these ties and cross-border linkages to interfere in the internal affairs of its neighbors. Sir Ivor Jennings vividly captured this love-hate relationship between India and its neighbors in 1951 when he wrote, "India thus appears as a friendly but potentially dangerous neighbor to whom one must be polite but a little distance. It is not because that India and Indians are unpopular, but that the Ceylonese [Sri Lankans], while admiring much that is Indian, and feeling themselves racially akin to Indian have a sensation of living under a mountain which might send down destructive avalanches"[12]. This is more relevant today.

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[11] "Regional co-operation and security: a Sri Lankan perspective"' (The Krishna Menon Memorial Centenary Lecture delivered by Lakshman Kadirgamar, at Kota, Rajasthan, India on Dec15, 1996) Daily News, January 09, 1997

[12] Sir Ivor Jennings, The Commonwealth in Asia, (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p.113.

The paradoxical impact of the rise of India to a status of global power on regional bonding should also be paid attention. In the last decade India consistently maintained one of the highest GDP growth rates in the world. India was able to take impressive strides in the area of knowledge industry and R & D. India is now ranked fourth in the Global Fire Power (GFP) ranking. Today, India's military is the third largest and its air force the fourth largest with 2185 aircrafts (Fighter Aircraft, Attach Aircraft, Transport Aircraft, Trainer Aircraft and Attack Helicopters). Its navy is fifth largest in the world[13]. These developments have compelled India, as an aspirant global power, to extend its strategic perspective beyond South Asia. At the same time, it acerbates the fear of Indian 'bogey' among its small neighbors as they feel becoming more and more Lilliput before the Indian Gulliver.

This is only one aspect of the changing scenarios. It must not be forgotten that South Asia became the fastest growing region in the world in 2016 and solidified its lead in 2017 due to solid economic performance by India. Still the South Asian region is home to 40% of world poor. The challenge before India's neighbors in South Asia is how to leverage their special links with India to become an integral part of South Asian growth engine. Nevertheless, stunned and threatened by economic and scientific advances achieved by the Indian Industrial and commercial establishment, some sections of weak and backward industrial and commercial middle class of South Asian neighbors seek state protection to remain within their own comfortable cocoon. In contrast, general public in these countries experiences cross border dividends generated by the growth of Indian economy and by other advances in scientific and medical research. The economies of other countries also benefit from the renewed Indian economic dynamism. For example, Colombo port has emerged as a major international transshipment hub for Indian goods. In 1915, 42% of India's transshipment was handled by Sri Lanka.

In order to go forward as a global power, India needs stable and friendly South Asian environment. It is a fact that insecure and discontented neighbors around her in South Asia would not augur well for India, having millstones around her neck. In the changed constellation of power in South Asia, what needs today is a 'new Gujral Doctrine' on the part of India to allay the perceived fears of its neighbors. In the long run, it will enhance its soft power in global

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[13] www.globalfirepower.com (2016)

politics. At the same time, it would give a kick-start to the stalled SAARC process. The small states of South Asia also need to recognize evolving geo-political realities in the region.

All the issues and impediments come to the forefront when regionalism is projected from the state-centered formula. The trust deficit exists mainly among states and not among people in South Asia. It must be noted that there can be two approaches to regionalism. The first is the top-down approach, which aims to foster collaboration between the states in the region. The issues of regional power politics come forward to hamper the process of regionalism when it is pursued through top-down approach. The second is the bottom-up approach, focusing on the people-to-people interaction based on common belonging and shared interests. In bottom up approach, the reference point of regional security, hence the driving force of regionalism is the people in the region that counts on their community of interests cutting across state boundaries. Therefore, the possible way out of the present imbroglio of SAARC is to redefine and re-chart regionalism from bottom-up approach. In such an endeavor, the human security in South Asia becomes a priority in regional security. The two approaches are not alternatives to each other. In an ideal situation, the both could proceed simultaneously. Hence, the South Asian regionalism must be a multilayered process and a political discourse. Who sets the agenda of the discourse is the critical issue here. It is a too serious issue to leave in the hands of demagogues, a common breed in South Asia