Conflicts in South Asia:
Causes, Consequences, Prospects

S D Muni[1]

Studying conflicts is a big intellectual enterprise. More than 60 per cent of the top 100 think-tanks listed in the University Pennsylvania survey in 2012 study conflicts and issues related to conflicts. These conflict studies concentrate mostly on inert-state wars and intra-state armed conflicts.[2] The conflicts generated by great power interventions or the imperatives of global order receive only occasional or incidental attention. This area of conflict studies would perhaps gain in salience as the phenomenon of "Arab Spring" spreads to other regions, and as interventions invoking "Responsibility to Protect" within the United Nations framework are more frequently taken resort to as was evident in Libya or could be tried in Syria. For yet another reason, the role of "global political conditions" needs to be factored in seriously in the study of conflicts. Making this point, Spain's former Foreign Minister and the former Secretary General

---

[1]   Professor Sukh Deo Muni is Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He can be contacted at isassdm@nus.edu.sg and sdmuni@gmail.com. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of ISAS. The paper was presented at an international seminar in New Delhi on 27 February 2013. The theme of the seminar – organised by the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University – was 'Conflicts in South Asia: EU's Role in Conflict Resolution'.

[2]   Uppsala University in Sweden has been compiling and putting out data on internal and inter-state conflicts on annual basis since 1988 as part of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Annual data is published as "States in Armed Conflict", Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.
IISS London also maintains an Armed Conflicts database (ACD). This is updated annually and contains information on more than 70 conflicts around the world**.**

of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Javier Solana and the President of Eurasia Group Ian Bremmer jointly commented (21 January 2013):

> In today's world, identifying and managing hotspots is not simply a matter of pulling out a map, spotting the wildfires and empowering diplomats to douse the flames. To understand today's major conflicts and confrontations, we must recognize important ways in which global political conditions enable them. Conflicts are much more likely to arise or persist when those with the means to prevent or end them cannot and will not do so.[3]

One may even go further than this and say that conflicts will persist until the major powers of the world and the global power system that they create, perpetuate and manage, do not stop precipitating or fuelling them for their strategic and other interests. In conflict studies, the questions of resource conflicts and human security concerns, neglected until the end of the last millennium are gradually being taken up on board but the effort and resources allocated to them are not adequate as yet.

South Asia has earned a status of its own as an important area of focus in conflict studies; and why not? After all, it is a region which has witnessed five full-scale inter-state conflicts, where adversaries are nuclear-armed and Asia's major powers, some of its states have earned the distinction of becoming a part of the hub of global terrorism and where no country has been free from insurgencies and separatist movements. The Armed Conflict Database (ACD) produced by the IISS (London) has been identifying nine South Asian internal and international conflicts. A large number of South Asian think-tanks, including those funded by governments as also those affiliated to established universities, are involved in conflict studies, with one of them based in New Delhi, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), running an annual conference on the study of "Armed Conflicts in South Asia" for the past six years.[4] The Pak Institute for Peace Studies has also been computing information on conflicts in South Asia on a periodic basis.[5]In this paper, we propose to identify the conflict types in South Asia and discuss their causes and consequences.

---

[3] Javier Solana and Ian Bremmer, "A New Year of Global Conflict", Project IIIV Syndicate, http://www.project.syndicate.org/print/a.new.year.of.global.conflict.by.javier. (Accessed on 28 January 2013)

[4] See the IPCS report of the "Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2012" for the Sixth Annual Conference. The Conference was addressed by India's National Security Advisor, Shivshankar Menon.

[5] See for instance Khurram Iqbal and Safdar Sial, "Armed Conflicts in South Asia: Overview and New Dimensions", dated: 07-06-2007, Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. In this report only Maldives was reported as the South Asian country free from any internal or external conflicts.

Conflict Types

Conflicts in South Asia, or for that matter in most of the other parts of the world, can be broadly put in four categories, namely (i) those imposed and escalated by the global political, strategic and developmental dynamics, including the role of great powers; (ii) those inherited and strategically induced in inter-state engagements; (iii) those precipitated and nurtured by the internal political turbulence, socio-cultural fault-lines and developmental distortions; and (iv) those that are caused and covered by the non-state actors. The first category includes conflicts inflicted by the forces and factors from outside the region. For example, conflict generated in or between the South Asian countries as a result of the United States' post 9/11 intervention in Afghanistan to wage a "global war on terrorism", the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979-80 and the US-led resistance to this intervention during 1980-89, both propelled by the exigencies of the Cold War, will come under the first category. The Chinese war on India in 1962 was also a war inflicted on a South Asian country from outside the region. The Cold War had also impinged on South Asia to deepen and sharpen various regional divides and complicate internal and inter-state conflicts. A typical example is the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. While the strategic imperatives of the world order dynamics have directly contributed to South Asian conflicts, the global developmental and ideological issues have done so indirectly and gradually by stimulating and reinforcing many internal conflicts. Globalisation as a process, for instance, has, besides its many positive and creative dimensions, negative fallout as well; and that has added to South Asian woes and worries.[6] In the second category, India-Pakistan conflicts would assume an important place. In the third category would fall all the insurgencies and ethnic/sectarian conflicts in South Asia and the fourth category would cover the activities of the terrorist groups, like the attacks on Mumbai in India in 2008, or the operations of the insurgent and criminal groups across the borders in South Asia.

The conflicts included in these categories could both be armed and violent as well as those that manifest diplomatic tensions, strong disagreements and non-violent popular protests. Both armed and unarmed conflicts have a tendency to feed into each other and get transformed into each other. The science and art of conflict management also focuses on transforming violent conflicts into non-violent conflicts and preventing the non-violent conflicts from assuming violent dimensions. Non-violent inter-state conflicts in South Asia have been triggered by territorial disputes, disagreements on access to or sharing of resources of the region like water, energy fisheries as also by disputes and disagreements on issues related to trade, transit and investments, migration of people across the borders etc.

The fourth category of conflicts, related to the operations of non-state actors, is being drawn attention to in recent years, particularly after the 9/11 Al Qaeda attacks on the US and the

---

[6] For a discussion of the negative aspects of globalisation, including on South Asia, see, George Heine & Ramesh Thakur (Ed.), The Dark Side of Globalization, United Nations University Press, Tokyo, New York, Paris, 2011.

proliferation of terrorist groups that operate across international borders with or without support from any established state. Underlining the importance of non-state actors in conflict studies, India's National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon said in his address to the IPCS Conference in 2012:

> Today, there is a fundamental change in the nature of conflict, which is not just evolving from one stage to another, but is undergoing change as a result of shift in the character of a conflict. The age of global interdependence has ensured the decline in conflicts between states. Nevertheless, there is escalation in the conflicts involving non-state actors, particularly when the lines between state and non-state actors are considerably becoming vague…The cocktail of NGOs, social media and the like, as spotted in West Asia, induce kinetic and physical consequences ultimately culminating in regime changes. In addition, the technology has also empowered the non-state actors to pose an important challenge to the state. The obliteration of distinction between state and non-state actors along with the punctured boundaries of state sovereignty has created new situations demanding novel perspectives.[7]

The categories of conflicts identified above are analytical and therefore, the conflicts thus generated do not necessarily remain confined to any single category in their practical and real-life manifestations. More often it is the spill-over of one category of conflict into the other one that makes real-life conflicts complex and intricate for the states and the analysts to address. This was amply demonstrated in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war that led to the emergence of a sovereign independent Bangladesh. This inter-state conflict was generated by the internal turbulence in Pakistan, by the military regime's authoritarian and ruthless way of dealing with the demands of the Bengalis of then East Pakistan. This has been admitted even in the Pakistan government-appointed Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report.[8] This is not to deny India's strategic interests in exploiting Pakistan's internal conflict, but such interests could not have come into play if there was no internal conflict in Pakistan and the spill-over of this conflict did not affect India adversely. There were 10 million refugees pushed from then East Pakistan into India as a result of Pakistan's military crackdown that resulted in genocide.[9] The spill-over of this conflict and international community's indifference towards these consequences forced India to get involved. The regional inter-state conflict then sucked the US and China into it directly because of the imperatives of their respective strategic interests in South Asia in the context of the then prevailing Cold War and the US military alliance with Pakistan.[10] There are many more

---

[7] Ibid. p.4.

[8] The text of this report can be downloaded from Bangla2000.com. http://www.bangla2000.com/Bangladesh/Independence-War/report-Hamoodur- Accessed on 8 March 2013.

[9] The number of refugees burdened on India was acknowledged by the UN high Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). For details see, Antara Data, Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971, Routledge, New York, 2013.

[10] Considerable literature is available on this conflict. For some representative studies see, Ayoob, Mohammad and K. Subrahmanyam, The Liberation War, S.Chand & Co. Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi 1972; Sisson, Richard and Leo e.

instances of internal conflicts spilling over into a neighbouring country to precipitate inter-state conflict in South Asia.

The categories of conflicts in South Asia listed above also do not represent any chronological or hierarchical order. There is a general assumption globally, and for good reasons, that inter-state conflicts have increasingly given way to conflicts within the states.[11] South Asia is no exception to this but the boundaries of conflicts should be seen as porous and not rigid in South Asia and elsewhere. Also the trends in conflict types are also not uni-linear. Howsoever remote it looks the possibility of another India-Pakistan war or even an open India-China conflict or India facing a two-front war situation exists in real.[12] Some of the most intractable and protracted internal conflicts in South Asia like the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal have been brought to an end in rather unexpected ways. No one predicted either a total military annihilation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka at the hands of the Sri Lankan military in 2009 or the acceptance of a peaceful, democratic transformation by the Nepal Maoists through their joining hands with the mainstream political parties, facilitated by the quiet and informal good offices of India and the international community in 2006.[13] However bringing an end to a conflict does not mean that it has been resolved and its root causes have been fully addressed and eliminated. In Sri Lanka, even after the end of the war, political resolution of the ethnic issue is awaited and the promise of building a New Nepal, that brought the Maoists into the mainstream of national politics remains to be fulfilled and institutionalised though monarchy has been removed and a republican political order has been established.

The Causes

Two major roots of South Asian conflicts have been their colonial legacies and turbulent processes of post-independence nation- and state-building. Three sets of colonial legacies having considerable conflict potential were; (i) the creation of unnatural and absurd state systems, (ii) unresolved boundaries of these states and (iii) undefined status of a diversity of its ethnic and religious minorities and social groups. The end of colonial rule in South Asia came as a result,

---

Rose, War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh, University of California Press, Berkeley 1990; Matinuddin, General Kamal, Tragedy of Errors: East Pakistan Crisis, 1968-1971, Wajidalis, Lahore, 1994.

[11] IDEA, Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in 21st Century, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2006. Also see the Uppsala University annual reports on States in Armed Conflicts.

[12] India's Army Chief Gen. Deepak Kapoor told a closed door army seminar in December 2009 that India was revising its war strategy to prepare for a two-front war with Pakistan and China. Times of India, December 31, 2009; also see Nirupama Subramanian, "General Kapoor's remarks betray hostile intent, says Pakistan", The Hindu, January 3, 2010.

[13] For some idea of India's role in ending Maoist insurgency in Nepal, see, S.D. Muni, "Bringing the Maoists down from the Hills' in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David Malone and Suman Pradhan, Nepal in Transition: from People's War to Fragile Peace, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012, pp.313-331.

not of any war of independence but a peaceful struggle waged by India. The success of this struggle ensured decolonisation of other South Asian countries like Myanmar (then Burma) and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) as well. However, partition of India created an unnatural and absurd state of Pakistan as a two-piece entity, in east and west, separated by a huge chunk of Indian territory. This absurdity was rectified only 23 years after partition and as a result of a fierce regional conflict, when Bangladesh emerged as a separate sovereign, independent nation. The colonial rulers' communal rationale of partition, though endorsed for short-sighted political gains by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, had a strong strategic under-current to create a strong but pliant state of the Muslims of the subcontinent that could be rallied against the oil-rich Muslim states of the region and resist the suspected Soviet march southward. The traditional British colonial interests converged here with the emerging US interests that shaped the contours of the Cold War in strategically dividing the whole world. The communal basis of the state of Pakistan however, kept Pakistan internally uncertain of its national identity and created a potentially volatile and almost perennial cause of communal conflict not only between India and Pakistan but also within India and Pakistan.

The absurdity of the methods used for transfer of power was also inherent in the application of the principle of paramountcy. This principle not only made the task of building and consolidating new states in India and Pakistan difficult and conflict-prone but contributed to the persisting source of tensions and war between them, such as on Kashmir question.[14] Colonial mind set to keep India and Pakistan divided was evident in many other forms as well. Recall India's first Governor General Mountbatten's insistence on accession and 'plebiscite' at the same time. Accession as a condition to India's defence of Kashmir against Pakistan's tribal invasion denied Pakistan to covet Kashmir by military means, and the 'plebiscite' rider in turn made 'the accession' to India incomplete, fragile and disputed.

The colonial legacy of unresolved borders also continues to keep South Asian relations conflict-prone. Two of the longest imperial boundaries of British India left unsettled were with Afghanistan (Durand Line) and China (McMahon Line). While the former is a major contentious issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the latter resulted in a war between India and China in 1962 and continues to be vulnerable to another Sino-Indian conflict. Tensions have also cropped up between China and Bhutan due to the unsettled McMahon line between British India and Tibet. Radcliff's partition line between India and (East) Pakistan still remains to be settled as boundary between India and Bangladesh. The two countries signed a boundary agreement in 1974 and again in September 2011 and the complicated question of enclaves of one country in the territory of another was resolved. However, both these agreements remain to be ratified by the Indian parliament owing to internal political pressures. The unfinished business of firming up the Radcliff line also keeps the India-Pakistan border fragile and sensitive in the Sir-creek area. It

---

[14] The details of British withdrawal and India's partition have been studied from different perspectives. For a somewhat dispassionate account see, Stanley Wolpert, Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India, Oxford University Press, 2006.

is also unfortunate that India and Pakistan left the task of drawing the Line Of Control (LOC) incomplete after the Shimla Agreement of 1972, resulting in the bilateral conflict in Siachen glacier region. Disputes on defining borders have also haunted India in its relations with Sri Lanka and Nepal. India-Sri Lanka border now is settled peacefully following their bilateral agreement on Kachchativu Island (1974) and settlement of maritime boundary in the Palk Strait (1976). In case of Nepal the boundary issue gets complicated by the changing course of common rivers with India.

We mentioned earlier about the conflicts of South Asia resulting from sources located outside the region, in the global political and strategic order. The more-than-a-decade-long "war on global terrorism" that has engulfed two of the major South Asian countries Afghanistan and Pakistan directly and the third major country India indirectly resulted from the US attack and intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. The US attack on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan can in many legitimate ways be explained as retaliation against Al Qaeda's 9/11 aggression and its acts of unprecedented terrorism on the US. However, there was something more in 9/11 attacks than just an act of terrorism. To say that terrorism was a collateral damage may amount to stretching the argument a bit too far, but one must objectively assess that the three attacks on the White House (an apparent target, by all accounts), the Pentagon and the World Trade Center were carefully planned against the US political, military and economic power. The targets were not American people but the icons of American power and dominance which Al Qaeda has been resenting and preparing to challenge. 9/11 in another way was therefore an attack on the uni-polar global political order as it existed after the end of the Cold War. The US and NATO forces have set their programme to withdraw from Afghanistan by July 2014. However, the nature of end-game in Afghanistan and its consequences for conflict in South Asia remains to be seen, and they promise to be hugely challenging to South Asia's peace, stability and long-term security.

This is however not for the first time that an extra-regional power's intervention or an imperative of the global political dynamics has resulted in conflict in South Asia. The then Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 was an even worse example of an extra-regional intervention in South Asia which also involved Pakistan in the ensuing conflict. The strong impulse of Cold War between the then prevailing superpowers was clearly the driving force behind this intervention. While the Soviet Union explained its intervention as a reaction to the US covert operations in Afghanistan, considered the soft under-belly of its Central Asian region, the US viewed the Soviet military push as an attempt to access the warm waters of the Indian Ocean through Pakistan. The US therefore put in all its efforts, in collaboration with countries like Pakistan, to roll back the Soviet military intervention. China had joined the US in this resistance to the then Soviet Union, as the Cold War had taken a new dimension, splitting China from its ideological alliance with the Soviet Union and bringing it closer to the US to help settle its differences with its former communist ally.

Yet another example of a war inflicted on a South Asian country from outside the region was the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. This war has generally been presented in the history text books as a border war precipitated by territorial dispute between Asia's giant neighbours. So was it in many respects. But if China initiated this war only in pursuance of its territorial claims and to settle the issue with India, then why did it withdraw almost completely and unilaterally even from the areas that it continues to lay claims on, like Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Sikkim. China of course, continues to keep the disputed Aksai China region in the western sector of the Himalayan border under its occupation since 1958, much before the war of 1962. The decision to launch the attack on India was surreptitiously taken by Chairman Mao Tse Tung, in consultation with a coterie of close advisers around him and not through the legitimate organs of the Chinese State. What irritated Chairman Mao and the Chinese leadership most, more than India's refusal to accept the Chinese proposal of a package deal involving the swapping of territories claimed, was his feelings about China's isolation. India was seen to be enjoying support both from the US and the Soviet Union. If this support continued, India could emerge as the major Asian power which was unacceptable to China. The war of 1962 therefore humiliated India militarily in Asia and exposed the extent of poor support that the two superpowers could extent to India in its hour of need. China chose the right time to launch its attack when both the superpowers were trapped in the worst moment of their mutual rivalry, the nuclear standoff in Cuba. There are also reports that China had diplomatically ascertained that the US was not in a position to come to India's help if the latter got involved in any conflict.

The above instances underline the important role that the then prevailing global strategic system, Cold War, played in imposing conflicts on South Asian countries. The Cold War had also widened and sharpened the India-Pakistan divide and made the Kashmir conflict intractable. Cultivating Pakistan as a bulwark of Muslim anti-communist resistance against the Soviet Union in the energy-rich Central and West Asian regions was an important objective of the US-led Western alliance system. For this, supporting Pakistan on the Kashmir question was a relatively small price that the US was more than willing to pay. US military establishments were also hopeful that Pakistan would be willing to spare troops for Asian operations of the Western alliance system if the Kashmir issue could be settled to its satisfaction. India's Prime Minister Nehru tried in vain to resolve Kashmir issue in cooperation with Pakistan before the latter could be inducted into the Western alliance system.[15] During the early years of the Cold War, the US drive to keep China contained also resulted in complicating the Tibetan question as a result of the Dalai Lama's flight to India and the US waging of a covert anti-China war in Tibet through the Tibetan tribe of Khampas. These developments contributed to the breakdown of Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai phase in Sino-Indian relations and the deterioration in these relations on the border and Tibetan issues. While these issues remain unresolved, the turn in the great-power relations

---

[15] See, S.D. Muni, Chapter 3, "South Asia", in Mohammad Ayoob (Ed.), Conflict and Intervention in the Third World, Croom Helm, London, 1980, pp. 38-72. Man and Development articles.

from the Cold War to the emerging rivalry between China and the US following China's rise may have conflict-fuelling impact on Sino-Indian relations.

The strategic aspects of the world order have directly contributed to the conflicts in South Asia, but its ideological and developmental aspects have created conditions that have encouraged, intensified and sustained conflicts in South Asian societies. Globalisation which has otherwise stirred up the global developmental processes and opened up several opportunities for the countries of South Asia, have also induced distortions by widening inequalities, creating and sustaining poverty, enhancing consumerism, encouraging crony capitalism and intensifying cultural alienation. These distortions in the development processes have generated conditions for conflict identified in World Bank Conflict Analysis Framework.[16] Globalisation has unleashed three explosions in the developing world, namely of information, of identity and of aspirations. Political systems have not been able to cope with the imperatives of these explosions, in the face of severe governance and leadership deficits. A telling example of governance deficit can be seen in the failure of the South Asian regimes not only in leaving large social constituencies and marginalised sections ungoverned and un/under-developed but also in not rehabilitating large numbers of people uprooted as a result of mega developmental projects like high dams, mining and deforestation.[17] Numerous examples of leadership failure in South Asia in the recent years are evident in the failure of institutionalising democratic gains in Nepal, Maldives and Pakistan, and thus the creation of potential for conflicts. In Sri Lanka, even three years after the defeat of the Tamil insurgency, the ruling regime has failed to find credible answers to the root causes of the ethnic conflict. Excessive preoccupation with personal and group (party) power has been a very important reason behind the leadership failures in such cases. Struggles for power and influence at various levels in the South Asian polities have sustained and vitiated raging conflicts. Recall the political use of Sikh extremist Bindrawale in Punjab during the 1970s by India's Indira Gandhi, hobnobbing of the Sri Lankan President Premadasa with the LTTE to humiliate the Indian Peace Keeping Force during the late-1980s and the patronising of the Maoist insurgency by King Birendra of Nepal during 1996-2001, as some of the typical examples in this respect.

South Asia's domestic conflicts are also rooted in its turbulent and unfinished processes of state- and nation-building. Unsettled social equations and political hierarchies sharpen ethnic and sectarian conflicts. Identity and ownership of the state- and the nation-in-the-making bring diverse social groups at daggers drawn. Pakistan's unsettled national identity, accentuated by the dominance of Punjabis over the Sindhi, Baluchi and Pathan social groups, and Sri Lanka's decision in 1959 to carve itself out as a Sinhala-Buddhist State by ignoring the sensitivities of the minority groups of Tamils and Muslims have been at the root of serious internal conflicts in

---

[16] http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCPR/214574-1112883508044/20657757/CAFApril2005.pdf> (Accessed on 31 January 31 2013)

[17] Displacement of marginalised populations and alienation of cultural (tribal) groups is considered one of the important reasons behind the rise of left-extremist insurgency in India.

these countries. In India, the past 60-plus years of democratic evolution had to confront numerous challenges of integrating the marginalised social groups; and now the surge of hitherto neglected and discriminated caste and tribal groups are putting huge pressure on the capacities of the state and its political processes. Unequal distribution of the fruits of development and the widening gap between aspirations and acquisitions of the social groups also fuel conflicts. In Nepal, the 10 years of Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006 was sustained by the marginalised tribal and regional groups who are now demanding equal and respectable status in 'New Nepal' which has in turn paralysed the process of constitution-writing and institution-building.

South Asia's unnatural and open borders along with its contiguous ethnic and social spread have easily allowed one country's internal conflicts to spill over into the other, leading to bilateral conflicts. Such spill-over(s) have been spurred by conscious decisions of one country to employ and exploit the internal conflicts of its neighbouring country in pursuance of its strategic, foreign or domestic policy interests. Most of the South Asian countries are guilty of exploiting the neighbour's predicament in this respect at one time or another. India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and the emergence of Bangladesh, Pakistan's cross-border terrorism against India and Afghanistan,[18] Nepal's resentment over the flow of Nepali refugees from Bhutan, are well known examples of internal conflicts turning into bilateral and regional conflicts in South Asia. Some of these transformed conflicts have also been resolved by a radical shift in the policies of the aggravating state towards the conflict-affected state and forging cooperation to deal with the spill-over. India's shift from helping the Tamil insurgency to fighting the LTTE in 1987 through the Indian Peace Keeping Force may be seen as a representative example of such radical policy shifts.[19] There are signs of such shift since 2010 in Bangladesh's attitude towards India's northeast insurgent groups seeking support and shelter in its territory.[20] It may not be out of place to mention here that India succeeded in enlisting credible cooperation from Bhutan (in 2003) and Myanmar (1995) in launching joint operations against insurgent groups operating in India's northeast region but seeking shelter and sanctuaries in these countries.

The Consequences

The consequences of South Asia's conflicts are clearly evident in the structure of its states as well as in the societies that constitute these states. We noted earlier that conflicts were inherent

---

[18] For a discussion of Pakistan's 'State sponsored militancy and Pakistani Taliban', see a CSIS Report on "Religious Movements, Militancy, and Conflicts in South Asia: Cases from India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan", July 2012, Centre For Strategic & International Studies, Washington DC, pp. 11-15; 18-19.

[19] S.D. Muni, Pangs of Proximity, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993.

[20] See on this issue; Wasbir Hussain, "Insurgency in India's Northeast Cross-border Links and Strategic Alliances", Frontline, Vol. 17, February 2006, pp. 105-125. S. Binod Kumar Singh, "India-Bangladesh relations: Continuous Consolidation", South Asia Terrorism Portal, February 05, 2013.

in the way South Asian states were structured after the colonial rule, and these inherent conflicts also restructured the states of South Asia. Three examples stand out in this respect. One is the obvious question of Kashmir which has, at least temporarily, altered the boundaries of India and Pakistan. It is not possible to say at this stage as to what the eventual solution of the Kashmir problem would be. But it needs to be kept in mind that a large chunk (nearly 5000 sq. km.) of its occupied Kashmir in the Himalayas was ceded by Pakistan to China under its boundary agreement concluded in 1963. Though the agreement left room for renegotiating this boundary after the final resolution of Kashmir between India and Pakistan, one wonders if China would ever transfer the ceded territory if and when the whole of Kashmir (including the Pakistan-occupied) de facto becomes a part of India. Second was the already mentioned creation of Bangladesh in 1971 out of the absurdly structured territories of the state of Pakistan, as a result of a fierce conflict between India and Pakistan which involved the United States of America, China and the United Nations. The third example was that of Sikkim, a British protectorate in the Himalayas, inherited by India as a protectorate ruled by its feudal king; the Chogyal. As a result of internal conflict between Sikkim's majority Nepali community led by Lhendup Dorji and the Chogyal, Sikkim abandoned its feudal ruler, ended its protectorate status and became an integral part of the Indian Union in April 1975.[21]

The question of redefining and restructuring South Asia's state structures as a result of its conflicts remains relevant. The military elimination of the LTTE has closed the option of a separate Tamil Eelam, but if the ethnic question is not resolved politically and amicably, the re-emergence of separatist Tamil tendencies in future cannot be ruled out. In India, the persisting conflicts in Northeast, especially of the Nagas, and Kashmir, have the viruses of separatism, though it may be hoped that India's resilient polity would not let these issues explode. In Nepal, if Terai is not integrated through a federal structure and socio-economic accommodation, it is feared by Nepalese that a separatist demand would gain momentum. There is however, no support for Terai separatism in India.[22] Pakistan is also afflicted by the separatist sentiments in Baluchistan which is facing insurgency. Pakistan's frontier province facing Afghanistan continues to have strong separatist sentiments based on Pashtu identity. There is a serious debate among analysts and policy makers if Pakistan would be able to keep its unity and territorial integrity intact in the face of multiple internal conflicts and religious extremism.[23] The uncertainty in Afghanistan particularly after the US and NATO withdrawal may result in a

---

[21] For a critical assessment of India's role in Sikkim's integration see Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi 1984.

[22] See, Nishchal N. Pandey, "Nepal: Terai – Based Militancy and its Transnational Implications", Peace and Security Review, Vol. 2, no.2, 2009, pp. 1-18, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and security Studies, Dhaka. Krishna Hari Puskar, "Seeds of Ethno-Civil War in Terai, http://www.nepalmonitor.com/2007/12/seeds_of-ethno-civil_war_in_nepal_terai.h , (Accessed on 6 January 2013).

[23] See the reports on this theme prepared by important think-tanks like the Brookings Institute, The Future of Pakistan, edited by Stephen P. Cohen and others, 2011, Washington DC; and Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Pakistan on the Edge, IDSA Pakistan Project Report, 2012, New Delhi.

violent redefining of the Afghan state and Pakistan-Afghanistan border, as seen by a number of analysts.[24]

In addition to creating new states and altering state boundaries, conflicts in South Asia have also changed regimes and political systems. Some of the representative examples may be flagged here. The 1971 India-Pakistan conflict that resulted in a humiliating defeat for Pakistan Army enabled the first popularly elected civilian regime headed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to last for a full term of five years since the birth of Pakistan. The army again staged a comeback in 1977 after the elections, but that became possible due to the weakening of the civilian regime and resurgence of army due to conflict in Baluchistan. The Maoists insurgency in Nepal encouraged King Gyanendra in 2002 to thwart democratic governance and take power directly into his hands in 2005. However, the success of the Jan Andolan II (Peoples Uprising II) in April 2006, which resulted from the Maoists joining hands with the mainstream political parties, led finally (in 2008) to the abolition of monarchy and establishment of a republican democratic order. In Sri Lanka ethnic conflict was a driving force behind the 1982 Constitution that established the presidential system. Distortions in this system, resulting from the abuse of powers vested constitutionally in the executive presidency, have initiated debate in Sri Lanka if this is the best system and whether the time to review and revise it is already ripe. Even when systems and regimes have not been changed substantially, conflicts have induced incremental changes in the institutions of governance, especially those dealing with law and order, judiciary and development of the social sectors. Strengthening of the institutions of national security, including military, police and intelligence agencies has been a common feature in most of the South Asian countries. Some of the states like Pakistan, and to some extent Sri Lanka, increasingly display the characteristics of being national security states.

Conflicts have also brought violence to South Asian societies in a big way. Many of the prominent South Asian leaders like Mrs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi of India, President Premadasa and prominent ministers like Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake, Ranjan Wijeratne and Lakshman Kadirgamar of Sri Lanka, and Mrs Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan fell to the bullets and blasts of assassins. Deaths of innocent South Asians in civil wars and terrorist attacks run into thousands, women and children having been subjected to untold abuses.[25] Terrorist attack on Mumbai in November 2008 alone resulted in 166 deaths and nearly 270 seriously injured. Such widespread violence and transmission of its gory images through television into the South Asian living rooms and at dining tables are adding to the brutalisation of societies. Insurgencies and conflicts have also made South Asia a prominent place of child

---

[24] The debate on the breakup of Afghanistan was enlived by the former US Diplomat Robert D. Blackwell, see his 'Plan B in Afghanistan: Why a de Facto Partition is the Least Bad Option", Foreign Affairs, January/February 2011. Also see Ramtanu Maitra, 'Long-term Planning for A Post-War Afghanistan", Executive Intelligence Review, August 13, 2010.

[25] A number of Human rights watch groups have continuously been drawing attention to these violations of rights to life, dignity and freedom.

soldiers. South Asian conflicts have significantly contributed to the deepening and aggravation of ethnic, communal and sectarian fault-lines; and identity-based polarisations have further fuelled political fragmentation and instability.

The impact of conflicts on economic growth and social development may be a matter of debate in South Asia. Many experts argue that there are examples of conflict areas being quarantined to let economic activity go uninterrupted elsewhere. For instance, the dynamism of Sri Lanka's tourism and garment manufacturing sectors remaining unaffected by its ethnic conflict is often being referred to in this respect. Similarly, Indian economy has grown impressively while still coping with internal and external conflicts. But these examples are not very definitive as contrary examples of the countries like Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan recording poor growth under the impact of conflicts also exist simultaneously. There is however no denying the fact that conflicts escalate opportunity costs in the affected countries. In India it has been publicly admitted by the Prime Minister and other leaders that the left-extremist insurgency is a major deterrent to India's growth. With the ending of insurgencies in Nepal and Sri Lanka, prospects of growth have brightened. Leaders of India, Pakistan and China have also repeatedly stressed that peaceful relations between them are necessary to maintain the momentum of growth and development. It is acknowledged in South Asia that one of the greatest obstacles to the success of regional cooperation under South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been the conflict between India and Pakistan. As bilateral trade channels are being activated between India and Pakistan, it is hoped that regional trade will grow to the advantage of all the member-countries. Conflict and regional rivalry between India and Pakistan is also obstructing the prospects of their mutual cooperation with Afghanistan, which, if facilitated, can in turn help both Pakistan and Afghanistan fight their internal insurgencies better.[26]

Conflicts in South Asia have impinged adversely on the autonomy of the region and its countries. They have made the South Asian states porous and vulnerable to external interventions and influences. Such influences have been both benign and destructive. The induction of Cold War in the region as a result of India-Pakistan conflict has been mutually reinforcing and is well documented.[27] Pakistan which was initially enthusiastic of the American alliance subsequently resented it.[28] In the context of the US role in the "war on terror" in Afghanistan, the US presence and influence in Pakistan has become a major issue of national controversy, particularly after the US intelligence operation to kill Osama bin Laden in his Pakistani hide-out. Sri Lanka's invitation to Norway for facilitating talks with the LTTE in the year 2000 eventually was criticised and stopped by the Rajapaksa regime.

---

[26] See Shahid Javed Burki, South Asia in the New World Order: The Role of Regional Cooperation, Routledge, New York, London, 2011.

[27] See Howard B. Shaffer, Limits of Influence: America's Role in Kashmir, Brookings Institute, Washington DC 2009. Dennis Kux, has written separate books on the US relations with India and Pakistan. Robert McMahon, Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan, Columbia University Press, 1994.

[28] See Pakistani President General Mohammad Ayub Khan's autobiography; Friends Not Masters, Oxford University Press, London 1967. Z.A. Bhutto's The Myth of Independence.

At the regional level, India's involvement in Sri Lanka during the 1980s and in Nepal during 2005-2006 in resolving their respective insurgencies also eventually came under heavy criticism. The Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka had to pack up and leave under pressure from the host government though its assigned mission had not been fully completed.[29]

Thus we find that consequences of conflicts in South Asia have been diverse and damaging. These consequences have affected all the vital sectors of life in the region such as security, stability, political order, economic growth and development and social harmony and stability. South Asia's people need to learn from these conflicts and commit themselves to resolving them in the interests of their own security and well-being.

Prospects

Conflicts are inherent in human nature and people are going to live in states and societies.[30] South Asia or any other region cannot be an exception in this respect. Almost all the causes of South Asian conflicts listed in this paper, ranging from historical legacies to turbulent state- and nation-building processes and distorted developmental dynamics, continue to be relevant. Even when one set of conflicts is resolved, another set appears, maybe in a somewhat transformed or redefined form, to be dealt with.

The root causes of conflict between Pakistan and India as also China and India remain unresolved and unmitigated despite efforts to put in place confidence-building measures (CBMs). Between India and Pakistan, Kashmir question remains unresolved; and the spill-over of Pakistan's internal identity crisis and dominance of army in politics generates instruments of conflict like cross-border terrorism that continue to thrive, undercutting expressions of peaceful intent and CBMs. Any repeat of a Mumbai-type cross-border terror attack or violation of LOC cease-fire can trigger passions and political moves leading to an unmanageable situation. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and Jihadi extremism in Pakistan may create conditions for such an attack. Generally however, in the coming years, Pakistan is expected to be preoccupied with its north-western front Afghanistan and would want to keep the eastern front with India peaceful and stable.

India and China both have stakes in peace and stability so that their growth dynamics can go forward uninterrupted. China's deepening engagement on territorial disputes with Japan and South China Sea neighbours, hopefully, will keep it keen on having peace and understanding with India. China's new leadership has also laid greater emphasis on its perceived core interests

---

[29] See Muni, Pangs of Proximity, op.cit.
[30] For instance, Max Boot's latest study of guerrilla warfare traces its history from 3000 BC when guerrillas of different tribes fought against each other. See Max Boot, Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 2013.

in South China Sea where war drums are sounding louder than ever. Despite the imperative of keeping the India front peaceful and stable, China seems less prepared to resolve the border issue and is worried about the possible firming up of strategic partnership between US and India, impinging on its interests in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly South-China Sea. In such a situation, China making moves to disturb India either directly on the pretext of border and Tibetan issues, or indirectly by encouraging Pakistan to keep India engaged on its western front cannot be ruled out, howsoever remote it appears. It has been noted earlier that in 1962, India's strategic equations with the US and the then USSR were a major factor prompting China to undertake the border offensive.

Inter-state conflicts within South Asia, barring the India-Pakistan dyad, may be ruled out for any foreseeable future. There could be tensions on a number of other issues from the spill-over over of internal conflicts to the sharing of resources (common rivers, territorial waters and extended maritime economic zone, trade and investment-related issues, human migration etc.), but outright war looks nearly impossible. However, internal conflicts within South Asian countries do not seem to be coming to an end in a foreseeable future. India's insurgencies (Kashmir, Northeast and the left-extremism) seem likely to persist. The Indian state is resilient in dealing with identity challenges and has also shown promise in coping with ideological insurgency, but the task of coordinating state actions in a divisive and federal polity with highly bureaucratised state institutions is not an easy one. Tensions within Sri Lanka on the ethnic question nowhere seem to be dying out. In Bangladesh, a new polarisation between the secular and sectarian forces on the question of 'war crime trials' is gradually assuming threatening dimensions. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, Islamic extremism and sectarian clashes may experience surge, and in Nepal the breakaway faction of the Maoists continues to adhere to the concept of "people's war".

Capabilities of the South Asian states to effectively manage and/or resolve these internal conflicts would depend critically on two aspects. They are: institutionalising of democratic functioning and ensuring of a respectable pace of economic growth with distributive justice. Both these have so far proved to be formidable challenges in most of the South Asian countries. For example, both Nepal and Maldives have so far failed to institutionalise the democratic upsurge witnessed in the first decade of the 21st century. It is to the credit of Pakistan's elected civilian regime led by the Pakistan Peoples' Party that it has completed its full term (only second time in the entire history of Pakistan so far), but the tensions among the principal governing institutions like the executive, army and judiciary look considerably chaotic. Reinforcing of democratic norms and economic growth will also strengthen South Asian countries internally and will also improve the prospects of regional integration and cooperation through SAARC.

......