

Unity Journal

Vol. III, 305-316, 2022

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/unityj.v3i01.43334>

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Impact of National Security Challenge in Development Prospect of South Asia

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Abstract

National security has always been viewed as a precondition for sustainable economic, political, and social development. Any sort of challenges or threats upon national security directly infringes the developmental course. South Asia, has been rampantly facing security-related challenges and obstructions as terrorism, counter-terrorism, militarization, and religious extremism, civil war, and border disputes. Such challenges have not only jeopardized the peace within the region but a seething unrest has been pounded in the development process. This paper primarily focuses on national security challenges faced by countries in South Asia. South Asian nations resort to increment of defense budget, militarization, border security, and struggle for nuclear power to address their security challenge. I have examined the impact of such response upon the course of development in this paper. This is a qualitative research and refers to secondary source of data which includes; books, journals, reports of reputed institutes and think tanks. The analysis finds that increasing militarization and defense budget has been abysmal to address national security threat in South Asia. South Asian nations can resort to bilateral talks and diplomatic measure to

address their security threats. This will save larger economic resources which could be utilized for development prospect.

Keywords: development, national security, defense budget, terrorism, South Asia, militarization

Introduction

This section of the paper introduces the concept of security, national security, development and the relation of development with national security.

Great English Philosopher, Thomas Hobbes noted in his renowned book Leviathan that, “without security there is no place for industry, no arts, no letters and no society, which is worst of all” (as cited in Preece, 2011, p.14). The notion of security has always stood as a contested concept amongst scholars. The term security is derived from a latin word *securitas*, where *sine* entails ‘without’ and *curas* entails ‘concern’, ‘fear’ and ‘anxiety’ (Serowaniec et. al, 2016, p.15). The traditional notion of security was more state centric and only associated security to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Security brings forth three major paradigms with it, first is the national security while the other two paradigms are

international and human security (Preece, p.19). This paper primarily deals with national security with an aim to highlight the national security challenge incumbent across South Asia and its impact on development prospect.

National security has always been viewed as a catchword (Babu, 2016, p.1). Walter Lipmann notes, "*nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice its core values or if it wishes to avoid war and if challenged with war, to be able to maintain it with victory*" (as cited in Wolfers, 1952, p.484). The concept of power, military strength and national defense comes concomitantly with the idea of national security.

National security includes intricate interaction between political, economic, ideological, legal, social including military factors through which individual states attempt to maintain sovereignty, territorial integrity, physical survival of population, political independence, and possibilities for balanced and rapid social development on an equal footing (Grizold, 1994, p.40). Additionally, national security is also referred as an activity of nation states with which states protect their identity, existence and interest within the range of their social capacities in present and in future (Grizold, p.40).

In the similar fashion, development has often been attached with multitude of meanings. Any kind of progressive change is regarded as development. General Assembly resolution on the Agenda for Development, 1997 defines development as a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Development is misread to include economic growth and economic progress only. Economic growth is initially

thought of when it comes to development but the modernization theory on development succeeds at eradicating this anomaly. According to this theory, development is to be viewed as a progress towards complex goals such as elimination of poverty, provision of employment, reduction of inequality and guarantee of human rights (Abuiyada, 2018, p.116). These important determinants of development are directly affected in presence of security threats. United Nations Millennium Declaration emphasized that poverty elimination, and eradication of inequalities can only be achieved in simultaneous presence of security and development. The destructive effects upon development due to security crisis marks the inextricable link between development and security. Security has always been a significant pre-condition of development (Zingel, 2020, p.1).

Thereto, this article aims to explore the national security challenge in South Asia and its impact upon development. More precisely this paper seeks the answer to three major research questions: What are the national security threats and challenges in South Asia? What measures are being taken to combat these challenges? How the measures taken are making an impact upon development prospects? Each of these questions are dealt in sequence below.

This paper is based on secondary source of information. Therefore it relies on; books, journal articles, newspaper articles, organizational reports, opinion of think tanks amongst others. The Annual Budget report of Ministry of Finance, press releases, reports of organization specializing in national security area was studied and analyzed. It is a qualitative research which makes a content analysis to derive conclusion.

Major National Security Challenges in South Asia

South Asia is home to 8 different countries-Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri-Lanka, Nepal, and India. It is home to more than one-fifth of the world population (Pandey, 2016, p.21). South Asia is characterized by security issues and least integration within the region. South Asia faces internal issues related to displace populations, grievances by ethnic minorities, unresolved territorial disputes, nuclear proliferation, and left-wing rebellion, link with regional and global terrorist group (Wagner, 2014, p.5). The national security position in South Asia is feeble.

The paragraphs below explores distinct national security related challenges faced by respective country in the region.

India

The *Economist* notes that, “Outside the cossetted places where rich Indians and foreigners gather, Indians have long been used to conflict and terror” (Kugelman, 2011, p.15). The extended economic and military profile up to the Indo-Pacific exposes India to intrastate and interstate security challenge (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019, p.835). The external threat India faces stems from its strained relationship with its arch neighbor Pakistan and China. The Line of Control (LoC) is a de facto boundary with Pakistan and Line of Actual Control (LAC) is an unmarked boundary with China (Pant & Bommakanti, p.837). Both these boundaries have remained contentious for decades and has led to four major wars and various bilateral crises between India and Pakistan (Wagner, p.9). The other downside to the security is the attacks by militant Islamic groups operating from Pakistan (Wagner,

p.10). V. K. Ahluwalia notes that the continued proxy war-cum-cross-border terrorism from Pakistan alongside irregular information and asymmetric threats poses potentially higher form of risk (Ahluwalia, 2019, p.14). The Jammu and Kashmir conflict has exacerbated the security risks.

China’s naval plans also possess potential threat since China has been marching towards disputed territory with its nuclear armed navy in surrounding waters and Chinese bases in Indian Ocean (Kugelman, p.15). China’s expansion of its nuclear capabilities also makes India susceptible to conflict and peril.

Secessionism is yet another serious national security concern for India. Secessionist movement uses terrorism as an instrument to achieve its end goals (Singh, 2004, p.352).

Nepal

Nepal is geo-strategically located in a very sensitive position. The emerging economic giants India and China are competing against one another for global order in terms of economy, maritime security regimes, global structures, cyber-security, and nuclear weapons (Upreti, 2012, p.10). They are also competing for influence in South Asia (Thapa, 2020, para.2). The balanced tie of Nepal with both the nations could be shaken with attempts from India and China to get support of Nepal in global issues (Upreti, p.12).

Nepal’s open border with India has afforded risk of cross-border crime and cross-border terrorism. The hijacking of Indian Airline Flight in Kathmandu during December 1999 highlights the open border as a potential entry-point for militant Islamic fighters (Wagner, p.12).

Bhutan

Bhutan's geo-political position poses serious threat upon their territorial integrity and sovereignty due to increasing influence of India upon foreign policy, energy, national defense and economy (Global Times, 2021). The Indian military presence in Bhutanese soil begun after the armed presence of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Bodo Tribal insurgents (Mathou, 2001, p.133). The continued presence of Indian army personnel to train Bhutanese Army officials and tackle the rebel groups has often been quoted a threat upon Bhutanese sovereignty (Mathou, p.134). Bhutan's proximity to the northeastern region of India makes it susceptible to ethnic tensions and insurgent movements (Penjore, 2017, p.123).

On regard to its relation with China, the un-demarcated border across Bhutan-Tibet region sows seed of problem. Since, Chinese intend to initiate diplomatic relation or keep the dispute unresolved (Penjore, p.116). This poses a security risk since, diplomatic relation with China can form bitterness in Indian relationship. Meanwhile, unresolved border dispute is a serious concern for Bhutanese national security and territorial sovereignty (Penjore, p.118).

Sri-Lanka

Ethno-centric conflict is the primary security challenge in Sri-Lanka. Even after the end of civil war and defeat of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE); the human rights, equality and linguistic rights of Tamil people is repressed and ignored by successive Sri-Lankan government (Kumara, 2013, p.45). This ignorance have eluded and driven the rebel group to take up arms for separation and stemmed risk of emergence of terrorist link-up and increment in ethnic and communal violence (Rajapaksa, 2020, p.148).

Additionally, the military support and arms procurement from China and Pakistan to Sri-Lanka has been perceived as distasteful by India and USA making it susceptible to power-rivalry (Gupta, 2010, p.8).

Maldives

Maldives, a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) (ADB, 2015, p.82) is an archipelagic state comprised of numerous tiny islands dispersed across Indian Ocean. The porous geography of the country opens door to national security challenge as terrorism, extremism and drug use (Mohamed, 2017). Maldivian youth being affiliated to regional terrorist group and terrorist financing, and radicalization of local population are high security concern in the country (National Security Policy 2012, p.29). LTTE used Maldivian territory to smuggle weapons and narcotics (National Security Policy 2012, p.25). The potential use of the territory for criminal acts by local criminal groups and rebels is a major security threat.

International interest and long-term power projection plan of global powers in Indian Ocean has remained a national security challenge in Maldives (National Security Policy 2012, p.25). The 1200 island claims and exclusive economic zone of 859,000 square kilometer is of huge significance to Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (Chaudhury, 2019, para.4). This increasing Chinese influence in the island has been viewed as a security concern by India which again meddles Maldives in the clash of two emerging economies of South Asia.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh lies at the cross roads of South Asia, South-East Asia and Central Asia and the passage along the Indian Ocean (Saber, 2008, p.8). Bangladesh is 'India Locked' and

shares a common boundary with Myanmar. Bangladesh has many unresolved bilateral issues with its neighboring nations. Modest militarization in Myanmar and nuclear proliferation in India, China and Pakistan are regarded as national security concern by Bangladesh authorities (Saber, p.8).

Large number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh often cross into the border of India (Gupta, p.8). Exodus to India can aid to conflict between the two nations. Further, Bangladesh has shown intent to side with China by capturing the Siliguri corridor (Saber, p.8). Such alliance with China threatens Indian dominance within Bangladesh which is likely to draw stern repercussion.

The Rohingya Muslim issue is the root of differences and potential threat between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Over quarter million Muslim minorities from Myanmar fled to Bangladesh (Saber, p.10). This created a mistrust between the two countries and almost led towards the brink of war.

Ever since early 20th century Islamist Militant Group and smuggling of illegal arms and weapons have mushroomed in Bangladesh posing additional threat (BIPSS, 2010, p.2).

Afghanistan

Afghanistan lies at 163rd position in the list of peaceful countries across the world (Ventura, 2021). The current Taliban takeover additionally imposes stringent national security concerns for Afghanistan. Terrorist group like: Tajik-Taliban, (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021) Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) dwells in Afghanistan (Schmitt, 2021). Such assemblage of terrorism is not only threat to the sustenance of the nation but to entire world community as a whole.

President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani had to exile from the country. Such political turmoil within the nation poses larger security concern within the country.

Differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the disputed international border of Durand Line has taken a setback after Taliban takeover (Wagner, p.10). Taliban is viewed as a proxy of Pakistan by India (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021). Meanwhile, Taliban is definitely not the 'apple of the eye' to America. This stringent relationship with strong and emerging economies of the world is a national security concern for Afghanistan.

China beholds economic interest to justify its Belt and Road Initiative narrative and combat terrorism threats in the Xinjiang border which is in close proximity with Afghanistan (Stanzel, 2018, p.2). On the other hand, Russian support to Taliban aids Russia to extend its influence in Central Asian region (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021). Afghanistan thereby beholds a risk of being a tool of influence for arch rivals of United States.

Pakistan

Larger national security challenges in Pakistan is rooted in border disputes with its immediate neighbors. Growing conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan on regard to Jammu and Kashmir is a major security concern for Pakistan (Khan, 2014, p.10). India and Pakistan has faced three major wars, two major border clashes, crises along Brasstack and Kashmir, and innumerable fire exchange along LoC stems antagonism between the two countries, imposing major national security challenge (Cheema, p.128). Terrorist group Tehreek-e-Taliban in Afghanistan marching its footsteps towards Pakistan to engage in terrorist activities is a security threat (Masood, 2021).



Sporadic separatist movement in Balochi, Sindhi and Mohajir also poses serious threat to national security (Safdar, 2004, p.12). Rampant insurgent movements in places like; Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa, FATA, Swat and Buner has led Pakistani military to constantly tackle with insurgency and counter-insurgency movements which has withered internal cohesion and national security within Pakistan (Kanwal, 2013, p.2).

Budgetary response to national security challenges:

Military budget is the major tool to address the security challenge a nation is undergoing. This section of the paper looks at the expense made in the defense sector by each South Asian nation respectively.

Name of Country	Defense Budget in FY 2019-20 (in US\$)	Defense Budget in FY 2020-21 (in US\$)	% covered in total budget in 2020-21
India	\$61.96 billion	\$65.86 billion	15.5%
Nepal	\$0.501 billion	\$0.424 billion	3.34%
Sri-Lanka	\$1.5 billion	\$1.7 billion	1.574%
Bangladesh	\$3.87 billion	\$4.06 billion	6.1%
Pakistan	\$10388 million	\$10097 million	17.4%
Afghanistan	\$226 million	\$262 million	-
Maldives	\$72.08 billion	\$70.64 billion	3.4%
Bhutan	-	-	-

Figure 1

The fiscal year 2020-21 saw a significant rise in the budget allocated in defense sector for India. The Ministry of defense of India has seen an annual growth of 9% on the defense budget. Thereto, \$65.86 billion was issued in defense sector of the country which amounts to be 15.5% of the total budget of the country (Vaishnav, 2020). This amount is equivalent to 2.1% of India’s estimated GDP (Union of India Budget). In a span of a decade the expenditure made on defense has plummeted from 16.3% of the total budget to 15.5% of the total budget in the year 2020-21. (Vaishnav, 2020). Indian army alone holds 56% of the budget allocated for defense purpose (Bhatnagar, 2021). Meanwhile, air force holds 23% of the defense budget, Navy is granted 15% of the defense budget and remaining 6% is utilized for miscellaneous

purposes (Bhatnagar, 2021). Air force alone made a capital expenditure of 59% from its total budget to accumulate new weapons and ammunitions. On the other hand, army spent only 18% of its budget on capital expenditure. Larger sum of budget allocated for defense purpose is spent for salaries and pension bills (Bhatnagar, 2021).

India stood to be the third largest military spender in the year 2020 despite the pandemic (Kaushik, 2021). As per SIPRI, India’s expense accounted for 3.7% of the money spent on military purpose globally after US and China. The larger sum of budget allocated in defense sector is a response to security threat from China and Pakistan.

In context of Nepal, in the fiscal year 2020-21, 3.34% of the total budget was allocated

in defense sector (Budget Speech 2020/21). The military expenditure solely amounted for 0.424 billion US dollar (Budget Speech 2020/21). Fiscal year 2020 saw a significant decrement in the military expenditure.

In the year 2020/21, Sri-Lanka saw a significant swerve in its defense policy. There is an increment of 8% in defense budget of the country in 2021. Sri-Lanka has issued US \$1.7 billion for defense. The rapid increment in the budget intends to strengthen maritime security and bring force modernization in military (M. Singh, 2021). Navy sector alone is allocated US \$104 million for force enhancement.

On regard to Bhutan, little to no expense is made distinctly under the heading of either military or defense. Indian military is large contributor to Bhutanese security sector. The budget for fiscal year 2020-21 has no distinct mention on military or other security related expenses. Defense or military is omitted under the flagship program of Bhutan. An army welfare project is run under the industrial heading in Bhutan.

In the fiscal year 2020, Maldives made an expenditure of MVR 1091.1 (US\$70.64 million) for military defense. This accounts for 3.4% of the total budget (Budget in Statistics 2019, p.134).

The budget for the fiscal year 2020-21 of Bangladesh, saw a slight decrement. Only, 6.1% of the budget was separated for defense purpose. Although the percentage off the total budget plummeted in this fiscal year. US\$4.06 billion was the amount allocated for defense sector. The military expenditure also dropped down to 1.30% of GDP from 1.34 % in the fiscal year 2020-21 (The World Bank, 2020).

The Afghan trend on the military expenditure has a distinct trajectory when compared to other South Asian nations. Afghanistan largely depended upon US military aid to strengthen its military sector. Even during withdrawal of US military in 2020, Afghanistan had utilized 18% of the US military aid (Tian, 2021). In the year 2020, Afghanistan made a military expense of US \$262 million. This military expense accounted for 1.4% of the GDP (The World Bank, 2020).

Pakistan stands to be one of the largest spender in the defense sector across South Asia. The budget for fiscal year 2020-21 in the defense sector saw a minor decrement. A total sum of US\$10097 million was issued for the military sector of the country (Trading Economics, 2020). Although on paper the budget saw a decrement, experts claim that the budget did not include allocations on arms acquisition, military pensions, nuclear proliferation, para-military forces and other major expenses (Chaubey, 2021).

The military expenditure of fiscal year 2020-21 amounts to be 4.0% of GDP (Silva et al., 2021, p.2). As per SIPRI, in the year 2020, Pakistan stood in 23rd position in the list of highest military spender across the world. The amount allocated for defense purpose covers 17.4% of the total government expenditure (The World Bank, 1993-2020). It is evident that a bulk of Pakistan's budget is spent on defense sector.

Impact of soaring defense budget upon development in South Asia:

United Nations Millennium Declaration notes that the poverty alleviation, employment generation and human rights can prevail only in simultaneous presence of security and development. According to Poverty and

Shared Prosperity Report 2018, South Asia accounted for 29% of the people living in extreme poverty line worldwide (The World Bank 2018). South Asia has second highest proportion of extreme poverty (Tonmoy et.al, 2021, p.2). Similarly, the average annual growth of South Asia is forecasted to be 3.4% in the span of 2020-23. This span of growth is 3% less than it was in the four years preceding pandemic (*South Asia Economic Focus, 2021*, p.71). Despite the disdainful development scenario, South Asian nations like India, still make it to the list of 3rd largest spender in military across the world. Whilst, economically challenged country like Pakistan, stands to be the 23rd largest military spender and the country with poverty of 78.4% in the year 2020-21 (*Business Standard, 2021*) at the same time.

Thenceforth, the major security challenges faced by South Asian nations has also been a hurdle to achieve poverty alleviation, employment generation and human rights. Since, the attention of South Asian nations shifted to alleviation of security challenges over prioritizing the development prospects like; elimination of poverty and unemployment.

Speculating figure 1 mentioned above, it can be analyzed that a country like Pakistan which is 4.1 times smaller in geography when compared to India spends 17.4% of its budget in defense sector, which is 1.9% more than the country 4 times its size. The economy of Pakistan largely runs from loan provided by IMF, in such light disproportionate sum of money spent on a single sector is putting development of the country at stake. Since, larger sum of the limited resources is being spent on defense sector which has no direct contribution in revenue generation. Additionally, scholars even note

that, Pakistan military budget is a response to higher expenditure of India on defense. Pakistan cannot afford to allocate such huge sum of money solely for defense purpose. Therefore, it tends to incline towards nuclear measures as a form of retaliation, which unfortunately raises additional security challenges (Cheema, p.135).

Investing large chunk of budget for defense is not going to resolve border issue and reinstate peace within the country. For a debt laden country like Pakistan, gorging budget for defense impinges the development of other important sectors like; education and health. In the year, 2019, US \$10388 million was issued for defense whilst only US \$ 151 million and US\$545 million was allocated for health and education sector (Chaubey, 2021).

Similar, response can be seen in case of Sri-Lanka and Bangladesh. It can be assessed that the increment in budget is a response to ongoing tension in border and other security challenges. Sri-Lanka amped up its defense budget as a response to maritime security, and external threat from LTTE associated insurgents. Similarly, Bangladesh's budget saw a significant rise in defense sector as a response to underlying tension with India across border regions. Such increment of budget reflects an acknowledgement of the security challenges in their nation. But in the same vein, it also reflects that South Asian nations undermine other development prospects amid security constraints.

Although bilateral talks and diplomatic measure appear futile for India- Pakistan border issue. Other South Asian nations must embark upon comprehensive bilateral political dialogue as a means to resolve border issue. Especially country like; Nepal and Bhutan, who hold a strong tie between both

China and India and are longing to maintain the balance can largely be benefitted from bilateral talks over military strengthening any given day.

Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman notes that huge allocation of resources to defense industry will result in collapse or decline of economies in long run even before they reach their full potential (Sajid, 2021, p.2). For emerging economies of South Asia like; India and Bangladesh it is a worrisome factor. Meanwhile, other nations like; Sri-Lanka, Pakistan and Maldives need to take this fact into consideration to avoid economic turmoil in near future. Scholars note that military spending and economic development has an inverse relationship. Most of the country in South Asia fall into the category of Least-developed and developing countries. Therein, South Asian nations are struggling economies with scarce resources, such nations cannot afford excessive military spending since any positive impacts it would have on the economic growth through augmented demand, modernization, and resource outset, would be overwhelmed by the damaging effects on economic growth through reduced investment (Azam, 2020, p.9).

All of the south Asian nations are recognized by their dismal performance in reducing poverty, reducing unemployment and achieving minimum level of per capita income (Smith et al, 1983, p.3). In such light, the negative impact caused by excessive military expenditure outweighs the intent of combating national security challenges. In fact, nations have increased their defense budget to address the security threats but the impact on threats reduction has been abysmal. Therefore, South Asian nations should indulge in diplomatic measures, regional collaboration and bilateral talks to reduce

their national security threats rather than just inclining to increased defense budget and military expenditure. Until nations across South Asia realize the embedded relation and impact national security threats and military expenditure has upon development; development across South Asia will continue to experience setback.

Conclusion

This study uncovered that development and national security anchor upon each other. South Asian nations suffer from large and explicit national security challenges which include continuous threat of terrorism, Indo-China power rivalry, border disputes, maritime piracy and security concerns amongst others. Alongside security threats, South Asian nations face issue of poverty, unemployment, human right violation and climate crisis which have been impeding their development. Let alone, South Asian nations have been increasing their defense budget and military expenditure. Nations have only responded to the national security threats by resorting to massive defense budget and militarization actions. South Asian nations have turned a blind eye on the stifling impact upon economy and development due to such expenditure. Nations must resort to other measures to address their national security threats or it will cost their development in long run. Shrinkage in military expenditure alongside equal emphasis on non-traditional security challenges can improve the development prospect in South Asia.

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