

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots. Most dots are light gray, but several are highlighted in red, representing specific countries or regions. The map is centered behind the title text.

Contemporary World Order and Approaches to UN Peace Operations

A South Asian Perspective

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- The world order is undergoing one of the greatest transitions in its history. The situation at the systemic level is characterized by the persistent tension between unipolarity and multipolarity in the sense that hegemonic actions of the United States (US) are as much a concern as the likely void in case of the decline of its dominance.
- The evolving framework of global governance in the peace and security area is being tested by the salience of non-traditional causes of conflicts, violence networks involving both governmental and non-governmental actors, and the dehumanizing effects of violent conflicts on civilian victims.
- South Asian countries have become the backbone of United Nations (UN) peace operations and demonstrate commitment to multilateralism and the principles of the UN. Bangladesh, Pakistan and India occupy the top three positions respectively as Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) and Police Contributing Countries (PCCs).
- The concerns of these countries in respect to full consultations, representation in the UN Secretariat, and reliable political support from major powers will have to be addressed seriously. On their part, South Asian countries could consider acting in concert more effectively.



Contents

1. World Politics and World Order: Changes and Challenges Ahead.....	1
2. South Asia in World Politics And World Order.....	2
3. South Asian Views on Challenges of UN Peacekeeping.....	4
4. Conclusion and Outlook.....	5
References.....	6

1. World Politics and World Order: Changes and Challenges Ahead

The first decade of the twenty first century has added complexities to world politics and order which is traditionally underpinned by the existence of territorially defined states without a superior, supranational authority. The changes in multiple spheres – political, economic and cultural – are still developing at such a rapid pace that one cannot escape from an assertion that the world order is perhaps experiencing one of the most profound transitions in its history.

The US and Changing Multipolarity

The foremost among future challenges to world politics may pertain to the need to keep away trends that dilute the salience of multipolarity as a long standing feature of international politics. Historically, management of world politics is characterized by loose concerts of the major powers of the day, from time to time. Indeed, the system of balance of power in Europe is aimed to ensure that none among them would be able to singly ignore or dominate others. Even during post-war times, the US-Soviet bipolar order soon yielded space to economically recovered Europe and Japan to make the world multipolar again. However, the end of the cold war and other factors placed the US in the 1990s in a far more powerful position relative to other major powers. In the resultant situation, aptly christened as the »unipolar moment«, the US preferred to target militarily regimes of certain countries ignoring interests and sensitivities of various sections of the international community. The US-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan in yesteryears, and lately against Libya (accompanied by threats of military strikes directed at inconvenient regimes in Syria and Iran) have pointed to a pattern of American exceptionalism from obligations under compliance with accountability norms in respect of its conduct in war and peace matters, while insisting on strict adherence to those very rules by the rest of the international community. This has brought into question the legitimacy of excessive exercise of power along with growing doubt about the power of legitimacy attributed to global institutions to ensure that collective management of common problems is both rule-based and principles-supported.

Just as the hegemonic actions of the US are a serious challenge, any possibility of a void resulting from the possibly slow or even dramatic decline of the US without

a ready availability of alternative and acceptable centres of power, may be a matter of great concern for world politics (Zakaria 2008). There are loose caucuses and underdeveloped consultative groupings, as exemplified by Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and others. On the one hand, many of these groupings lack a sufficient degree of synergies for keeping the United States in check. On the other hand, however, the growing influence of countries like Brazil, China and India (despite the fact that not all of them share a democratic system of governance) does not fail to receive close attention from American policy makers. In the context of the ongoing economic crisis in the European Union (EU), Asia has gained growing endorsement as a likely geopolitical hub guiding future world politics in either collaboration or competition with established powers such as the US. The resulting geopolitical realities would not only point to the ascendancy of India and China in the pecking order, but also to the added responsibilities associated with their future status as global leaders. The main question would, perhaps, be not whether the world will be multipolar or not; but what form the multipolarity might take. This issue would most likely define the future threats to global peace and security.

Changing Nature of Conflicts and Consequences for Global Security Governance

Global governance may be another important concern of relevance to the role of international organizations in a range of issues including international security. Global governance is understood as a »complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships, and processes between and among states, markets, citizens, organizations both inter-governmental and non-governmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated« (Weiss and Kamran 2009: 71). The challenges to the evolving framework of global governance issues in the area of peace and security emanate from diverse sources of threats ranging from foreign intervention, animosities among various ethnic groups, refugee flows from neighbouring countries, decline of governing structures of state, to growth of religious fundamentalism and intolerance aided and abetted by cross-border terrorist networks. Besides, direct or indirect involvement of both state and non-state actors in conflict situations, leading to the

dehumanizing effects on civilian populations, is making the situation grave. No longer are disputed borders salient as prime causes of wars. Instead, ethnicity, contending claims over natural resources, non-representative and oppressive character of ruling establishments, and easy access to small weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction have propelled conflicts, pitting states against one another. Increasingly, armed forces have to fight disorganized warring factions inside a country with or without outside support from both government and non-governmental partners. Apart from global terrorist networks, a new class of conflict-perpetrators and profiteers, including warlords, private mercenary forces, and organized crime syndicates involved in drug trafficking and money laundering, have aggravated the situation in many cases and further destabilize whole states and regions. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria and Yemen are testimony to this trend. The African continent, in particular, has emerged as the epicenter of violence entrepreneurs who are able to easily turn an intra-state conflict theatre into a major concern of regional and global security. In their most brutal ramification, these wars have robbed millions of innocent civilians, especially women and children, of their basic right to life and dignity. In a paradigm shift, human security has overshadowed the importance of national security. While responding to these changes, such seasoned institutions as the United Nations in partnership at local, national and regional levels have sought to feverishly adopt a combination of existing strategies ranging from traditional peacemaking to multi-mandate peacekeeping to authorizations for enforcement action by coalitions of willing countries.

Diverse Patterns of Conflict Management at the United Nations

The question before the UN is not simple: whether to call for use of force without paying due respect to the basic organizing principles of the interstate system (such as sovereign equality, non-use of force, non-intervention in internal affairs) or to patiently pursue peace-oriented strategies eschewing quick-fix solutions. A familiar action of the UN refers to deployment of peacekeeping forces in scores of conflict theatres with the aim to bring an end to violent conflict and help restoration of normal conditions. These operations have been widely regarded

as cost effective¹. However, because of the inability of the UN to resolve the dilemma, in nearly half of conflict-ridden societies, armed violence recurred within five years, of a premature, withdrawal of peace forces. This led the UN to modestly supplement its peacekeeping activity with post-conflict peace building endeavours for assisting in providing security, installation of representative government after a process of national reconciliation, and advocacy of economic reconstruction so as to make peace sustainable in conflict-ridden societies. Even so, the futility of imposing liberal democracies without reference to the histories and aspirations of local communities has been widely commented upon (Chesterman 2004; Paris 2004).

Notably, the wide variety of non-coercive and coercive actions of the UN have received criticism on account of adverse effects on innocent populations because of ill-designed sanctions, and the unintended consequences of unseemly behavior of personnel deployed as part of peace operations. Furthermore, the partnership between the UN and regional organizations has demonstrated more problems than promise. This is borne out by the experiences of the UN with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Burundi, Darfur, Georgia, Haiti, Liberia, Somalia and Timor Leste are among those who have had this experience in the past one and a half decade.

2. South Asia in World Politics and the World Order

The geostrategic significance of South Asia to issues of world politics and future order is underlined by the proximity of west and central Asia on its west with substantial energy resources, the vast Chinese landmass on its north with booming trade links accompanied by the yet-to-be resolved border dispute with India, the Indian Ocean in the south providing cru-

1. According to a study quoted by the representative of Bangladesh in the Security Council's thematic debates in 2011, mediation and peacekeeping have contributed to an 80 per cent decline in the total number of armed conflicts since the end of the cold war. Further, 87 per cent of UN peacekeeping operations have been successful, as compared to the 50 per cent success rate of other peace operations. (Statement of the representative of Bangladesh in the Security Council, Doc. S/PV.6603, Resumption 1, 26 August 2011: 12).



cial lines of transportation and communication, and the (Association of South East Asian Nations) ASEAN countries in the east.

Regional Power Constellation and Security Problems

The peculiar geopolitics of the region is definitively shaped by the objective realities of India's preeminence and the perceptions of other countries about it. The involvement of outside powers – the US, Russia and China – has aimed, both, at taking advantage of the intra-regional schisms and at times to undertake a tight rope walk amidst pulls and pressures from client states in South Asia. In the past, the only interstate wars involving South Asian countries were fought between India and Pakistan, but they were ended with the help of major powers and the UN. Contemporary South Asia suffers from many of the security problems afflicting other parts of the world. Cross-border terrorism, internal militancy fuelled by ethnic and religious extremism, separatist movements, civil strife, free flow of weapons and drugs, and the burden of refugees have been affecting Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in different degrees. Moreover, democratic political systems are yet to achieve stability in large parts of South Asia. Human rights violations both by native regimes and foreign military forces are reported regularly.

Cooperation in Conflict Management on the Global but not yet the Regional Level

While attempts to promote regional cooperation, through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have not made much headway so far (Dash 2008), South Asian countries have been active participants in global forums and negotiations especially aimed at disarmament, international peace-keeping, as well as, sustainable and human development. The countries of South Asia, with long experience of partaking in the collective management of common problems, do have well articulated perspectives on the problems of the emerging world order. They have for long genuinely believed that a world order based on equality, justice, peace and development would serve their interests. They consistently stress multilateralism as a desirable approach to the solution of global prob-

lems. As former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gilani noted in a speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2011: »We can do more together than we can apart. We can solve complex problems by consensus rather than by unilateralism«. A few years earlier (in 2000), former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh of India spoke on similar lines: »There is but one United Nations, none can replicate it, nor can any replace it.« It is, therefore, logical that the countries of South Asia highlight the need to respect the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter, namely sovereign equality, non-intervention in internal affairs, non-use of force, and support to UN Security Council decisions taken by consensus.

The images that South Asian countries portray of themselves on the world stage are that of moderate and free societies. The tensions that existed in the aftermath of the attacks against India's parliament in December 2001 and in Mumbai in November 2008 seem to have subsided and a positive trend of dialogue and partnership has gained prominence lately. India and Pakistan now seem to have come round to the view that the core problem regarding Jammu and Kashmir could only be solved through bilateral dialogue. They seem to acknowledge that war would hardly be affordable especially after the nuclear weapon tests in 1998. Unlike the situation nearly ten years ago, where the world apprehended that South Asia was on the brink of a nuclear confrontation, India and Pakistan are presently more engaged in cooperation. This may well be a game changer in the future. In a way this is reflected in the fact that the India-Pakistan recriminations at the General Assembly and also in the Security Council have become less frequent. Indeed, there seems to be an increasing trend of collegiality between India and Pakistan. For instance, India and Pakistan voted in support of each other's candidature for non-permanent membership in the Security Council in the years 2010 and 11. Demonstrating a cautious and balanced approach towards the events of the Arab Spring, the two countries generally voted alike in the Security Council on the draft resolution (vetoed by China and Russia) regarding the situation in Syria. The Human Rights Council is another forum where South Asian countries take complementary positions; the variance in voting on the latest resolution criticizing the violations by the Government of Sri Lanka during the last phase of the armed conflict against the Tamil separatists is an exception.

Again, some South Asian countries do not mind opposing new treaty regimes if found unsuitable to their security interests. They have taken such positions on the Land Mines Ban Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Rome Statute. On the humanitarian intervention, alternatively phrased as 'Responsibility to Protect', South Asian countries have grave reservations, just as they have serious objections to allowing greater importance in decision making to civil society actors in the global institutional apparatus. While on the one hand, India views terrorism – to borrow the words of former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee – as the »most pernicious and ruthless threat to the lives of men and women in open societies and to the international peace and security«, Pakistan too is actively painting itself as a victim, asserting that terrorist violence is un-Islamic. This is, nevertheless, not to dismiss the notes of discord and dissonance among South Asian countries. The divergence of positions on the enlargement of the UN Security Council is a clear example (Murthy 1998).

In a nutshell, South Asia has the distinction of being a representative region of future problems to global stability and security and might well provide an interesting theatre to try new policy initiatives.

3. South Asian Views on Challenges of UN Peacekeeping

As mentioned by a delegate from India, a leading South Asian troop contributing country to UN peace operations, peacekeeping »consumes more resources, employs more people and occupies a greater share of the Security Council's time than any other single issue, and no other Council instrument has had a greater impact on the provenance and application of international law and international humanitarian law than its peacekeeping mandates«. Peacekeeping has also generated a reputation of impartiality and fairness for the United Nations (See India's statement S/PV.6603, 26 August 2003: 21). As seasoned actors in peacekeeping, South Asian countries have witnessed the changing character of UN peacekeeping with both interest and caution. Notwithstanding the fact that the popularity of peacekeeping under the United Nations has been very uneven in the past, the trend in recent times has been different. The number of peacekeepers has gone up by ten times since 1990, while their budget allocations have shot up 27

times². Three quarters of the nearly 117,000 peace personnel are deployed in African conflict theatres. The scope of responsibilities of the new generation of peace operations goes far beyond traditional tasks of ensuring adherence to cease fire undertakings of fighting armies. The complex mandates of these operations have reflected the changing needs and requirements of the present times to protect civilians, to encourage national reconciliation, to help repatriation of refugees, demilitarization and disarmament of ex-combatants, civil and police administration, conduct of elections and so forth. Often, it has been observed, elements of peacekeeping mandates include peace building tasks. For instance, in the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), a mission established in 2011, the phrase 'peacebuilding' appears nine times.

South Asian Countries in UN Peacekeeping

South Asian countries have become the backbone of UN peace operations. Military personnel of three major South Asian countries were/are present, according to information of the army web sites of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, in 52, 43 and 41 missions respectively so far (unfortunately, South Asian presence in the category of international civilian staff whose modest strength stood at 3,000-5,000 in the past ten years cannot be established as no such country-wise break up is available). The UN leadership openly and regularly acknowledges that no major operation could be contemplated without South Asian willingness to help. As per statistics available in July 2012, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India and occupy the top three positions respectively as troop and police contributors to many ongoing operations. In other words, one in every four men/women in uniform happens to be from a South Asian country. South Asian countries look at their contribution to peace operations as a symbol of international recognition of their experience in handling delicate situations of internal unrest and their capacity to provide a positive difference in world politics (Krishnasamy 2001). The African Union aptly describes India as an »exemplary reference point« in the area of peacekeeping (S/PV.6603, resumption 1, 26 August 2011: 23).

2. The total expenditure incurred by the UN towards UN peacekeeping since 1990 – to the tune of 50 billion – is reported to be less than the annual expenditure incurred by the US-led international security force in Afghanistan. See India's Concept Note on »Peacekeeping: Taking Stock and Preparing for Future« in UN Doc. S/2011/496, 8 August 2011.

Table 1: Overview of South Asian Countries Troop Contributions to UN Peacekeeping, 2001-11

Country	December 2001	December 2006	December 2011
Total Strength	47,108	80,368	99,016
Bangladesh	6,010 (1)	9,681 (2)	10,394 (1)
India	2,883 (4)	9,483 (3)	8,115 (3)
Nepal	1,121 (10)	2,607 (4)	3,597 (8)
Pakistan	5,552 (2)	11,867 (1)	9,416 (2)
Percentage of Total	33.0	41.8	31.8

Source: Statistics provided by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors_archive.shtml, accessed on 5 October 2012. The ranking of each country for the selected year is shown in brackets.

South Asian countries have sought to play a role in policy making and deliberative forums also. In an action that carried forward the South Asian tradition at the Security Council of the past decade, India organized a special meeting to discuss the future of peace operations during its presidency of the Security Council in August 2011, where other South Asian troop and police contributing countries made their positions known (S/PV.6603, and Resumption 1, 26 August 2011). This seems to have become a South Asian tradition. Bangladesh and Pakistan also utilized their presidential prerogatives to organize special discussions during their turn as non-permanent members at the council in 2001 and 2004 respectively.

Challenges to UN Peacekeeping from a South Asian Perspective

According to these countries, the principal challenge before the international community is to build on the legacy of peacekeeping and ensure that it remains relevant to current realities. An important challenge concerns exit strategies and seamless transitions to long-term peace building. The gap between tasks assigned and resources made available also needs to be bridged. A second major concern is to forge effective partnerships between the Security Council, the UN Secretariat, the personnel contributing countries, and the financial contributors. In particular, in-depth consultations should be held with TCCs and PCCs leading up to mandate creation. Consultations should be held informally and more frequently, beyond the framework of the Security Council's Working Group on Peacekeeping. In the

opinion of Pakistan, »for clear, realistic and achievable mandates, greater understanding is required between the sanitized confines of the Security Council, where mandates are written, and the dusty fields of the conflict zones, where the mandates are implemented«.

Third, given the importance of Africa on the UN peacekeeping agenda, South Asia supports capacity building of the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Fourth, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are concerned with the slow and cumbersome process of recruitment for key positions; it should accommodate those with real experience in peacekeeping from TCCs/PCCs. Pakistan voiced concern about the »archaic« rates of remuneration for police and military personnel. Nepal raised the issue of safety and security of peacekeepers.

Last but not least, as noted already above, peacekeeping should strictly follow the guiding principles of consent, impartiality, non-use of force except in self-defense or in defense of the mandate. Of late, several UN peacekeeping mandates have included tasks that raise questions on the fundamental tenet of consent, placing peacekeepers in difficult legal circumstances and thereby hampering their effectiveness.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

While the topography of challenges to international peace and security is no doubt becoming more complex, there seems to be no alternative to peace operations planned and executed in compliance with the principles and provisions of the UN Charter. Since the value of South Asian countries for the smooth management of peace operations will remain high in the future, the concerns of these countries in respect of full consultation, representation in the UN Secretariat and reliable political support from major powers will have to be addressed seriously. In view of the growing relevance of civilian personnel to UN peace operations, it may be useful for the UN to engage on competitive terms civilian and technical experts from South Asian countries for performing various tasks both on the field and at headquarters. On their part, South Asian countries should consider acting in concert more effectively. The ethical responsibility of ensuring good conduct of personnel and setting in motion a more responsive process to deal firmly with cases of personal and professional misconduct will need to be taken seriously too.



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