

Re-Examining the Politico- Economic Fabric of South Asia in a New Light



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This paper attempts to study the political economic situation in the south Asian region in a new light. While it is a universally accepted fact that there is a nuclear arms race between two neighbours known to be perennially hostile and yet share a common history, culture and a host of other similarities including social and economic problems and yet views each other with mutual distrust and a source of their problems. This paper is an attempt to understand the similarities between the regions and map them towards building a peaceful south Asia working on Economic cooperation rather than conflict.

1. Political Equations

The political equation in the sub continent has been somewhat precarious and ever changing. The countries which were considered “All weather friends” are not viewed in the same light anymore. While relations between India and Nepal were always considered friendly and trustworthy keeping in mind that the Indian army always relied heavily on its “Gurkha Regiment” and in turn paid a royalty to the Nepalese Government. The relation experienced a topsy-turvy when suddenly India reduced the size of the Gurkha Regiment and inducted recruits from the North Eastern region as that would be more helpful in countering the insurgency in the Northeast while accommodating the North eastern population into the main stream. The Nepalese has thus started losing the royalty that it used to earn. At such an opportune moment, China lost no time in warming up to Nepal by offering to build a Railway line in the region. The Late his Highness King Birendra whose family was slaughtered supposedly by his own son over a marriage had started leaning towards China. A brief opinion survey of the students of Tribhuvan University, Katmandu revealed that it is strongly believed throughout Nepal that top Politicians of the Indian Government were involved in it. The reason being Nepal is the only Hindu Country going the communist way. These allegations can neither be proved nor refuted. What’s more with Nepal now becoming a safe haven for Pakistan’s I.S.I operatives to carry on its infiltration activities into the Indian Territory! Relations with neighbouring Bangladesh continue to go on a high and low. While the Manmohan Singh Government was about sign the historic agreement over the water sharing proposal of the Teesta tosta, the Mamta Banerjee government of West Bengal has refused to let it happen.

Relations with Pakistan are topics that can be researched even fifty years from now and yet no conclusion! While partition history of the two countries, the subsequent wars over Kashmir and cross border terrorism are everyday news; it has now become a culture or a singular national opinion on both sides of the border to view each other as enemies. A study of this nation Dyad has revealed interesting facts. History matters in international business. The conflicts of the past become the reference for the present relation (**National Animosity and cross border alliances; Ilgaz Arikian**). If a cross border business alliance is to be formed between two organizations from India and Pakistan, the four wars and the cross border infiltration would form the basis of this situation. Even a business alliance would be formed on the basis of complete mistrust. Where did the mistrust begin? As per the study by Ilgaz Arikian on conflict of nations, animosity starts on an individual belief which leads to a popular belief. The popular belief leads to a national opinion; which in case of India and Pakistan has even gone on become a popular notion for winning elections! It is now a culture on both sides of the border to view each other as enemies out to destroy.

2. Re-Examining Past History

It is imperative to understand the brief history of the conflicts of the subcontinent. A survey amongst a population of under 35 with a limited reading of history has revealed that more than 95 % of the population believes that the Rs 55 crores given to Pakistan was given as charity! Unfortunately nothing is further away from the truth. As per the distribution of the assets and the liabilities India was to retain 87% assets and Liabilities. India owed the amount which was to be paid off in five years but finally decided to clear it out and the same was committed. Defaulting on the same would have shown India as a country which could not keep its word. That would have made World Bank funding even more challenging (**An Indian Summer, Freedom at midnight; Dominique Lapiere**). A brief survey of senior citizens revealed that it all started in 1948 with the first attack on Kashmir by the Pakistan army and tribesmen. But the fact is that nothing was further away from the truth. The Pakistan army was in disarray as all the weapons and supplies were in the Army depots in India and the same were still to be delivered (**Crossed Swords; Shuja Nawaz**). The attack was carried out by tribesmen from the NWFP who apparently wanted to help their Muslim Kashmiri Brethren in distress. Villages upon villages were burnt in Kashmir valley by Hari Singh’s

Dogra Army because the people wanted to merge with Pakistan! This very point is being harnessed by the Pakistan Government in the United Nations even today. In the same book the writer has also pointed out that the senior military officers in both the armies which were also known as the British Indian army of undivided India were also officers who had fought hand in hand, braved bullets for each other, sacrificed their lives for each other in the jungles of Burma during WW2. They had done it under the command of none other than Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose! What then led these brave men for whom honor meant everything to point their guns towards each other? In the same book the writer has also pointed out that unfortunately these brave men were not given higher command by their respective armies. Had they been given command, the military history of the subcontinent might have been different.

A brief look at the post mortem of the Indo-Pak war of 1965 has revealed interesting facts. While it was proved beyond doubt that the aggression had been entirely caused by Pakistan; the aftermath of the Tashkent agreement revealed something else. Field Marshal Mohammed Ayub Khan told his Military Junta "Never again will I risk the lives of 20 million Pakistanis for 5 million Kashmiris" (**Crossed Swords; Shuja Nawaz**). Interestingly the dictator was immediately replaced by the council and another established in his place.

A brief survey amongst the overall population has brought out the popular perception that Taliban which comprises of the Pushtun speaking population from the NWFP are the trouble monging fundamentalist and comprise a major chunk of it. An interesting point needs to be highlighted that at the time of partition, the majority Pathan population of the NWFP led by Abdul Gaffar Khan was against partition! More so Abdul Gaffar Khan was also popularly known as Frontier Gandhi! It remains to be examined as to what went wrong and how can it be corrected.

The subsequent events namely the decisive war of 1971, the succession of east Pakistan into Bangladesh, the Pakistani support to the separatist movement in Punjab followed by a much more determined support to the separatist movement in Kashmir, Indian continual support to the separatist movement in Baluchistan, refusal on a compromise on the Sir creek, Demilitarization of the Kashmir Valley, continual cross border terrorism have only worsened the matters.

Also it is the common opinion of the Indian population that they have to stop first. A regular reading of the newspapers across the border reveals that an equal and opposite opinion exists there.

There can be either the theory of engagement: India being a superpower militarily and economically can engage a weak and an unstable Pakistan in an arms race and bleed them by that. But where would that leave India? A economic superpower with a rogue nation as neighbour growing weaker and jealous by the day but armed to the teeth. That can only mean disaster as India has much more to lose than Pakistan. The additional burden of growing defense expenses is unfathomable.

The other measure came containment: India continues to be reactive than proactive. Take the remedial measure while continuing to build on its military, nuclear and economic power (The dynamics of India Pakistan relationship; Anit Mukherjee). This process has been adopted by India. While building economic relationship with the commonly independent states in central Asia, India has built the Zaras- Delarau highway through Iran thus completely bypassing Pakistan. But that has only fueled further suspicion of Indian intentions and strengthened the opinion of the hard liners in Pakistan against India. Certain schools of thought have opined that a fragmented and a weak Pakistan would be much more manageable than strong united one. Assuming India succeeds in such a design by further fragmenting it how will it help India? It would only fuel further hatred amongst the military hardliners who also hold the nuclear weapons. Another school of thought has suggested a once and for all decisive conventional war to teach them a lesson. All war gaming techniques applied lead to only one answer that in case of a conventional war India can fragment Pakistan into pieces. What other option would a defeated and a dismembered Pakistan have other than activating the Nuclear button! What would they have to lose?

3. Suggestive Measures

From the above study it is now quite evident that if the issue is left to the politicians or the military leaders of the respective countries, the issue may not be solved for the next fifty years. It is also quite evident that there moderates on the other side of the border too.

In my opinion, an appeal can be made to the moderates on both the sides of the border to come together to make a fresh beginning. The international community has shown the way; the joint Nobel prize to Satyarthi and Malala indicating to both the countries that we have a common war to fight within. The war for the betterment of the citizens of the respective countries. If Pakistan has a Taliban which prevents education of girls, India has its similar Taliban in the Khaps. Both countries have a gigantic task of caring for its future citizens; the children. Infant mortality rate due to malnourishment is higher in the subcontinent than the Sub Saharan region.

Women empowerment remains a common issue in south Asia. Be it on religious grounds, moral policing grounds the views only be termed as chauvinistic. A country like Bangladesh with very limited access to resources and education has shown the way with the successful Grameen Bank Model headed by the Economics Laureate Dr. Mohammed Yunus. Unfortunately India as well as Pakistan are yet to learn from it. But taking a positive viewpoint of the same; all the three countries now boast of Nobel laureates. Nobel laureates who have been awarded for distinctive work in the upliftment of the down trodden in their respective countries. What is it that cannot be achieved if such people come together and work for a common cause!!

I also opionate another step towards a stable south Asia; healthcare. Healthcare remains a cause for concern more than military building. While healthcare advancement in India is happening in leaps and bounds, in Pakistan it continues to remain out of bounds. Cities Like Bangalore and Chennai have not only shown but lead by example. Complicated heart surgeries performed in sophisticated hospitals in Chennai and Bangalore has got hordes of patients from Pakistan coming in for complicated surgeries and going back with nothing but goodwill in their hearts. Many hospitals in both these cities now have

a huge patient queue and do not need to spend anything on marketing and promotions! Better relations across the border will definitely lead to these hospitals opening branches across the border and better affordability for the patient and more profitability for the Indian hospitals. Also it would open up the market for the huge Pharmaceutical industry from India thus leading to more employment by these companies for the educated Pakistani youths leading to economic prosperity for the both.

Another economic aspect which needs a special mention in my opinion is the oil gas pipeline. With massive oil rigging by Indian companies in central Asian countries like Kazakhstan etc an oil gas pipeline passing through Pakistan would immensely benefit both the countries.

4. Conclusion

Thus the conclusion of the paper in my opinion is that the moderates working on both sides of the border need to come together for a common social development. If trade and commerce starts taking precedence, mutual hatred and distrust will give way to a new found trust and respect born out a newfound economic prosperity experienced by people on both sides of the border. This in my opinion will go long way in keeping out the hardliners from both sides of the border

5. Bibliography

1. Crossed Swords; Shuja Nawaz
2. Freedom at midnight; Dominique Lapiere

6. Source Citation

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2. National Animosity and cross border alliances; Ilgaz Arikan