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# **Issues and Challenges of Peace Building in South Asia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Peace building is the rehearsal of developing policies that strengthen the peace and re-establish order through social, political and economic reforms. Peace building has shifted its state-centric approach to regional focused agendas for more than a decade. South Asia is a diverse region with a unique geo-strategic significance, socio-political subtleties, and economic diversities. It faces distinct traditional and non-traditional challenges in the process of peace building. South Asia – the home to one third global population faces immense challenges due to weak state structure. The long and persistent influence of external powers in decision making process in South Asia has impacted the political evolution of the states included in the said region. The lack of fundamental necessities has increased the level of frustration and the sense of deprivation, which provides a fertile ground for the prospect of conflicts. The region is often labelled as one of the most dangerous regions on earth due to growing intolerance, extremism, terrorism, insurgencies and rise of various nuclear powers in South Asia. Kenneth Waltz claimed that the anarchic international system is a power that shapes the states behaviour, as the structure of the anarchic system compels states to adopt certain policies. In this exploratory research, an effort has been made to explore and analyze that how anarchic international structure influences and affects the peace building process in South Asia.

**Key Words:** Peace building, State-centric, South Asia, Conflicts, Insurgency, Indian Ocean.

## **Introduction**

Peace building is the most effective way to deal with conflicts as it occurs before the explosion of the conflict or eruption of crisis. It evades all types of devastation or damages of life. Peace building is a practice of developing policies that are helpful in strengthening the peace, and reinforce order through restructuring of the societies politically, economically and socially. However, the dilemma of peace building is that until the conflict is not fully blown it becomes hard to convince the international community, regarding the threat of conflict eruption to its maximum capacity. As general tensions assemble, conflict erupts, fights move on for a short

or long period of time and eventually ceasefire is brokered, and finally peacekeeping mission starts (United Nations, 2006).

It is an undeniable fact that post-conflict societies are comparatively weaker and have comparatively more chances to relapse into conflict. Extra efforts are required to rebuild and return to the pre-conflict position and advancement to prevent the conflicts in future. That is why focus of international support is more on peace building rather than on conflict resolution (Hansen, Ramsbotham, & Woodhouse, 2004). Moreover, it is intended by the international community to twist or push the conflict-ridden societies towards lasting peace and include them among the peace instated states or regions of the world.

Traditional security threats are usually more focused in research on South Asia. In South Asia peace building is a continuous but still incomplete agenda. Nuclearization, insurgencies, terrorism, military campaigns have made adverse effect to region's peace. Peace building has shifted its approach, for more than a decade, from state-centric to regional focused agendas. However, peace building process is dependent on the economic, political and security dynamics of that particular region, where it is being carried out.

## **Review of Literature**

Ahmad analyzed the prospects of peace building in South Asia, while focusing Indo-Pak relations. The author argues that since India and Pakistan have failed to resolve their disputes through bilateral means, mainly because of the rigid mistrust, the possible way out is to invite a third party in the dialogue process. Moreover, the focal point of the paper was that after the 9/11 incident, the American interests in the region also require an active role of the both the states and foreign intervention for peace-building in South Asia. However, this research paper has ignored the important aspect which is to dig into the idea that to what extent peace building in South Asia favors major powers including US, when the region is the biggest recipient of international arms industry. This research discusses post 9/11 scenario yet totally ignored the induction of fifth and sixth generation warfare (Ahmad, 2012).

Javaid explored the tremendous strategic importance of South Asia having two rival nuclear powers, (India & Pakistan) and contrasts the region being poverty-stricken, underdeveloped, fragile and conflict-ridden simultaneously. This work addresses the relations between India and Pakistan, marked by tensions and lack of regional co-operation that is hindering the overall growth in the region. It also discusses the prospects of peace and stability in South Asia after nuclearization of India and Pakistan. The author has tried to highlight the strategic significance of this region because of the location of powerful neighbors like China and the Middle East. She further discusses that the issue of granting weightage to India and Pakistan has created a dilemma for the policy makers of the US, because any tilt towards one will result in the disliking of the other. This article provides a superb overview of the issues and prospects of peace building in

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South Asia. But while discussing South Asia the author has ignored all other countries and the issues of region and the approach has solely been centered on Indo-Pak. Similarly, she remained silent on the role of international powers which has made the region a chessboard for their vested interests (Javaid, 2012).

Nepali put forward a liberal approach and discussed the ongoing democratic process in all eight South Asian states one by one and pointed out the shortcomings in every state. According to him the South Asian states expect the people to serve the state, to suffer for the state, to die for the state but the state hasn't yet seen itself as an entity which is there to serve the people. According to the author the slogan of nationalism tends to be a little self-destructive for the region. The study further explored that the people of the region have to face social inequalities, energy and security issues and bad governance due to the incompetent leadership. For him life of every individual is important, as one man's insecurity feeds the others, and ultimately, we have this cycle of violence. He added that the role of the individual is terribly important for the world which begins with each one of us. However, the author while adopting the liberal approach has totally ignored more drastic and realistic picture of international anarchic structure where individuals are driven by more powerful international factors and have least say in international power politics where 'might is right'. Individuals, the states and even the ruling elites of the third world countries are just like the puppets in the hands of major powers that manipulate, twist and exploit conditions according to their own interests (Nepali, 2009).

### **Research Methodology**

During the study we have made an attempt to explore the causes affecting the peace building initiatives in South Asia. Politico-economic and strategic dynamics of the region are critically studied to answer the designated research question. Available and existing literature in forms of books, journals, articles, reports, editorials, electronic and print media coverage are critically evaluated to make the study more representative and purposeful. In addition, we have conducted structured and unstructured interviews with the notable media persons, defense and strategic analysts, including Rahimullah Yousafzai (Pakistan), Dr. Ghulam Ali (China), Prof. Dr. Rashid A. Khan (Pakistan) and former ambassador of Pakistan to India, Abdul Basit personally and electronically. To make the study more deliberative, we have looped some eminent and distinguished strategic analysts including Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Pakistan), Dr. Attaullah Wahidyar (Afghanistan) and Dr. Jayanath Colombage (Sri Lanka) through latest communication channels.

## **Research Questions**

How international anarchic structure is compelling the South Asian region towards adoption of particular policies which are ruining the peace building process in the region?

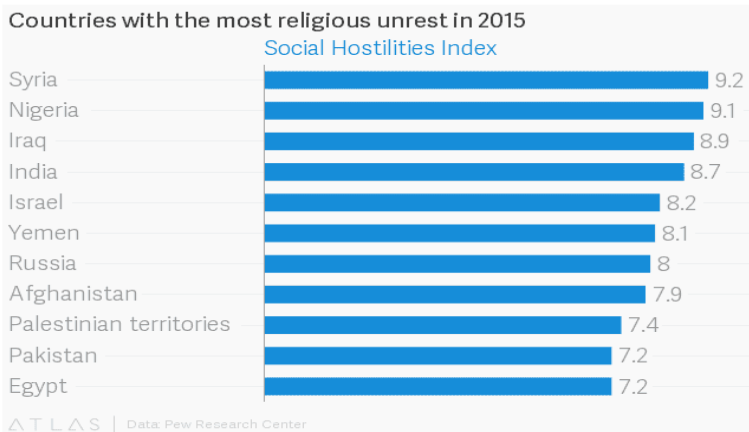
## **South Asia: issues and challenges**

South Asia is not a clear cut or well-defined region. It comprises of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives and Afghanistan. The region connects three important regions, Central Asia, West Asia and South-East Asia. South Asian countries have strong bonds with other neighbouring nations. That is why the socio-political, geo-strategic or economic issues relevant to South Asian nations cannot be analysed by bounding it within the geographical boundaries of South Asia, as the region is profoundly influenced by its neighbouring regions (Colombage, 2018). According to Snedden, “despite common historical, cultural, religious, and ethnic commonalities, people-to-people interaction among regional states is minimal, with least sense of belongingness of being South Asians” (Snedden, 2016).

At times these connections have been a cause for violent conflicts as well. The region is usually known as one of the most dangerous regions and named as the ‘nuclear flashpoint’ in the world. The vulnerability to the ethnic, sectarian, religious conflicts and continuous cross border terrorism is, due to the inadequate basic necessities or facilities. Alarming security conditions of war-trodden Afghanistan, military antagonism among bigger states of the region, nuclearization, historical intra-state conflicts and rivalries, along with the widespread and systematic human rights violations are the unprecedented threats to peace and harmony among the regional states (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2008; Bhatta, 2004). According to Pew Research Centre analysis of 198 countries, the three major countries of South Asia ranked among the top 10 religiously unrest nations of the world and placed India on fourth, Afghanistan on eighth and Pakistan on tenth positions (Ghosh, 2018). More interestingly communities from different religions (Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsi, and Buddhist), races and creed reside in the region.

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**Figure 1: Figure showing countries with the most religious unrest in 2015**



(Bhattacharya, 2017)

Almost one third of the total global population resides in the South Asia, out of which more than 50% are less than 40 years of age which made this region the richest region in terms of man power. Yet the region is home to 37% of the world's poorest population as almost 2 billion people are bound to live below the poverty line along with almost half of the world's malnourished children belongs to the same region (The World Bank, 2017).

The biggest question arises here that why this strategically extremely important region with rich culture and history, along with tremendous man power remained fail in the development of it politically, economically and socially? Why South Asia is a security concern around the globe and what are the causes responsible for regional instability? Why extremism became a huge impediment to security in the entire region regardless of any single religious ideology. Let's discuss one by one.

### **Geo-Strategic interests of major powers**

Though South Asia comprises eight states but being located in the centre of South Asia, India occupies crucial strategic location. With 7500 km long coastline in Indian Ocean, she enjoys extra ordinary economic and geographical advantages, even up to the level of frustration for the smaller states around its borders. This reality makes South Asia 'Indian locked' for neighbouring countries which limit the regional connectivity. The neighbouring countries can either meet at a third country or they have to cross India, resulting in least integration among the South Asian countries and low socio-economic prosperity. This limitation of the region has usually been exploited by the major powers in one way or another and used region with Indian-centric approach while ignoring the smaller states (Gordon-Flake et al, 2017).

Since the end of the cold war, the US is aimed to maintain its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean for strategic reasons. A considerable cooperation and relations between India, Japan and US, developed a maritime trinity (it has slightly weakened the strategic importance of Pakistan for US, though US still has limited options beside Pakistan, due to its dependence on Pakistan to achieve its interests in Afghanistan). This strategic alliance is due to a strategic convergence among the three nations, mainly to counter growing Chinese influence and power in the region. This has led to an undeclared 'Maritime Cold War' in South Asia. According to Ex. Naval Chief of Sri Lanka, Dr. Jayanath Colabage,

“The development projects funded by China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with a special focus on South Asia, are not viewed favourably by India, Japan and the US, especially maritime related ones, in India's immediate neighbourhood like in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives and Bangladesh. As the US is still the most dominant maritime power in the Indian Ocean (IO) and is carrying out Freedom of Navigation Operations (FNOPs) in the Western Pacific Ocean and aspires to be the global policeman in the IO as well. The US' Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power describes the area of their focus, the so-called Indo-Asia Pacific” (Colabage, 2018).

US have shown very unambiguous plans to deploy 60 per cent of their maritime force capabilities to maintain security in this region (US Coast Guard, 2015). Despite the fact that India has the biggest navy in the region, still depends on the US to act as a guarantor of maritime security.

As in this context, India is expected to serve the purpose of acting as a strategic hedge for U.S in the region to contain Chinese influence (Khan, 2017). In prevailing conditions smaller countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (already under Indian influence) are now caught up in a strategic dilemma. However, the case is bit different for Pakistan who remained a part of many controversial alliances to counter the mighty Indian influence in the region and will further look towards to invite other major powers of the world for its survival (Pant, 2017). Political analysts feared that this competition for influence and power in West Asia, Asia Pacific and especially in South Asia could be disastrous. As South Asia will become a chessboard for major powers and will negatively impact the social, political and economic progress of South Asia as it did in the past.

### **Corrupt ruling elites**

Perkins confessed that America is funding the third world countries not to develop them but to corrupt their ruling elite. Tactfully the world powers are managing to inject the menace of corruption in developing states of the third world, to fulfil

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their ulterior motives and safeguard their national interests at the cost of others. Client-patronage culture has been promoted in third world states (Perkins, 2004). Similarly, Kenneth Waltz claimed that the anarchic international system is a power that shapes the state's behaviour, as the structure of the anarchic system compelled the states to adopt certain policies (Waltz, 2000). If we apply the above mentioned claim of Waltz and confessions by Perkin on the prevailing conditions of South Asia, it seems as if the conditions and situations are nowhere as true as in the case of these third world countries of South Asia, where major powers are not only investing, backing and supporting the corrupt ruling elites but are also contributing in the corruption of the ruling elites of the South Asian countries. Perkins describes

“Economic hit men are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S Agency for International Development, and other foreign (aid) organisations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet's natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortions, sex and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions during this time of globalisation” (Perkins, 2004).

Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are the living examples where it is a continuous practice of major regional and international powers to interfere in the internal matters of respective countries; corrupting the ruling elites and change in regimes for their own vested interests for last many decades. In December 2000, an exile agreement signed with the facilitation of Saudi Arabia with Government of Pakistan for the release of ex P.M Nawaz Shareef (who was jailed in plane hijacking case) is an indication of foreign involvement (Harding, 2000). Similarly, in the recent years one of the mega corruption scandals in the history of Pakistan revealed in “Panama Leaks” against the ousted Premier, Nawaz Sharif (who remained Prime Minister for three terms) and his family. The scandal disclosed how the political elites are involved in corrupt practices and how foreign regional and international powers are coining money in corrupting the ruling elites to facilitate their own interests.

Afghanistan too has a long history of foreign interference. The country has faced frequent regime changes for many decades according to preferences and choices of major powers and finally became a tug of war between USSR and USA during the cold war. In post 9/11 scenario, the elimination of Taliban government has had along-lasting impact. Afghanistan which was the world's largest opium producing country (opium is a basic ingredient for heroine) in the world, as 87% of world opium production and 63% of world opium cultivation is in Afghanistan, the government of Taliban (1996-2001) adopted extremely strict policies against

opium cultivation and production and reduced it to almost zero in just few years. But the regime changes in 2001, led to destabilisation and chaos in Afghanistan and production of opium has immensely increased once again during last one and a half decade in the presence of NATO and alliance forces. According to the different reports, the weak central government of Afghanistan (backed by major powers) is not only responsible for it but also gaining benefits from this billion-dollar international narcotics industry. Currently the country is a hub of illegal weapons, money, drug production and drug trafficking, which in general is a great threat for the entire world and for the immediate neighbours in particular (Felbab-Brown, 2017).

In Sri Lanka major powers in strategic partnership with India preferred to see Sri Lanka move away from Chinese influence, when failed in doing so, supported a regime change in 2015, resulted in decline of Sri Lankan economy to sixth position among the SAARC nations. This put Sri Lanka in to a very weak position on its journey to reconnect with China, where for nearly two years no nation came forward to help Sri Lanka for its economic development (Ratnayake, 2015).

### **Economic interests of major powers**

Economic liberals are of the view that complex economic interdependence among the nations minimizes the prospect of conflicts among the nations. On the contrary, South Asia today has been counted as one of the least integrated regions of the world as the intra-regional trade merely accounts for 5% as compared to 58% of the European union, 52% of the North America Free trade Agreement (NAFTA) region and 26% of the ASEAN zone (European Centre for International Political Economy, 2010).

The most considerable change in South Asia in the recent times is the rise of China which is expected to have a profound impact on the entire region. First, China has adopted a policy of 'trade not aid' which is exactly opposite to the policy of other major powers in the past who used 'aid not the trade' as a tool to corrupt the ruling elites to gain their vested interests. Second, China has risen to the second position in economic standing in terms of its GDP, then again, a position previously enjoyed (for last many decades) by Japan. With the exception of India, South Asian countries view China as a reliable partner that helps countries in their economic development in a tangible manner while respecting the countries' sovereignty (Tellis & Mirski, 2013). Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) mega project and investment on the development of maritime related infrastructure projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives have created concerns for major powers. India, together with USA and Japan, consider these projects as having strategic and military objectives with a view to strangulate India, although China has never expressed any designs or intentions to eliminate India out of these initiatives. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Congress in Beijing in October 2017, Chinese President expressed his strong commitment for developing the Chinese armed forces on modern basis to deal with the contemporary challenges by 2035.



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Yet, his words are noteworthy that “no matter what state of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion” (Xinzheng, 2017).

According to Booth, major powers do not want the economic integration among India, China, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives. As it will minimise the prospects of conflicts and wars with in the region which is not in favour of major powers. As the foreign powers have always adopted a realist approach of ‘divide and rule’ strategy in the region for last many centuries very successfully (Booth, 2011). Therefore, US is pursuing its global interest in South Asia. While addressing on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2017 in Washington, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that, ‘US has intensified its interests in the Indian Ocean and is deepening ties with India so as to counter the growing Chinese influence in the region’ (Harris, 2017). This was the first time that US accepted publicly, its rebalancing strategy towards Asia. It is most likely that smaller and less powerful countries in South Asia would be caught in between this struggle for power and influence among the major international powers.

Fast track economic development has been expected in Pakistan due to billions dollar investment by China on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Through which China gets an access to the shortest route which connects Persian Gulf and western China through Gwadar port of Pakistan. It has reduced China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma’ as previously China had to travel across South China Sea, Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca to reach the Persian Gulf. The project has given a big breakthrough to foreign investment deficient Pakistan, who was facing the worst power and energy crisis for last more than a decade. However, this initiative has not been seen by India with favourable eyes due to decade long rivalries and conflicting interests with both Pakistan and China. India has portrayed the project as anti-Indian bond. On the other hand, ‘US concerns’ over growing Chinese influence in Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf (60% of oil and gas trade through Persian Gulf) made US and India ‘natural allies’. The famous philosophy of ‘Enemy’s enemy is a friend’ seems to be used by US in the region where US is giving lot of economic and political advantages to India to strengthen its position against China (Colabage, 2018).

Regardless the fact that the Chinese initiatives have lot of prospects for development for not only China but also for a large population of terrorism haunted Pakistan and other neighbouring states as well. A propaganda campaign was launched against Chinese funded project in Hambantota port deal in Sri Lanka on the island’s Southern coast. Many allegations are in voyage, due to the equity given to China in lieu accrued debts. However, it was almost impossible for Sri Lanka to pursue such an ambitious project without Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). However, the geographical advantages of the Hambantota port, its deep water seaports, their proximity to the most active shipping lane in the ocean and traversable waters helped it to become a ‘Maritime Hub’ in the Indian Ocean with the help of Chinese investment (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2008).

## **Border / Territorial conflicts**

According to Muni,

The conflicts 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 the strategic and other reasons.....The colonial powers (especially British) inflicted many unnatural borders in South Asia (Muni, 2013).

These randomly and illogically designed borders divided the people in a way that it led to unending territorial conflicts and contests which have led to a creation of new states (Bangladesh). Unresolved Pak-Afghan borders, Kashmir conflict, India – China territorial dispute, India– Bangladesh border / water conflicts among South Asian nations are the prominent examples.

South Asia has faced a prolonged and a most aggressive inter-state and intra-state armed conflict since World War II. Pakistan and India have fought full fledged conventional wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 along with many limited stand offs (1999, 2001-02), mainly due to unfinished division agenda left by British colonial power in 1947 in a form of Jammu and Kashmir. Which has further resulted in conflicts over the distribution of water resources moreover political analysts claims that ‘water’ would be the fundamental reason for future wars between India and Pakistan(Qureshi, 2017; Pappas, 2011). Both India and Pakistan have maintained a heavy military presence not only on ‘Line of Control’ (LOC) but also maintaining the world’s highest and most expensive battlefield in frozen region ‘Siachen’ for more than last three decades.

Similarly, India-China border dispute has resulted in war in 1962 and again came very near to war like situation in June, 2017 in Doklam, near China-Bhutan borders. Whereas issue of Durand line is also a historical gift given by foreign powers to the South Asian region where Pakistan is now building a controversial hedge for which she has to face heavy expenses for its construction and maintenance. Afghanistan is one of the world’s biggest examples which became the chessboard for the major powers of the world for almost last four decades, during cold war period, in post-Cold war period, as well as in post 9/11 scenario. The unfortunate country has now become a tug of war for the major powers’ interests and the population with lowest human indexes faced carpet bombing, biological and chemical bombs, which has resulted in millions of civilian casualties or displacement and has raised the more complex issue of refugees (United Nations Development Programme, 2016),which have lasting impacts not only on neighbouring countries but for the whole of South Asia. The conditions in war-torn Afghanistan are still turbulent and unstable with freak hopes for peace even in the presence of US led coalition forces. The country has become a safe haven for the violent non-state actors, destabilising the entire region as the central

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Government and NATO forces have least or no control on more than 40 % of the area of Afghanistan (Tellis & Eggers, 2017).

The regional countries have faced many internal violent movements which have resulted in heavy human and economic losses, four decades of long civil war in Sri Lanka, Sikh separatist movement, Maoist and Naxalities movements in India, Nepalese ethnic conflict in Bhutan, Nepalese civil war (1996-2006), Pakistan's debacle 1971 or current security conditions all have connections with either regional or international powers in one way or another. Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi was convinced that "Washington-based espionage agency" and Pakistan abetted civil unrest among separatist Sikhs in Indian Punjab in June 1983 resulted in 1,500 casualties (Claiborne, 1984). Similarly, Bouckaert and Thapa claimed that in Nepalese civil war (1996 – 2006) lethal military assistance was provided by Britain, U.S and India. During Sri Lankan civil war according to Chellaney the biggest regional power India first armed the Tamil tigers and then sought to disarm them through an ill-starred peacekeeping foray that resulted in thousands of killings. He further added that India contributed to the Sri Lanka bloodbath through its military aid, except that it has ended in it strangely (Chellaney, 2010).

Resolution of border / territorial conflicts needs international mediation as the countries remained failed to resolve them bilaterally yet no international or regional force including UN worked seriously to play a constructive role in the resolution of these conflicts, as resolution of conflicts is not in the favour of major powers. Moreover, the conflicts can be desirable as without conflicts major exporters of arms and weapons may not be able to flourish their trillion dollar arms industry.

### **Fourth & Fifth generation warfare, terrorism and non state actors**

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, 'Terrorism' has emerged as most obscure and vague phenomena. With the absence of any clear or precise definition, term 'terrorism' has been exploited widely and the 'right of self-determination' along with 'human rights violations' are widely confused with the terrorism. The 4<sup>th</sup> Generation and 5<sup>th</sup> Generation warfare phenomena has evolved as even more complex insurgency warfare, which isn't about states fighting states and armies fighting against other armies within the limits drawn or set by the international laws. Here loosely armed networks or insurgents or combatants (don't represent any state) are using non-conventional strategies while fighting against conventional armies without any clear or precise objectives and time limits. Fourth or fifth generation phenomena of warfare are 'Pre-Westphalia' in nature as they have ended the monopoly of nation-state over violence (Echevarria, 2005). Moreover, these loose constellations of insurgent groups are willing to co-opt other insurgent groups and can be co-opted by any foreign agencies whenever required. Tehreek.e.Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar.e.Jhangvi (LeJ), Lashkar.e.Tayaba (LeT), Al-Qaida, Daesh (ISIS) and many other organisations claim anti-US, anti-Indian agendas while using Islam as

their sole slogan(Sattar, 2012). Yet involved in killing thousands of innocent Muslims while offering prayers, attached hundreds of mosques, and left serious question marks on their identities and objectives, that to whom they are serving, for what they are fighting for and against whom?

According to Dr. Attaullah Wahidyar,

“Following cold war mind set terrorism evolved into an industry where buyers, sellers, brokers, investors and promoters are busy trading human lives without any responsibility for the consequences for humanity. This industry is used for defending state to individual interests depending upon time and place resulting in destruction of humanity without any accountability on any side” (Wahidyar, 2017).

Similarly Mrs Hillary Clinton in one of her addresses as a US Secretary of State admitted to the fact, that““The People we are fighting today, were created, funded and trained twenty years ago by the American CIA,.....They were our people and they worked for us” (Chossudovsky, 2018).

According to Tuhin, U.S and Saudi Arabia have been donating a huge amount of money to the madrassas of Bangladesh for long. Some 10,000 Mujahedeen’s returned to Bangladesh after the end of Soviet – U.S war in Afghanistan (Tuhin, 2017). Similarly, presence of ISIS in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and other parts of South Asian region is alarming for the entire region, as conflicting reports and allegations are in voyage. Recently US have blamed Pakistan for providing safe heavens to terrorists in Pakistan, whereas on the other side, Former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai (important US ally) recently alleged US for backing ISIS in Afghanistan. In an exclusive interview in Kabul with Voice of America (VOA), he claimed, “I do not differentiate at all between Daesh (ISIS) and America”. He added “I consider Daesh their tool”(Zahid& Sarwan, 2017). However, the major powers seem failed to clear the strong perception that they have not only invested in the creation and training of the terrorist organisations but also have highly financed them during cold war, in post-cold war and then after 9/11 era to support their hegemonic designs. Especially, USA and NATO allies’ war against terrorism in Afghanistan, in Iraq then in Yemen and now in Syria has created a tremendous vacuum and provided a space for the terrorist organisations to flourish. Tens or hundreds of oil well in Iraq are under ISIS control and the terrorist organisation is exporting the oil to finance their acts of terror which puts a serious question mark on ‘war against terror’ its objectives and success. According to a report by Fox News,

ISIS militants are continuing to steal, spill and smuggle crude oil from Iraqi oil fields as a means to wreak havoc and fund their campaign of terror..... In 2014-15, it was estimated ISIS made as much as \$

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50 million per month from its contraband energy operations (Mckay, 2017).

As a tremendous increase of proxy wars, cross border terrorism and excessive international terrorist organisations has been recorded since 9/11. The Raymond Davis case in 2011 and arrest of Indian intelligence agency RAW's spy and Indian Naval officer Kulbushan Yadev in March, 2016 from Baluchistan region of Pakistan (Zafar, 2016) are the living examples of the desperately confused security conditions in the region.

This hair-trigger environment has diminished the possibilities for the resolution of issue of Kashmir and other conflicts in the region, thus continuously locking the states in a strained relationship full of irresolvable conflicts. Therefore, the region is compelled to persist incurring massive defence spending from meagre resources, eroding their respective economic goals.

### **International arms industry**

The South Asian region is one of the biggest recipients of international weapon industry as the regional states have fought number of wars against each other which have resulted in heavy human, infrastructural, and economic loss. According to a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) world's top five major arms exporters are United States, Russia, Germany, France and China. Together they account for 74% of the total volume of arms export around the globe, whereas India and Pakistan are among the top five arms importers in the world, import 15 % and 5% of the total weapon trade in the world respectively (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018). The figures claimed by Rhitu Chatterjee indicates the bitter ground reality that the country like India where 70% people do not have access to the toilet, roughly 1.2 billion Indian still defecate in the open (Chatterjee, 2016) is spending more than 3,078 million US dollars on arms import. According to Times of India, Indian defence budget has increased more than 24percent between 2008-2012, and 2013-2017, while maintaining the fourth largest army in the world and continues to buy all the variety of conventional weaponry, ranging from main battle tanks to fighter aircraft acquired from different foreign sources (Pandit, 2018). This Indian initiative provided legitimacy to Pakistan to spend more than 378 million US dollars to maintain the regional equilibrium out of its meagre resources.

Soon after 1998 India-Pakistan nuclear tests, a common perception among the strategic analysts was developed that now the region is equally balanced and due to nuclear deterrence chances of conflicts have been minimized if not completely eliminated. But just after one year 'Kargil Crisis' sparked and a threat emerged with a clear message that the chances of traditional wars have not been fully diminished, yet there is a lot of room for the traditional weapon imports.

After 2001 attacks on Indian parliament, 'Cold Start Doctrine' was adopted by Indian military forces, to mobilise their army quickly, to punish Pakistan on borders within 48 hours and to pull back Pakistan's nuclear line, to confront

'Indian Cold Start Doctrine' Pakistan opted for 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' and to develop a 'Tactical Nuclear Weapons' (Azhar & Abbasi, 2017). This has further complicated the situation as a Cold Start Doctrine has increased Indian defence budget from \$ 24 billion to \$ 40 billion from 2007 to 2009 and Islamabad government has increased its budget sharply 32% putting another strain on its already tenuous economy. As for the development of tactical nuclear weapons, Pakistan needs more fissile material (Sankaran, 2015; Hoyt, 2001). Indo-US deal and waiver granted to India by Nuclear Supplier Group in 2008 (while excluding Pakistan from nuclear club) and recently 'Strategic Trade Authorization – 1' (STA-1) status has been granted to India, which was previously given to only those countries of the world who were the members of 'four export control regimes' whereas India is the member of only three, are few prominent examples of acceleration of military competition in the region. Even before the status of STA-1 the US military sales to India went from zero to \$ 15 billion in the last decade and after STA-1 status India will not only be able to import sensitive sophisticated military technology but will also improve its indigenous weapons. Jaspal claims that, "Indian nuclear program will be equal beneficiary of the STA-1 along with its missile program" (Jaspal, 2018). Strategic analysts believe that these developments are likely to further accelerate the arms and missile race, as threat perception has increased in the region. These developments indicate the fact that major powers are least concerned about the worst human conditions in the region and are more focused on selling their weapons and military technologies.

## **Conclusion**

Major regional and international powers have chased an out-dated balance of power approach while ignoring the fact that their interests can be better served by a partnership with South Asian nations. Their long and persistent influence in decision making in South Asia has impacted the political evolution of these states. To some extent, all the regional states are facing internal democratic disorders yet the non-reconciliatory role of external powers has shaped the political landscape of the region. Divide and rule strategy and exploitation of the political differences among the South Asian has been used so skillfully that the breach has almost touched the peak, which directly and indirectly served the interests of the major powers. These powers are seeking their maximum benefits in the region in terms of their arms sale, importing raw material at cheap rates and selling their costly finished goods.

Similarly the idea to permit to fight a limited war under the nuclear overhang (for the sale of conventional weapons) can be a dangerous investment which must be discouraged at all levels, through proactive diplomacy and appropriate defensive mechanisms. As the limited or controlled wars may get out of control at any stage and will prove disastrous due to the presence of nuclear weapons in the region. CBMs and Nuclear Risk Reduction Centres may help in this regard. To maintain the regional nuclear stability, the regional states specifically, India and

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Pakistan should focus on the idea of “strategic restraint regime”. However, along with the nuclear and missile restraint, control over the conventional arms race is equally crucial to save billions of dollars to invest for the human capital development rather than purchasing and maintain weapons. Poverty elimination would narrow down the scope of non-state actors and the menace of terrorism would be immunized.

South Asian youth which is almost half of its total population is a greatest asset as well as an equal challenge. Due to poverty, unemployment, chaotic political and deteriorating economic conditions, the youth is among the greatest affected. South Asian countries remained failed to utilise and channelize the powerful energies of their young population due to limited resources and waste of resources on military budgets. In prevailing conditions this asset is turning in to a dangerous bomb, as frustrating conditions are pushing the youth towards the dangerous trends of drugs addiction and terrorism as youth can be an easy prey to the international terrorist industry. In recent years a dangerous trend has been figured out that university students and the professors are joining the terrorist organisations in different parts of the world including South Asian states.

The realization of durable peace will never be achieved without simultaneous and sustained economic progress. As economic deprivation, illiteracy and unemployment are the fertile grounds for intolerance, extremism and terrorism. All these feathers have become the societal characteristics of the regional states. Shared economic and social development will be cost and time effective and enhance the mutual benefits. Poverty elimination will be helpful to narrow down the scope of non-state actors and the menace of terrorism can be immunized. Major powers must ensure to invest for the “ruled” and not for the “ruling”. Moreover, Chinese initiatives require the maximum participation of the regional states and suitable solution should be made to intact India. Regional states should enhance their mutual trade and minimize the trade barriers. Economic expansion and liberalization can be mutually beneficial, if SAARC becomes a genuinely free trading area and South Asian economies are linked to those of Central and West Asia.

Resolution of all the territorial and water conflicts are crucial for the regional peace and stability as it is the only way to minimise the waste fulmilitary expenses. The region can follow the western examples where the countries are sharing rivers water on the basis of an idea of mutual shared benefits without diverting or manipulating them.

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