



## Geopolitics and Terrorism in South Asia Vis A Vis India

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In today's political landscape, the issue of geopolitics and terrorism rank among some of the major emerging issues. Geopolitics can be defined as the applied study of the relationship between geographical space and politics. Geopolitics is in itself a science which studies how political events depend upon the physical setting in which a country exists. In the world over, geographical factors such as space, climate, resources, climate and terrain are some of the factors which play a key role in the issue of

geopolitics in that it can either favor or obstruct maneuvers of a political or military nature. When a country is endowed with strategic advantages over their neighbors it is able to enjoy all the perks that come with such a significant advantage in terms of political mileage. The issue of geopolitics is one that has been in existence since time immemorial. It is reflected in the writings of Aristotle, Strabo as well as Plato and later in the works of Bodin as well as Montesquieu who referred to geopolitics in their respective works while discussing environmental determinism (Weatherbee, 2014). However, there



have been numerous scholars who have all had a different view about geopolitics. There is no one way of explaining geopolitics and there have been numerous ways of interpreting this term.

To better understand what geopolitics is, it is important to first understand what foreign policy is. Foreign policy can be described as the declared programs of action which have been enacted by an international actor in a bid to deal with the external environment so as to attain the set goals as well as objectives which a government sets (Acharya, 2013). Foreign policy mainly lays emphasis on the attainment of the set objectives while neglecting the probable reaction. Foreign policy comes as a result of the inner and outer interactions. The policies which are made are enacted

with an aim of reacting to external aspect in this case a country's relationship with the international community while the inner aspect refers to the domestic aspect.

Looking at the geopolitics of the western and southern regions of Asia, what one notes is that the geopolitics in this region is typically a case of geography being undermined by politics. The major countries in this region include India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It is interesting to note that these three countries have a massive potential for trade as well as economic linkages seen in the large number of people in the three countries totaling to around half a billion people (Rabasa, 2014). However, the potential inherent in these three countries has been stunted by the inability of the security as well as the political elite

and establishments in the three countries to liaise with each other to come with strategies and solutions which are mutually beneficial to the three countries. Leaders in some of the three countries have been either unwilling or unable to create a concrete foundation on which they can use to strengthen ties between the three states. For example, there have been cases whereby the leaders have shown no desire to improve relations between the countries. The contradictions and complications have always been evident and apparent anytime a certain party tried to come up with initiatives to improve the relationship between the countries. For example, the relationship between India and Pakistan has always been a rocky one and this was evident when the Afghan president while on a three day visit to India offered the

bleakest of assessments of the relationship between India and Pakistan.

While giving an interview for the Saudi Gazette, the Prime Minister offered did not only criticize India and their supposed unwillingness to make efforts to improve the efforts between them and Pakistan but he also pointed out to their unwillingness to reciprocate his unrelenting desire to improve relations and also their desire to resume any kind of dialogue with Pakistan. The Pakistani's Prime Minister's assessment on this case was correct because it has already been documented that the Indian government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had drawn back on each and every opportunity they have had to engage the Pakistanis. Instead, the government



has opted to give in to domestic politics be it in India-held Jammu as well as Kashmir or pointing to legitimate concerns pertaining to terrorism as cover to give the impression they are tough on the Pakistanis (Urbain, 2015). In any case, the only lesson that has been more than apparent in the relationship between the off-on and off again relationship between the two countries has always been that the only solution to the fractious relationship is dialogue.

Granted, both sides of the divide have legitimate concerns when it comes to the demands of the other party and it is unlikely that engaging in dialogue will alleviate a majority of these issues. However, not engaging in meaningful dialogue between the two parties has the effect of increasing the likelihood of conflict arising. Both India and

Pakistan have been actively scrambling to exert some form of influence in the neighboring Afghanistan and the key to preventing conflict is to avert a fresh scramble for influence from taking place (Urbain, 2015). Instead of scrambling for influence in Afghanistan, the two countries ought to be concerned with assisting the country economically, in trade and investment while anything that has the potential to strengthen Afghanistan ought to be welcomed wholeheartedly by Pakistan instead of rekindling old fears about the encirclement of the nexus of the three countries.

Another issue that is central to the relationship between the three South Asian countries is the issue of security. The economy and security are not only interlinked in Afghanistan alone, but are also interlinked in the relationship

between India and Pakistan. On the security front, Pakistan can help out in return for its own security interests and not compromising India's security as well. On the other hand, India can invest in Afghanistan to foster economic stability which could in turn help to improve and enhance internal security. In such a case, the three countries can coexist and benefit mutually in a win-win situation for the three countries.

In a bid to expand its geopolitical reach, the government of India has formulated a three-pronged strategy which is aimed at securing its flank in the east to be able to compete and cooperate effectively with China (Black et al. 2015). However, this endeavor faces a serious challenge in that it faces significant economic as well as political obstacles which

threaten to derail the realization of this goal. To compete on an equal footing with a rising China, India has identified the expansion of its geopolitical reach as a key area of focus. Geopolitically, the rise to prominence of China and its influence in the areas around New Delhi has led to India choosing to adopt the three-pronged strategy in a bid to re-assert itself in the area. For example, China's support of activities like cultural, economic & sports in India's neighboring countries has raised eyebrows within the country that China seeks to encircle India in a geopolitical sense. The three-pronged attack entails securing the flank to the east of the country by resolving border conflicts, cooperating with China in areas where the underlying interest is mutual, and competing with China in regions to the west of Asia.

During the battle against terrorism, South Asia remained in the front line in the battle against terrorism. Although the influence of the terror group known as Al Qaeda has been significantly cut down, more terror groups have risen in its place. Afghanistan has for a long time been a target of choice for terror groups who have over time been carrying out aggressive and coordinated attacks (Sneddon, 2012). During the period of transition to full Afghan leadership, security forces had to be deployed with the Afghan National Security Forces and the US coalition forces providing security.

The issue of terrorism remains a major cause for concern South Asia because of the presence of international terror groups as well as their supporters in some parts of the southern region of Asia (Sardesai, 2012). These terror

groups along with their supporters have been identified as threats to the stability of the southern region as well as the achievement of major policy goals in the afflicted countries. A large number of Taliban supporters and Al Qaeda forces who fled from Afghanistan remain active in the area to this day mostly in Pakistani territory. On top of that, numerous Pakistani terrorist groups who have carried out various anti-western attacks are believed to have significant ties to the Al Qaeda (Acharya, 2014). In addition to Pakistan, other countries in this region which are considered to be hot beds of terrorism include India, Maldives, and Bangladesh the boon of these terror groups is their insistence on establishing Islamic states which are run on Islamic laws. The South Asian region has the world's highest

concentration of terror groups and Islamic jihadists. The diverse and dynamic nature of the Jihadists also makes them a hard prospect to deal with effectively.

There is no other region in the world where the connection between geopolitics and terrorism is more evident as it is in the regions to the countries to the south of Asia. The country that is most affected among all these countries is Afghanistan which has been heavily affected by the Taliban scourge. The only way of overcoming the challenges brought about by terrorism is for the affected countries to come together and put aside their political differences and forge a united front. Issues arising from political differences between the countries ought to be ironed out in order to strengthen the collaboration

initiatives. It is an undisputable fact that the only way to defeat terrorism is through collaboration and as such, regional politics should not be given a chance.

Conclusion: India has also been wary of China's 'strategic partnerships' with its neighbours especially Pakistan and Bangladesh. Perhaps a strong tie-up with the US and Japan enables India to play China's own game in its backyard. Both Japan and the US too share India's concern of China being a 'regional hegemon'. United States and India seek peaceful engagement with China, fully conscious of the fact that China could be a potential long-term security concern and neither wants to see Asia dominated by a single country.

Perhaps the biggest contrast between U.S. and Indian security goals has to do with India-Pakistan relations. India sees Pakistan as the principal source of terrorism, and one that directly affects

India, including Kashmir. Washington sees Pakistan primarily as an ally in the war on terror. India and the US face mutual challenges as well as opportunities to cooperate and coordinate in the ongoing war on terror. Areas of cooperation include intelligence gathering, law enforcement, concerns about technology transfers etc. The scenario gets complicated by the fact that New Delhi and Washington have differing perceptions of what inherently constitutes the war on terror. India does not identify terrorism with any religion, though it is fully committed to combating terrorism.

India can be a geographic obstruction to an Islamic arc stretching from Morocco across Africa and the Middle East all the way to Malaysia, Indonesia, Phillipines, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In this context India can be a decisive factor in its strategic and cultural campaign being waged against Islamic terrorism. The study shows that the war on terror could accelerate the process of building a US-Indian strategic partnership, resulting in

what is likely to be a long-term mutually beneficial military relationship. The protracted war on terror could trigger profound changes in the regional strategic landscape. India has little choice but to stand in the front line against Islamic extremism. In fact India recognised the dangers of Islamic terrorism long before the US.

Two factors contributed to Pakistan's importance to the US in the war on terror. Firstly, that Pakistan shares a common border with Afghanistan; and secondly Pakistan itself combined the two major security threats to the US viz., weapons of mass destruction and the perceived links with terrorism. Hence from the Indian perspective, Pakistan is a central part of the problem, rather than being part of the solution. Washington's decision to name Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) as Foreign Terrorist Organisations for example is a vindication of the Indian stand. Needless to say a lot remains to be done.



One Western press report called Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) "the most ungoverned, combustible region in the world." The Mumbai attack has been perceived as presenting a "moment of truth" for the civilian government in Islamabad, one in which both their mettle and sincerity would be tested. Islamabad has so far faltered on both. Pakistan is known to be a base for numerous indigenous terrorist organisations, and the country continues to suffer from terrorism at home. Radicalised Islam is perceived as a threat to both India and the US. India perceives the strategic environment largely through the prism of India-Pakistan relations. The perception of an India-US strategic partnership cannot be totally dehyphenated from US-Pakistan relations. Hence New Delhi was aware of the fact that though the Bush administration tried to dehyphenate India and Pakistan, yet it tended to treat the Afghan and Kashmir insurgencies as two different boxes. The radicalised state-

sponsored jihadi culture in Pakistan has implications for both India and the US. This is because Pakistan has been a breeding ground for terrorism and at the same time possesses nuclear weapons, which together makes a heady cocktail. The links between the drug czars in Pakistan and Islamic terrorists has also been a major concern.

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