



## **Role of SAARC in peace and conflict in South Asia region**

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### **Abstract**

The core argument this article is how South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) play a role in peace and conflict in South Asia Region. For the study of present topic the investigator used the analytical methods for this article by reviewing relevant publications, primarily based on the online journals available on Internet, Wikipedia, Elsevier and Journal of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses and other related literature.

**Keywords:** Role of SAARC in Peace, Conflict in South Asia Region

### **Introduction**

South Asia consists of seven very diverse sovereign states of different sizes. It is the vast geographical space stretching from the Himalayan mountain ranges in the North to the Indian Ocean to the South and from the valley of the Indus in the west to the plains of the Brahmaputra River in the East.

South Asia is a sub region of Asia comprising the modern states of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal and it ranks among the world's most densely populated regions in the world. South Asia is the land of great ethnic religious cultural and linguistic diversity. When the nations of South Asia won their independence from British almost 69 years ago they were at once united an divided by claims of identity. Soon after independence most South Asian states were faced with various kinds of domestic conflicts.

South Asia is an international sub system which assumed importance soon after the British withdrawal from region and the emergence of a number of new states which ever either parts of the British Empire or were its protectorates. British withdrawal was necessitated by their shrinking economic and military capacity to pursue a super power role and growing local opposition to their presence in the area this partial withdrawal by them is said to have created a vacuum in the area and supporters of this pernicious imperialistic theory naturally justified the entry of the US aggressive forces in to the area. The countries of the third world have been manufactured into diverting their resources to the purchase of sophisticated weapons manufactured in US. In South Asia it plays an important role through Pakistan.

SAARC was institutionalized in 1985 and is being looked upon as a regional instrument for development cooperation. It has incorporated many of the human security concerns in its agenda, including counterterrorism, food and energy security, poverty alleviation, curbing of human trafficking, and mutual help against natural disasters such as floods, tsunami and earthquakes. But progress in these areas has been far below expectations.

The principle of unanimity in decision making in SAARC,

which almost give a veto to all its members, ensures that neither the smaller countries of the region can be dominated by the larger ones nor the larger ones marginalized by the collectivity of the smaller ones. Every possible institution and arrangement envisaged under the South Asian strategic architecture will have to imbibe this principle A number of South Asian countries as—Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka—primarily driven by their desire to have a credible balance against India's comparatively huge capabilities.

SAARC was envisioned initially as an organization that would facilitate peace, economic integration and prosperity in the region. In the past, any initiative within the framework of SAARC to discuss cooperation on issues of traditional and non-traditional security threats was not possible since it was argued that discussion of such issues was outside the terms of reference of SAARC. However, in recent years, most notably at the last four SAARC summits, the subject of combating terrorism within South Asia has been given the highest priority. The need for joint action on food, water, environmental, human and energy security have also been highlighted in SAARC declarations, at both the summit and ministerial levels. Both traditional and non-traditional security issues are now being addressed by several SAARC member states within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and also within SAARC itself.

The South Asian region, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka has about 23 per cent of the world's population and 15 per cent of the world's arable land, but receives less than 1 per cent of global foreign investment and tourism revenues, and accounts for only per cent of global GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and 1.2 per cent of world trade. Furthermore, South Asia is still home to about 410 million of the 720 million poor living in the Asia-Pacific region despite the rapid economic growth in India and, to a lesser extent, other countries in the region.

Of the 1.4 billion people in South Asia, 42 per cent or 488 million live on less than a dollar a day. In addition, key

indicators suggest that social development still remains relatively low when compared to other Asian regions. In terms of human development, all the above countries, with the exception of Sri Lanka, rank low. The United Nations Development Project's (UNDP) Human Development Report of 2010 states that of the 169 countries for which the Human Development Index (HDI) was calculated, the selected countries were ranked as follows: Bangladesh 129, India 119, Nepal 138, Pakistan 125 and Sri Lanka, 91.7

Compounding the formidable economic and social challenges facing South Asia are numerous traditional and non-traditional security threats. Yet, while South Asian countries confront both military and human security dilemmas, national budgets tend to favor military spending. Excessive spending on defence continues to have an adverse impact on the capacity of the countries in the region to provide adequate resources to spend on human security and NTS programme. South Asia's ratio of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP is one of the highest in the world. The confluence of positive trends in regionalism and prevalence of NTS threats has resulted in the growing acceptance within the region of the need for a comprehensive security framework in South Asia. There is an urgent need for workable cooperative security framework, which could enable regional cooperation on an expanding range of security issues.

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