

EVOLVING SECURITY LANDSCAPE IN THE SOUTH ASIA (INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT)

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General

The region of South-Asia, includes a number of nations and a home of a very large population with mosaics of ethnicity, language, culture, traditions and colourful histories. In recent times, the region has undergone significant changes in terms of regional security structure, political and economic cooperation and development. These growing economic and political pre-eminence coupled with complex dynamics of international relations and regional politico-economic intricacies have definitely caused certain security concerns in the region. The potential security landscape sprouting in the region should be viewed with this backdrop.

The Evolving Regional Security Order

The security order of the South-Asian region is in a flux. The emergence of new regional cum global actors with increasing economic and political influences has reshaped the regional security landscape of the region to a great extent. Traditionally, the USA has long maintained permanence in the region and also pronounced every intention of maintaining its leading role with its 'rebalancing' or 'pivot' foreign policy to Asia. On the other hand, China is a vital economic partner to many in the region and the countries like Russia and some of the EU countries have also maintained effective economic and military relationship with countries of South-Asia. In regional arena, India as a growing regional power also continues to maintain due regional influences. These evolving competitions over the clout of influence by the regional and extra-regional countries manifesting traditional Indo-China-US rivalry coupled with the long standing Indo-Pakistan feud are the trademark security delinquents in the region.

In this evolving scenario, how to maintain a pragmatic balance between the thriving competitive countries has become a rational concern. Hence, the regional countries caught in this paradoxical ball game surely have to play smart. The last thing is expected however, is the development of a cold-war like scenario or confrontational politics between these key actors or others, which, definitely would be extremely detrimental to all in the region.

The Critical Indo-Pak Feud and Sino-India Differences

This is no denying the fact that Indo-Pak boarder and more particularly the Kashmir issue is a significant hotspot in the region. Side by side the Sino-India differences are also another point of concern. The enigmatic relations between India and Pakistan have often swung like pendulum from tentative cooperation to near-conflict situation. Particularly, due to the possession of nuclear arsenal by both the countries, the threats of pre-emptive conventional and nuclear attacks have always clouded the security landscape of the region. The possibility of irresponsible or hasty use of nuclear weaponry in conflict or near conflict scenario by any of the parties remains as a great concern. Moreover, the probable proliferation of nuclear and long range missile technology is also a point of worry. However, it is appreciable that so far both the governments have shown ample maturity and defused the tension to a great extent. Numbers of confidence-building measures are on between these two brotherly countries.

It is also perceived by the security academics and intelligentsia that the likelihood of a major Indo-Pak or Sino-Indian conflict is considerably less likely, notwithstanding the ever-present possibility of limited skirmishes and territorial forays. It may be argued that there are significant constraining factors that will limit military assertiveness and the effects of miscalculation by either side in the foreseeable future. The current strategic stalemate is perceived to be continued to result in a relatively stable but tense security status quo. However, the ongoing, seemingly intractable differences between these thriving countries are definitely not conducive to longer-term regional stability.

Maritime Security: Trade and Energy Flow and Boundary Delimitation

Over the years the South-Asian region has transformed into a centre of gravity for global trade and energy flow. The strategic location of the Indian oceans

along with the Bay of Bengal and the presence of number of critical chock points have transformed into the great pathways for shipping of essential trade and energy. This scenario has underscored the energy security as a critical kingpin in the security conundrum. Hence, the energy security has become a key feature in the security landscape of the region. At the same time, the rise of non-military threats such as illegal arm smuggling and piracy in the maritime domain has further complicated the maritime scenario. Furthermore, the dispute over maritime boundary delimitation and on ownership of vital islands or sea areas will essentially endure as the bone of contentions among the littorals. The growing competitions to exert influence over the critical sea areas or chock points and the concurrent rapid growth of naval capacity building and its show-down by the extra-regional and regional countries in controlling the critical sea are as will have significant security implications in the region.

Non Traditional Security Threats: The Climate Change

In non-traditional security parlance, the climate change issue coupled with natural calamities are pervasively becoming worrisome particularly for the developing countries like Bangladesh. The unwarranted Sea-level rise may pose serious threat in the availability of food, water, health & shelter. The subsequent loss of livelihood, assets and displacement may lead to economic deprivation and lower quality of life for the affected group of people. Although, resilient people of countries like Bangladesh are constantly trying to adapt and cope with the changing climate scenario but it is not the permanent solution. Particularly, in light of the fact that the Indian Ocean is now storing 70% of heat stored by global oceans in the previous decade, need a serious look into this issue.

Rohingya Crisis

More than 'six hundred thousand' Rohingya population from Myanmar, had scrambled across the Bangladesh border very recently to escape alleged extrajudicial killings, torcher, rape and arson attacks. The latest influx of displaced people took the total number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh more than a million. In fact, Bangladesh is struggling to provide humanitarian assistance to these distressed people, most of whom are women and children. In this backdrop, Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina reiterate that the Bangladeshi government would do best to continue to render humanitarian support to these oppressed population, but that Myanmar needed to "take steps to take their nationals back to their own homeland".

It is also to be noted here that the sense of deprivation and marginalisation often breed radicalism. Seemingly, the huge number of refugees hosted in Bangladesh, remain vulnerable to indoctrination and recruitment by radical groups, which was also duly indicated by the Advisory commission led by Mr Kofi Annan. This will not only affect national security of Bangladesh or Myanmar but surely would have serious implications on enduring peace in the region. Necessary regional and international efforts are urgently essential to solve this humanitarian crisis immediately and albeit permanently.

Rise of Terrorism: Bangladesh Experience

The rise of terrorism has been evolved as the greatest threats to democracy, economic development and pose perilous challenges to national, regional and international peace. This international phenomenon is also equally affecting regional country like Bangladesh.

Bangladesh however, is not and never was a breeding ground for terrorist, rather according to many, it is a spill-over effect of the middle-east crisis, Afghan war, Iraq War and other extra regional factors. In recent years, Bangladesh experienced number of sporadic terrorist activities in public places. Especially, the much talked about 1st July 2016 terrorist attack in a Dhaka Restaurant, was a heinous blow against humanity and social harmony of Bangladesh.

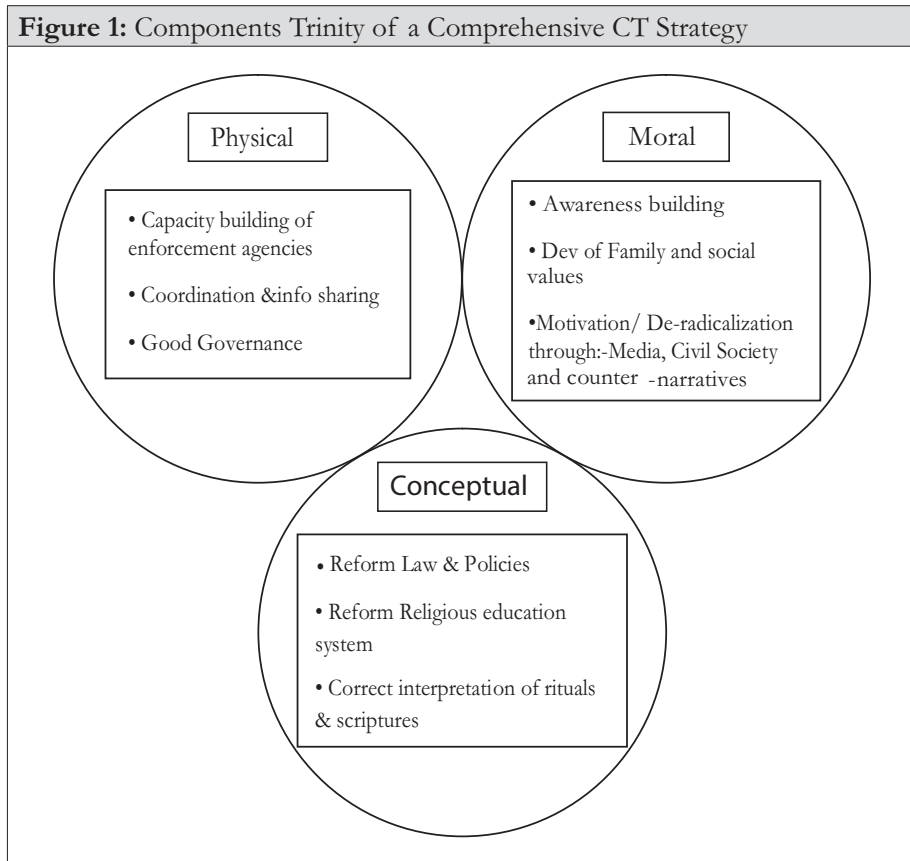
Counter Terrorism: Bangladesh Perspective

The government of Bangladesh, under the able leadership of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is following a “zero tolerance” policy against terrorism. Bangladesh pursues a value driven foreign policy as articulated by the father of the nation Bangabondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who solemnly propounded the outlook of “friendship to all and malice towards none”. This unique maxim inter-alia promotes peace, democracy, communal harmony, human rights, good governance and also underscores the necessity to combat violent extremism and fundamentalism necessary to a peaceful society.

Counter Terrorism: Way Forward

Bangladesh recognizes the necessity of a holistic approach involving all the national and regional stakeholders to eradicate terrorism from the region. Thus, an all-inclusive and a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism and radicalization

are required to meet the challenges posed by contemporary extremist and terrorist groups. This would demand de-radicalization programmes, involving the active participation of educational institutions, law enforcement authorities, the media and the civil society. A comprehensive counter-terrorism (CT) strategy may essentially encompass conceptual, physical and the moral components as shown in the Figure 1 below:



Implications to Gulf Region

The world is now connected through interconnecting webs. The regional security issues often spill over and causes international crisis. The security inertia of South-Asia or Indian sub-continent will have obvious burgeoning effect to Arabian Gulf Region too. Particularly, the superpower rivalry to gain superiority has vast future implications to all. The energy security will also be the inter-

connecting concerns for the Gulf countries as well. The gulf has always been the venue for the “Great Game” of the super powers. Many academicians opined that the various crisis and issues prevailing in the region have evolved due to the manipulations by the great powers. The big powers generally see opportunities and advantages in engaging in just like the colonial powers. The countries in the region need to emphasis on their national interests and regional stability rather than just becoming a puppet of outside powers.

The other security issues for instance, the Rohingya refugee crisis might also have a long lasting effect to gulf region. The Rohingya community has a very old attachment to middle-eastern countries and their diasporas are also quite active in this area. The constant persecution, ill-treatment and marginalization of Rohingya may breed terrorism, which may spread even up to this region. Hence, containing terrorism and asymmetric threats will continue to remain as a future security challenge. However, while discussing terrorism, it is not necessarily to entail the terrorism or radicalism only with the Muslims. In subcontinent, there is a huge phenomenon of Buddhist radicalism, particularly in Myanmar. Side by side the Hindu radicalism is also in rise in India.

Other non-military security issues as I discussed such as global warming and subsequent sea level rise will also have serious security implication to South-Asia and to this part of the world too.

Looking Ahead: Crystal Gazing

Securing cyber space will pose serious security challenges in future. The 101 million dollar illegal money transfer scam from Bangladesh Bank to the Philippines and Sri Lanka in the very recent past has showed us the rogue nature of the cyber-attacks even during peace time. Side by side looming competitions on controlling outer space is surely going to occupy the future security parlance. The Fourth Industrial Revolution builds on the Digital Revolution marked by phenomenal technological breakthroughs in robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), nano-technology, quantum computing, biotechnology, etc will have great potential to continue to extraordinarily expand the people to people connectivity & lifestyle changes. On the other hand these would also create new-fangled security concerns. We need to be very smart in mastering and managing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which will be exceedingly challenging.

Author

Lieutenant General Chowdhury Hasan Sarwady, BB, SBP, BSP, ndc, psc, PhD was commissioned in the Corps of Infantry on 15 June 1980. In his glorious military career, he has fine mixed of command, staff and instructional appointment. He commanded Infantry Battalion, 1st Bangladesh Battalion (which trains the cadets of Bangladesh Military Academy), Rifles Battalion, Rifles Sector, Infantry Brigade, Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party, Special Security Forces, Logistics Area, Infantry Division and Army Training and Doctrine Command. As staff he served as General Staff Officer, Grade-1 in Formation and Army Headquarters, Director Operations in Border Guard Bangladesh and Director Military Intelligence in Army Headquarters. As instructor he conducted training in Switzerland, United States and Nepal on United Nations affairs. He was the Founding Member and Chief Instructor of both Non Commissioned Officers' Academy and Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training. He also served in Mozambique as United Nations Military Observer and Chief of Operations of Bangladesh Contingent in Sierra Leone. He was the Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh University of Professionals.

The General is a graduate of Defence Services Command and Staff College and National Defence College, Bangladesh. He also obtained LLB degree and Master's degrees in Defense Studies, Security Studies, Political Science and Business Administration. He has successfully completed PhD degree from Bangladesh University of Professionals.

General Hasan received gallantry award 'Bir Bikrom' for displaying unfathomable courage in counter insurgency operations. His contribution in Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord on December 2, 1997 is worth mentioning. He led the rescue operations of Tazreen Garments, Savar on December 2012 and Rana Plaza, Savar on April 2013. For these rescue operations he received the coveted 'Senabahini Padak', which is the highest non-operational award in Bangladesh Army. He was also the architect of two Guinness World Record making events of Bangladesh; 'Largest Human Flag on 16 December 2013' and "Most People Singing National Anthem Simultaneously" on 26 March 2014. On this field he received the coveted 'Bishisto Seba Padak', which is also another non-operational award in Bangladesh Army.