



Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2008

Growing Violence



Editors
D. Suba Chandran
P. R. Chari

**Armed Conflicts
in South Asia
2008**



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Preface

The essays in this volume are concerned with armed conflicts in South Asia and the conflict management efforts made over 2006 and 2007 to mitigate these armed conflicts. The present volume is the second in what is intended to be a series. The first volume was published earlier this year (2007) and discusses the armed conflicts that excoriated South Asia in 2005. It was made possible by a generous grant from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. We are confident that these annual volumes will be as valuable as are the Strategic Surveys published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, and the Yearbooks on Armament, Disarmament and International Security brought out by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in Stockholm.

By way of a methodological note, it should be mentioned that the contributors to this volume, as in the earlier one, were requested to follow a standard format in writing their essays. Through this approach they address five issues or themes: they start with a brief history of the armed conflict; identify the principal actors in the conflict; describe the course of the armed conflict over 2006–07 and its major trends; evaluate conflict management measures, if any, undertaken in this period; and, finally, present appropriate conclusions. Two additional chapters on naxalites and sectarian strife in Pakistan were added as they had become relevant over 2006 and 2007. These essays are prefaced by an Overview chapter. The structure governing this volume has advisedly sought to approximate the pattern followed by the SIPRI Yearbooks.

A conscious effort has been made to associate younger scholars with this work in the hope that they would provide continuity to this exercise. The initiative taken by Dr Suba Chandran in this regard merits appreciation; without his tireless efforts this volume would not have achieved fruition within the rigid timeframe set by the publishers. An initial meeting was held with the proposed authors in May 2007, followed by a two-day conference in September to review the first drafts of the chapters.

I am grateful to the scholars who have contributed to this volume, and for adhering to deadlines. Without their willing cooperation this effort would not have fructified. I am also grateful to Mr. Bhambal and Ms Omitha Goyal at Routledge for having agreed to undertake this series.

P. R. Chari



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1

Armed Conflicts in South Asia—An Overview

P. R. Chari

BY WAY OF A PROLOGUE

In a recent interview, Eric Hobsbawm predicted a bleak future for this century:

If 21st-century states prefer to fight their wars with professional armies, or contractors, it is not just for technical reasons, but because citizens can no longer be relied upon to be conscripted in their millions to die in battle for their fatherlands. Men and women may be prepared to die (or more likely to kill) for money... [but] in the original homelands of the nation, no longer for the nation-state.... War in the 21st century is not likely to be as murderous as it was in the 20th century, but armed violence creating disproportionate suffering will remain omnipresent and endemic—occasionally epidemic—in a large part of the world.¹

It is no longer disputed that the stability and certainties of the Cold War era have been replaced by the anarchism that is inherent within the international system. Non-state and transnational actors, owing no allegiance to the discipline of the alliance systems of the 20th century, would be contending for space in the international system. Consequently, the problems of terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the dangers arising from failing states, the malefic aspects of globalization, and the democratic movement would exacerbate socio-economic and ethnic conflict within states, making for a more conflict-prone future. These developments would be more evident in the developing parts of the world.

All these problematical issues and newer threats are excoriating South Asia and have informed the present exercise to study armed

¹ <http://living.scotsman.com/books.cfm?id=1057902007> (accessed on 6 July 2007).

conflicts in this region. Paradoxically, and contrary to general expectations, and despite being the land that gave birth to and remained the *karma bhumi* (work sphere) of the apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, South Asia is identifiable as one of the most violent regions in the world. It exhibits great ethno-political and religious-communal violence that spills over borders to aggravate regional tensions and instabilities. Next only to Iraq, South Asia has seen the largest number of deaths caused by terrorism over the last several years.²

Proceeding further, an immediate definitional problem arises in parsing the operative phrases in this paper's title, i.e., 'armed conflicts' and 'South Asia'. Reversing their order, South Asia is easily recognizable as constituting a unique security complex. Should it be only the eight states comprising SAARC (including Afghanistan)? Should China be included within a more diffused entity of southern Asia, appreciating the logic that it impinges on South Asian security? Extending this logic further, should Myanmar be included, which impinges on regional security and was highlighted during the student-monk agitation in that country? Should one prefer the natural geographical expression 'subcontinent'? Exploring these possibilities would detract from our main purposes; hence South Asia is identified here as coterminous with SAARC, which now includes Afghanistan.

What about the phrase 'armed conflicts', which is also problematical. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) provides a definition for 'major armed conflict', which is seen as 'a contested incompatibility concerning government and/or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties, of which at least one is the government of the state, has resulted in at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a single calendar year'.³ This definition is unduly restrictive, but ensures that only high-intensity conflicts would be recognized. Earlier, the UCDP definition required that these 1,000 battle-related deaths should have occurred over the entire course of the conflict to qualify as a 'major armed conflict'.⁴

² See www.tkb.org (accessed on 8 July 2007), especially the Chart, '22 Countries with the Most [Terrorist] Attacks, 1998–2004', which places India in the second position. This website is devoted to compiling statistics relating to terrorism worldwide.

³ *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The scale of violence is obviously central to defining the term 'armed conflict' and making it relevant for security analyses. Viewed from a state perspective, this data is sufficient to initiate peace processes for containing and ending 'armed conflict'. However, there are obvious inadequacies in these UCDP definitions when applied to 'major armed conflicts' in South Asia. They exclude, for instance, the use of armed force between two or more non-state actors, which occurs in sectarian conflict or between militant groups as occurs during Hindu–Muslim communal riots in India, or within communities like the Shia–Sunni violence in Pakistan, or the Sinhala–Tamil ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka or Pashtun–Uzbek clashes in the FATA region. Further, the 'use of armed force' connotes the utilization of troops and militarily trained personnel by the state against guerrillas, insurgents and similar non-state actors. What about deaths caused by hunger and deprivation in the battle zone, or due to the forced migration of the population either fleeing the war zone or being forcibly evicted by the state or by non-state actors? Consequently, the UCDP definitions do not address these broader aspects of collective violence.

These quibbles can be multiplied, but the greatest difficulty arises by raising the bar to 'at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a single calendar year'. Restricting such deaths to 'battle-related' causes would exclude deaths caused by landmines, improvised explosive devices and so on that cause the most deaths in armed conflicts in South Asia. The death toll qualification, however, does not include civilians caught in the crossfire between the state and insurgent and terrorist forces. In effect, therefore, this numerical limitation would ignore long-enduring conflicts like Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, the Kashmir imbroglio, and the ethno-political conflicts afflicting northeast India for decades; the total casualties in these conflicts greatly exceed the numerical limits placed by the UCDP definitions if the entire duration of these armed conflicts is reviewed.

It is apparent now that the UCDP definitions were derived from Cold War beliefs that persist; hence, more thought needs to be given to refining the concept of 'major armed conflicts' to have greater relevance for South Asia.⁵ Since its situation is unique, this exercise

⁵ The inadequacy of the present definition of 'armed conflict' is appreciated, while recognizing the need for 'additional research and resources'. See *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, note 3 above, p. 95. The attendant problems are set forth in Appendix 2 C, 'Collective violence beyond the standard definition of armed conflict', *ibid.* pp. 94–106.

should be undertaken within the region to cater for these different elements relevant to armed conflicts, especially the death of civilians and the economic damage to the affected territory, apart from battle-related deaths.

PARTICULARITIES OF SOUTH ASIAN ARMED CONFLICTS AND PEACE PROCESSES

National security beliefs are primarily a function of the threat perceptions generated by their ruling elite; they comprehend both external and internal dimensions, but also the linkages between them. Do armed conflicts in South Asia share any common features? Overall, the region's security is characterized by two unique features. First, the tensions and instabilities embedded in the India–Pakistan standoff have acquired a nuclear dimension. Several wars have interspersed their traditional hostile relations, which began soon after they achieved independence in 1947; the inter-war interregnums were really an armed truce, but were marked by various forms of subterranean warfare, which is ongoing in Kashmir today. Their reciprocal nuclear tests in May 1998 made overt the state of recessed nuclear deterrence between them. It could have been hoped that this would strengthen stability and erode tensions; not unexpectedly, this did not happen, and there was no mitigation in the proxy war that had been launched by Pakistan against India, manifested by its support to militancy in Kashmir and terrorist activities all over India. The Kargil conflict (1999) is unique in that it provides an example of a conventional conflict between two nuclear armed countries, the only other example in the nuclear era being the Ussuri clashes that occurred between China and the erstwhile Soviet Union in early 1969. Currently a peace process is underway between India and Pakistan, but at a glacial pace, and opinion is evenly divided on the durability of this modality.

Second, the binding force linking the security perceptions of India's smaller neighbours is their abiding angst regarding its perceived hegemonistic ambitions, which guides and underpins their foreign and security policy. They are convinced that 'South Asia's security problems derive basically from India's expansionist and hegemonic spectre looming over the region, since the main component of Pakistani,

Bangladeshi, Nepali and Sri Lankan threat perceptions focus upon India.⁶ The geo-political structure of South Asia emphasizes its Indocentricity; an often-cited fact is that no two South Asian neighbours of India have common borders with each other, but India has land or maritime borders with all of them. This geo-strategic reality has profound psychological implications for Nepal and Bhutan, both land-locked countries, while emphasizing the geo-political isolation of the island nations—Sri Lanka and the Maldives—from the region. The national security perspectives of these countries is shaped by these geo-strategic realities, which has strengthened India's belief that it must expand its bilateral and multilateral relations beyond South Asia to its extended neighborhood in Southeast, Central and West Asia, while continuing modest efforts to pursue bilateral ties and regional cooperation in the region through SAARC.

Some distinguishing features of armed conflicts in South Asia can now be discussed. They inform us that:

- First, in line with global trends that have accentuated in recent years, the external aspects of national security in South Asia have yielded precedence to its internal aspects. Following the Indo-Pak war of 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh, there have been several crises between India and Pakistan that could have escalated into a major conflict but did not. These major crises were associated with the Brasstacks Exercise (1987), the Kashmir-related Spring crisis (1990), the Kargil conflict (1999), and the Border Confrontation crisis over 2001–02.⁷ There could be several reasons why these major crises did not precipitate an all-out war, which might be attributed to a combination of good sense dawning—belatedly perhaps—on the India–Pakistan leadership, intervention by the United States, a fuller appreciation of the implications of nuclear deterrence among the decision-making elites of the two countries, and plain good fortune. Their current security problems are almost entirely internal

⁶ P.R.Chari, 'Security Aspects of Indian Foreign Policy', in Stephen Philip Cohen, ed., *Security Aspects of Indian Foreign Policy: American and Asian Perspectives*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987, p. 50. Nothing basically has changed over the intervening two decades.

⁷ See P.R.Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, The Brookings Institution Press, forthcoming.

in nature, comprising threats from jihadi terrorism, Left extremism and so on, which can be aggravated by external actors, but basically illustrates that internal threats far outweigh external threats in South Asia.

Indeed, it has been perceptively noted that ‘Lagging economies, ethnic affiliations, intense religious convictions, and youth bulges will align to create a “perfect storm”, causing conditions likely to spawn internal conflict. The governing capacity of states, however, will determine whether and to what extent conflicts actually occur. Those states unable both to satisfy the expectations of their peoples and resolve or quell conflicting demands among them are likely to encounter the most severe and most frequent outbreaks of violence.’⁸ All South Asian countries are at risk since the lack of governance or, more accurately, misgovernance in South Asia is too marked to require highlighting. The security situation in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka exemplifies this assessment.

- Second, the region also exhibits symptoms of the ‘contested incompatibility’ noticed in the UCDP definitions, deriving from states acting in concert with armed groups under their control to promote dissidence and insurrection in their neighbours. Indeed, several armed conflicts in South Asia exhibit this phenomenon of external–internal factors propelling conflict and exacerbating their virulence. In consequence, large numbers of deaths occur due to terrorist and insurgent violence in the region, including those of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire, which is euphemistically underplayed by describing them as ‘collateral damage’. The proxy war instrumentality informs the interventionary foreign and security policies of South Asian countries, as the recent history of India–Pakistan, Indo–Bangladesh and Indo–Sri Lankan relations informs us. Terrorist attacks on specific communities, targeted killings by focusing on individuals within designated political groups or communities are also occurring regularly. For instance, jihadi groups have been encouraged by Pakistan to selectively kill

⁸ Report of the National Intelligence Council’s 2020 Project, ‘Mapping the Global Future,’ http://www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_global_trend2020.html. Cf. ‘Pervasive Insecurity’, p. 5.

moderate Kashmiri leaders, and the LTTE assassinating leaders in their own Tamil community. Another example is the wanton destruction of property in Sri Lanka by the security forces and the Tamil militants. These examples illustrate the different ramifications of armed conflicts in South Asia, as distinct from its law and order problems which rank lower in the spectrum of violence in the region.

- Third, sectarian and ethno-political violence, apart from insurgency and terrorism, underlies several armed conflicts in the region, which is discernible in a broad span of territory from the turbulent Afghanistan–Pakistan border region to Baluchistan to northeast India to the tribal belt in East and Central India, and further into Sri Lanka. Battle-lines are constantly being redrawn in these conflicts, leading to a loosening of government control over the affected territories, and the armed conflicts in these theatres becoming more intense. The most recent addition to this list of lawless territories is the sensitive Waziristan and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) in Pakistan. There has been an alarming growth of al Qaeda and Taliban influence in this sub-region due to the crusading zeal of these Islamist organizations and the covert support extended by Pakistan's intelligence agencies. There are some 40 million Pashtuns living on both sides of the Durand line in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and it is believed that the birth of a new Pashtunistan state is possible⁹ as this region rapidly slips out of the control of both Islamabad and Kabul.
- Fourth, most studies on armed conflicts in South Asia pay little heed to their psychological and economic costs, which are considerable but are difficult to quantify, especially when these conflicts are prolonged over years. The armed conflicts in Kashmir, northeast India and Sri Lanka, for instance, have proceeded for decades. Apart from causing economic hardships to individuals and communities, stultifying regional development and draining the national and state exchequers, these prolonged conflicts are known to have profound psychological, even

⁹ Selig Harrison, 'The Pashtun time bomb', *The International Herald Tribune*, 1 August 2007. According to the author, traditional wisdom informs that either Islamist or Pashtun identity would triumph in this conflict. But the more plausible alternative is the emergence of an 'Islamic Pashtunistan'.

neurological, effects on the local population.¹⁰ This is particularly true of groups that are generally forgotten in these conflicts, namely women and children, whose sufferings need greater illuminating in studies of armed conflicts. The absence of adequate importance to socio-economic costs, however, does not mitigate from their relevance, or the need to configure the affected population, particularly women and children, into reconciliation and rehabilitation programmes devised to manage the post-conflict consequences of the peace processes.

- Fifth, armed conflicts in South Asia exhibit the full panoply of violence. They include cross-border conflicts which have occurred regularly between India and Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and now between Afghanistan and Pakistan; and, intra-state conflicts within the South Asian countries with varying degrees of virulence. These intra-state conflicts can be further categorized into armed conflicts possessing a communal-religious character, clearly evident in Pakistan and Bangladesh; or having socio-economic roots as apparent in the naxalite movement in India and the Maoist struggle in Nepal; or having ethno-political dimensions as evident in northeast India and Sri Lanka. Intra-state conflicts have arisen when such discontents have morphed and turned societal groups against provincial and central authority and sometimes against each other. All these factors have made South Asia, alongside sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world. It could be said that better connectivity between estranged communities and with the state would mitigate such discontents by increasing communications. But better connectivity is a double-edged sword, and improved communications through television or internet can also fuel resentments within communities having common links—religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural—against insensitive governments or against each other, leading to the growth of local resentments, frustrations against legal authority, and inspiring armed conflicts within the state.
- Sixth, South Asia's extremist groups have inspired these armed conflicts. They fall into five distinct categories: (i) Islamic

¹⁰ Kavita Suri, 'Women in the [Kashmir] Valley: From Victims to Agents of Change', in W.P.S.Sidhu, Bushra Asif and Cyrus Samii, eds., *Kashmir: New Voices, New Approaches*, Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006, p. 84.

extremists who seek to impose, extend or defend Muslim rule against non-Muslims; (ii) armed Sunni and Shi'a extremists fighting for sectarian control over the Islamic state; (iii) Hindu extremist organizations, like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, who wish to establish or mould the state on the foundation of Hinduism as opposed to a secular polity; (iv) ethno-linguistic groups that use political violence, including guerrilla war and terrorism, to gain their secessionist objectives, like the LTTE in Sri Lanka; and (v) Leftist extremists, like the Maoists in Nepal and the Naxalites in India, who are seeking to acquire state power and transform its structure to conform with their ideological goals. Currently, all these violent groups are using conventional weapons like small arms, hand grenades, landmines and improvised explosive devices. However, an anxiety obtains that they will, in time, acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), especially biological and radiological weapons that are comparatively easier to acquire and deliver by unconventional means like using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Persisting reports, for instance, that the al Qaeda has shown interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction cannot be dismissed as fanciful. This was recognized in the latest National Strategy for Homeland Security report issued by the United States, which unequivocally states that 'the most serious and dangerous manifestation of this [terrorist] threat remains al-Qaida, which is driven by an undiminished strategic intent to attack our Homeland.'¹¹ For that matter, the likelihood of states giving WMDs in deliverable form to non-state actors cannot be dismissed.

- Seventh, peace processes in South Asia are common, but proceed fitfully, as between the regional countries and within them. Clearly, the dynamics of peace processes between the South Asian countries are necessarily different from those between the state and non-state actors within their territory. The inter-state peace processes include the ongoing dialogues between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan and India, India and Bangladesh; the intra-state peace processes include those between the central authority in regional countries with their militant groups, as occurs with the Taliban in Afghanistan,

¹¹ *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/homeland/nshs/NSHS.pdf> (accessed on 12 October 2007).

Kashmiri dissidents in India, jihadis in Pakistan, Maoists in Nepal, Tamils in Sri Lanka, and may occur in the fullness of time in the Maldives. These dialogues generally proceed at a leisurely pace; some are halted, while others could be revived.

Going further, the problem remains of sustaining the peace dividend when achieved. The empirical evidence suggests that peace processes in South Asia are easier to initiate than to sustain, as is apparent in Sri Lanka and in Nepal. Ironically, however, agreements reached are scrupulously adhered to, especially if their benefits are clearly demonstrable. A good example is the Indus Waters Treaty (1960), which has withstood the strains of three India-Pakistan conflicts, the continuing dispute over Kashmir, and several major and minor crises that have periodically heightened tensions and instabilities between the two countries over the last half century. Currently the India-Pakistan 'composite dialogue' proceeds at a snail's pace, although some minor agreements have been reached between them on hotlines, giving prior notification on missile flights (cruise missiles are not yet included) and nuclear accidents. More substantive agreements on territorial issues like resolving the Siachen and Sir Creek disputes still await resolution, but remain the subject of interminable negotiations. Significantly, however, both countries have reached an agreement on 'making borders irrelevant' in Kashmir, on the assumption that neither country can extend them further or make them permanent in the foreseeable future. Bus services have been opened between the two countries that permit the divided population on both sides of the Line of Control (LOC) to socialize with each other. Agreements on permitting truck traffic and opening these routes to trade and commerce are on the anvil, and may become possible as mutual suspicions erode. Much the same could be concluded about the several other peace processes that are on in the region. No doubt the complexity of the disputes that lead to armed conflicts militate against their early resolution, but the influence of the security establishment, coupled with the lack of political will, apart from the dedication of the conflicting parties to pursuing their perceived national objectives without compromise, are further reasons for the continuance of these armed conflicts. So, is the glass half full or half empty? Much lies in the eyes of the beholder, but a debate on these issues is useful, even if it remains inconclusive.

The past history of American–Soviet negotiations on arms control, the current Israeli–Palestinian negotiations on evolving an elusive peace agreement, and between North and South Korea to usher peace into northeast Asia informs us that conflict resolution and post-conflict reconciliation are difficult exercises, and can linger for years without progress; patience is therefore essential for their pursuit, since quick-fix solutions can easily unravel. There is little reason therefore for South Asian countries to shun external mediation, which has often helped, though there can be no guarantee that they will always succeed. The Indus Waters Treaty, for example, was finalized after six years of negotiation over 1954–60, chiefly due to the mediatory efforts of the World Bank. More recently, American intervention was a crucial factor that hastened the cessation of the Kargil conflict and the termination of the border confrontation crisis. The signal lack of success, however, of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the Norwegians to bring peace to Sri Lanka shows that it is for the warring parties to resolve their differences and make the necessary compromises to end regional armed conflicts.

DISCERNING THE BROAD TRENDS IN ARMED CONFLICTS OVER 2006–07

It is not proposed to summarize in this Overview the contents or the conclusions of the various chapters in this volume. Each individual essay is basically reportage and needs to be read fully to appreciate its judgements on facts, and the conclusions derived thereafter. Instead, it is proposed to review here the broad trends that have manifested themselves within the armed conflicts in South Asia over 2006 and 2007, and those that seem likely to either persist and/or exacerbate over the coming years. An identification of these trends would permit revisiting them in future volumes in this series to track developments of interest and changes therein.

It is apparent that the new challenges to security, especially intra-state security, are more likely to ignite armed conflicts in South Asia. Peering into the future, what can one discern about armed conflicts that might arise, or those that would continue and could exacerbate over the coming years? Several indications are available to read the writing on the wall.

- First, there is little doubt that the writ of several South Asian states does not run over their entire territory, and sometimes does not extend much beyond their national capitals, as occurred during the last decades of the Mughal empire. The best example is Afghanistan, which lends credence to the *bon mot* that the Karzai government's writ runs only over Kabul, and that too, only during the daytime! But, it is also evident that the writ of the Pakistan government no longer runs over its FATA region, especially over the Waziristan Agency. The resurgence of the Taliban in south and east Afghanistan and the tribal belt straddling Afghanistan–Pakistan, with its bases located in Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province constitutes a cancerous node in South Asia; it could spread like a contagion leading to instability in Central Asia, but also in Pakistan. This phenomenon of expanding lawlessness and armed conflict is largely financed by the smuggling of drugs from the uncontrolled cultivation of poppy in these criminalized areas. Several parts of South Asia are exhibiting manifestations of state failure demonstrated by the presence of 'black spots' where the symptoms of a failed state are evident. 'One such black spot is the area around Peshawar... which has been repeatedly described as the hiding place for fleeing or regrouping al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives; the area is also a smuggling center where almost anything can be bought or sold on the black market.'¹² It is also the distribution centre for illicit opium and its derivatives produced in Afghanistan for supply to markets across the world. Other 'black spots' are recognizable in the Jaffna peninsula, the Chitagong Hill Tracts, northwestern Nepal, parts of Kashmir and the northeastern Indian states, and, most worrisome, the rapidly growing number of districts in central and eastern India (172 out of some 600 plus districts at last count) that are falling under Naxalite control. These 'black spots' identify the areas out of which armed conflicts could emerge and radiate further into South Asia unless they are effectively dealt with. The coexistence of functioning national and provincial authority, alongside virtual lack of control over broad expanses of its territory, has become a distinguishing feature of violence in South Asia.

¹² Bartisz H. Stanislawski and Margaret G. Hermann, *Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism and WMD*, Centre for International Development and Global Management (CIDCM), University of Maryland, 15 October 2004, pp. 2–3.

- Second, many South Asian countries have demonstrated a touching faith in the efficacy of fencing and/or mining their borders to keep out militants/terrorists, but also desperate people migrating into their territory hoping for a better quality of life, and often to ensure their personal safety from persecution or by escaping from ethnic and communal conflict. The latest effort is Pakistan's attempt to fence off stretches of the Pak–Afghan border, mainly to convince the Americans that it is 'doing something' to prevent the ingress and egress of the Taliban and al Qaeda elements that have found refuge in its territory. India has fenced off the Line of Control in Kashmir to stop militants and terrorists from entering the state by crossing the Indo–Pak border. This modality has its dedicated supporters and opponents in India. Those in favour point to a marked reduction in the number of militants and terrorists crossing the LOC. But those against this proposition argue that the fence can be breached or tunneled under, and needs to be continuously manned anyway. Moreover, the fence goes down whenever heavy snowfall occurs, permitting the LOC to be crossed. The shifting of mines due to landslides, furthermore, causes more casualties on the Indian rather than the Pakistani side, both to the local people and their livestock. The efficacy of the Indo–Bangladesh fence that is being constructed by India also remains in doubt, chiefly due to the availability of easy alternative river and maritime routes for entering India, apart from the Bangladeshi enclaves in Indian territory and vice versa. Besides, there is no reason for determined anti-social elements to cross the border to enter another country, when the longer but safer modality of entry via a third country is available. Witness the ease with which Pakistani militants and terrorists enter India through Nepal or Bangladesh. Therefore, the chief value of these massive, expensive, but essentially useless efforts to fence off countries seems to be providing an option to slow down the human tide of migrants. Wisdom suggests that a more certain method to achieve this objective would be for South Asian countries to develop their border regions jointly through SAARC. Wisdom also suggests that the implications of sub-nationalism, which transcends borders, be recognized, instead of trying to fence it off.

- Third, minority issues are likely to become the new and more prescient reason for armed conflicts in South Asia. The disconcerting regularity of communal riots in an avowedly secular country like India points to the strength of religious prejudices in the majority community against the minority communities in South Asia. The major communal riots in India in the recent past, for example anti-Sikh (1984), anti-Muslim, after the Babri Masjid's demolition (1992), and Gujarat (2002) highlight both the religious aggressiveness of the majority community, and the hand of the state in permitting, if not promoting, such deliberate breakdown of law and order. This is applicable to the Pakistani and Bangladeshi governments as well in their dealing with, if not also promoting, anti-Hindu riots in the past, as also the Sinhala government's conduct in Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the Tamil minority. In India and Sri Lanka the minorities are too large to be either suppressed or expelled, which only leads to more virulent attacks upon them by the majority community. An equal danger arises from the minority community resorting to violence in retaliation, which need not express itself overtly, but through covert modalities like those embedded in 'revenge' terrorism. Several terrorist incidents in India, like the Bombay blasts in 1993, had a clear nexus with the anti-Muslim riots after the Babri Masjid demolition some three months earlier. A serious majority-minority situation in South Asia currently obtains in Afghanistan where the minority Uzbek community currently dominates the Karzai government, while the Pashtun majority, constituting the bulk of the Taliban militants, is challenging its authority. Past efforts of the international community (read the United States and, for that matter, India) to support the Northern Alliance (largely Uzbek) has alienated them from the Pashtuns, reduced the capacity of the Karzai government to cobble a *modus vivendi* in Afghanistan, and exacerbated the ethnic divide between the Uzbek and Pashtun communities. A reasonable presumption could be made that South Asia will witness greater sectarianism and communalism in future, leading to violence and armed conflict; the two largest communities in the region—Hindus and Muslims—comprise roughly 60 per cent and 40 per cent of the total population. The empirical evidence reveals, moreover, that the majority community can be responsible while the minority

community is irresponsible, and vice versa, which points to the need for objective judgements, instead of automatic and *a priori* conclusions.

- Fourth, the absence of coordination between the several states in South Asia, as also within these states, is a matter of serious concern. The Terrorism Convention, for instance, which was entered into by the SAARC countries in 1987, remains toothless in the absence of extradition treaties for the eviction of persons wanted for prosecution for serious offences. Nor are the countries where they were provided asylum willing to undertake their prosecution on the basis of evidence provided to them. The situation in India as regards coordinating efforts by the northeastern states, for instance, or the states afflicted with Naxalite militancy, is equally disconcerting. Determined efforts to launch joint operations, share intelligence, investigate cross-state-border offences, and proceed, in short, with a clear sense of purpose against militant and terrorist groups are seriously missing. Ironically, these anti-social groups have established close coordination among themselves to procure arms, set up training facilities and address 'policy' issues to make themselves a more effective fighting force.

CONCLUSIONS

The plea has been made in several fora by well-meaning people that the bilateral and multilateral dialogue processes in South Asia must be strengthened to bring peace and stability to one of the poorest regions in the developing world. But, is peace an end in itself? Can the mere absence of hostilities ensure peaceful and stable conditions for the affected population to pursue their lives and avocations without fear? In northeast India, for instance, negotiating peace and ceasefire agreements has become a meaningless exercise since they proceed side by side with militancy; kidnappings and extortion, for instance, continue even after negotiating such agreements, making them quite irrelevant.

What is often not appreciated are the connections between the national security concerns of the South Asian countries, the common nature of their armed conflicts, and their identical mistakes. Three instances from recent South Asian history are instructive in this regard.

- First, it may be recalled that Indira Gandhi was arrested in mid 1978 and tried on criminal charges after the Janata Party came to power in 1977, immediately after the Emergency imposed by her was lifted. The sympathy wave generated by this vindictive act, and the inability of the Janata government to obtain Indira Gandhi's conviction, led to their ouster in the general elections of 1980. Thereafter, her prosecutors were sidelined, and her trusted officials returned to prominence. This same course of events is unfolding in Bangladesh with the military-backed interim government having arrested former Prime Ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina in mid-2007 on charges framed against them by the Anti-Corruption Commission. At the time of writing, no charges have been pressed against them while the Parliamentary elections have been indefinitely postponed. Should these leaders return to power, which is not unlikely, history might repeat itself, with the prosecutors becoming the prosecuted.
- Second, the forcible entry of the Indian army into the Golden Temple in June 1984 and the storming of the Lal Masjid in Islamabad in July 2007 bear a remarkable similarity. The comparisons between the circumstances leading to 'Operation Bluestar' and 'Operation Silence', the killing of Sant Bhindranwale and Maulana Gazi, and the situation that obtained in Punjab in 1984 and is currently seen in Pakistan in 2007 are striking. The lessons that can be drawn from these two episodes to instruct the leaderships in South Asia is that the nurturing of an extreme leadership to counter moderates in the Opposition might be part of a clever divide-and-rule policy, but it is also fraught with the danger of the extremists getting out of control, and the intended solution becoming the future problem. But, has this lesson been learned? Does prejudice deter the countries in South Asia from learning anything from these Indian examples?
- Third, the co-optation of militants into counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations is a modality that has a siren lure for many states in South Asia. Banglabbhai in Dhaka, Karuna in eastern Sri Lanka, the SULFA (Surrendered ULFA) in Assam, and Ikhwanis (former militants) in Kashmir are some examples of individuals and organizations being co-opted into the law enforcement machinery to identify and often liquidate their former companions in militant and terrorist outfits. Empirical evidence

reveals that these former militants/terrorists slowly but surely become the problem rather than the solution. Extortion rackets, human rights violations and other anti-social actions are frequently associated with them, sometimes in collaboration with the armed and paramilitary forces of the state. In all such situations the local population fears them more than the militants and terrorists. The result is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the general population, without whose cooperation counter-militancy and counter-terrorism operations are doomed to fail and destined to continue *ad infinitum*. Still, this modality continues to inspire governments, as is evident from the establishment of the controversial Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh, which has instilled fear in the common people and has raised the hackles of NGO groups across the country. The latest example is President Karzai's offer to initiate a dialogue with Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which in itself is unexceptional, but he also went on to say that 'executive positions in his government could be found for Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami notables'.¹³ How this will affect the ethnic arithmetic of his present Cabinet and the power structure in Kabul is not difficult to predict. It would only complicate his task even further.

Regrettably, the similarity in the intrinsic nature of their armed conflicts has not informed the South Asian countries to formulate responses taking into account the experience of their neighbours, since they prefer to learn from their own experience! The same grievous errors and mistakes made elsewhere in the region continue to be repeated. Lessons remain unlearned, allowing a paraphrasing of Marx's famous judgement on history in the South Asian context: 'History repeats itself as a tragedy, and then as a greater tragedy'. Lest this negative picture seem overdrawn, the positive developments within the region over 2006–07 should be noted. The ceasefire along the Line of Control in Kashmir is holding up, and the earlier artillery duels between India and Pakistan in this region have, hopefully, become a part of their unfortunate history. Elections, despite their obvious imperfections, have been held in Pakistan and Nepal, and,

¹³ William Maley, 'Talking to the Taliban', *The World Today*, vol. 63, no.11, November 2007, p. 4.

hopefully, will be held before long in Bangladesh. GDP growth, despite violence, has displayed remarkable resilience in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—the prominent countries of South Asia. There is in all the regional countries a commitment to multi-party democracy, which remains firm despite many slippages in practice. But these few positive developments are a thin silver lining in the dark cloud of growing violence and conflict.

What can we discern about the future of armed conflicts in South Asia? The South Asian countries, except for India and the Maldives, fall in the category of failed and failing states. To make such estimates, an annual 'Failed states Index' has been drawn up by a US think-tank, the Fund for Peace, which is published by the *Foreign Policy* journal in Washington.¹⁴ Nations are ranked on this index according to twelve factors: mounting demographic pressures; massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons; legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievance; chronic and sustained human flight; uneven economic development along group lines; sharp and/or severe economic decline; criminalization and delegitimization of the state; progressive deterioration of public services; widespread violation of human rights; security apparatus becoming a 'state within a state'; rise of factionalized elites; and intervention of other states or external factors.

How do South Asian countries fare on this Failed States Index? Including Afghanistan, which has recently become a SAARC member, it is disconcerting that, except for India and the Maldives, the other six countries in the region are listed among the first sixty failed states. Their respective positions are Afghanistan (8), Pakistan (12), Bangladesh (16), Nepal (21), Sri Lanka (25) and Bhutan (47). Significantly, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh are designated as the most 'critical' countries; Nepal heads the second list of countries 'in danger'; while Bhutan falls in the third list of borderline states. So many failed states being located in South Asia has serious implications for the region's internal security and the propensity for armed conflicts in their territory. The geo-strategic reality must be appreciated that India is ringed by a circumference of tensions and instabilities that react with tensions and instabilities subsisting in India. This factor has profound implications for its external security in the coming

¹⁴ Cf. *The Failed States Index 2007*, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com> (accessed on 7 September 2007).

years. It can be argued that the Failed States Index exaggerates the situation, since newly de-colonized states could be expected to be economically and politically weak and not cohesive as they are in various stages of state formation. But the existence of one or all of these symptoms of state failure in parts or the whole of different states in South Asia cannot be ignored; they point to their serious vulnerability to social and political chaos, which predisposes them to instability and armed conflicts.

Finally, it could be surmised that terrorism, with its international and regional linkages, is unlikely to show any signs of abatement in South Asia, but will continue to excoriate the region; that the linkages between terrorism and organized crime will further consolidate, but a special danger will arise from the *entree* of these anti-social elements into the inner processes of governance; that the growth of 'identity politics', with primacy being accorded by adherent groups to religion and ethnicity, would lead to greater communal and ethnic violence; that the links between the internal and external sources of armed conflict in South Asia, especially radical Islam, will continue in the foreseeable future; that the growing reach of the electronic media, with its message of consumerism for the endowed, will inspire and strengthen the resentment of the poor against authority, leading to their resorting to violent means for mitigating perceived injustices; that the capacity of regional bodies like SAARC to erode armed disputes will remain marginal; and that bilateralism to proceed with the peace processes would posit itself as a practical necessity.

These issues need to be closely reviewed when considering armed conflicts in South Asia, but they must also be kept in mind to forge the instrumentalities required to meet these challenges to regional security in South Asia. What is important is to nuance these issues to enhance our understanding, but also to recognize their changing trends.

Afghanistan: Continuing Violence

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza

A BRIEF HISTORY

The beginnings of the conflict and consequent instability in Afghanistan can be traced to the period 1973–1979, the period preceding the Soviet intervention. This phase was marked by internal coups and external power intervention. In the largest covert operation since the Vietnam War, policy-makers in the United States started supporting the Afghan resistance parties based in Pakistan through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). President Carter decided that the US had a ‘moral obligation’ to help the resistance movement.¹ The US Congress increasingly pushed for more aid and took the initiative in doubling the administration’s request for \$250 million, plus an extra allocation for anti-aircraft weapons. The entire aid programme was channelled by the CIA through Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistani’s intelligence agency, to maintain deniability.

With the objective of transforming Afghanistan into a ‘Soviet-Vietnam’ and to bleed the Soviets white in Afghanistan, US policy-makers armed the mujahideen, flirted with Islam and allowed the chaos to intensify. Following Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, US policy-makers lost interest in the country. In the 1990s, Afghanistan continued to be wracked by internecine warfare between various mujahideen factions. In the ensuing anarchy, the Taliban began their victory march with active support from Pakistan. There was, however, some apprehension among US policy-makers after the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996. The strict puritanical Taliban regime

¹ In July 1979, six months before the Soviet invasion, President Carter signed a Presidential finding on covert action that began as a modest programme of medical aid to the rebels. See John H. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, London, 2000, p. 129. For CIA funding see Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf and Major Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan’s Untold Story*, Lahore, 1992, p. 120.