

Geopolitics of south asia essay



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The Geopolitics of South Asia From Early Empires to the Nuclear Age Graham P. Chapman Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo, Norway Professor Emeritus of Geography, Lancaster University, UK From Chapter 14 The Greater Game The New Security Agenda The United Nations Development Programme in 1997 outlined the seven areas of new security; economic, nutritional, health, environmental, personal, community and political. Since then the more crystallised term ' New Security Agenda' has been pushing its way into debates in international relations.

It challenges the comprehensiveness and utility of the ' Old security Agenda. ' Whether there ever was quite such a simple animal as ' old security' is uncertain; but for the purposes of this chapter we can agree that the theorists of the New Security see the Old Security as essentially the preservation of any given Westphalian State by conventional military and diplomatic means. India and Pakistan and the other states have defined territories to defend, by the providing and equipping adequate military forces to deter or defeat perceived military threats.

Their governments are the dominant actors in forging supporting alliances. By contrast, in the post-Cold War world, the new agenda is growing in prominence because international relations theorists, diplomats, many governments, and agencies of the United nations are increasingly aware of the extent to which the internationalisation of crime, terrorism, the trade in narcotics, and environmental issues, all impinge, sometimes collectively, on the security of both states and their constituent publics.

More recently the most basic of all securities - access to food - has again become an international security issue. The issues, then, may involve linkages which cut across states or which crystallise below the level of states. Essentially, New Security relates to people rather than to nations. Duffield (2005) proposes the idea of biopolitical security, in which the principal concern is not securing states but lives. ' Geopolitics, the security of states, and biopolitics, the security of population, are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary, interdependent and work together to a lesser or greater degree. ' In July 2004 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK sponsored a conference to discuss the new security agenda in South Asia (Jacques, 2004). Delegates were initially presented with the following questions as jumping off points: • Is competition over water a potential source for conflict? • Can environmental cooperation reduce tensions? • What role is there for regional cooperation in the management of natural or man-made disasters? • How can South Asia's energy demands be met? The regulation of South Asian trans-border migration • Can trans-border drug trafficking and crime be tackled through a regional response? • The challenges of HIV/AIDS to security. Terrorism was not included because within seconds of opening such a debate there was a danger that the dispute over Kashmir and ' freedom fighters' (aka ' terrorists') and ' occupying forces' (aka ' liberators') would stymie any discussion on any other issues. In the best traditions of peace negotiation, confidence has to be built by dealing first with tractable rather than intractable issues.

Many of these issues have cropped up in the preceding chapters. The partition of Punjab and its impact on water management was dealt with in

Chapter 13, in which we also discussed the issue of the Farakka barrage, on the Ganges just upstream of Bangladesh, and the embryonic plans for the massive River Linkage Programme of India - which would redefine sub-continental hydrology to fit an arbitrary Westphalian sovereignty. In Chapter 12, on India's Northeast, I commented on the level of illegal migration continuing from Bangladesh to India, and its destabilising effects (see Hazarika, 2000, for extensive field-research on this topic).

Sometimes these issues are linked: the raising of the Ganges by seven metres at Farakka has destabilised it both upstream (and downstream) of Farakka. Upstream in Maldah district of West Bengal the river has shifted 10 kms east in 30 years. (It may soon outflank Farakka barrage.) It has eroded villages, schools, roads, houses, post-offices - the whole investment of modern life - and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, while throwing up new char then diaria lands in its wake, the size of a small English county (Rudra 2003). It has become a driver for some of the cross-border migration.

Neither the state of West Bengal nor Jharkhand will accept the responsibility to administer resettlement on the char - which therefore operates under goonda control, and no public services are established. The Farakka scheme is also implicated in the millennium flood of 2000 that destroyed the houses of 20 million people in West Bengal and 3 million in Bangladesh, with attendant huge losses in agricultural equipment and in life stock (Chapman and Rudra, 2007). This is insecurity which repeatedly wipes out any small accumulations of capital which poor people may have contrived.

Among the major states of India, Bihar has the lowest per capita income, the highest levels of corruption, the highest levels of violence, and the least development of infrastructure, the districts north of the Ganges being even more backward than the southern part of the state. Some of its poverty has been ascribed to the capricious behaviour of the River Kosi, which, in debouching from Nepal onto the plains, has built a massive inland deltaic fan, across which it wanders in destructive floods. Attempts within India to control it by embankments have failed.

Whether the super dams in Nepal discussed in Chapter 13 would, if built, reduce flood damage, is a matter of speculation. However, what is not speculative is that the border between Nepal and Bihar is highly porous, and that the Maoists of Nepal cross it relatively freely. They have contacts with nearly all other insurgency groups in India such as the People's War Group and the Naxalites (HutT2004). Cairn Energy, a UK company which is investing in India's energy sector since liberalisation and which has found oil in Rajasthan, has the concessions to drill in north Bihar. But presently it cannot do so, because of the security situation.

Development in this troubled part of the northeast demands security: security demands development. So, whereas the previous section stressed the low-levels of economic interaction between the states of South Asia, this section has found other ways in which their destiny is still regional.

Unfortunately, the Mumbai massacres of 2008 underline this simple fact, and the frequent impotence of Old Security. The Politics of Triangles Although in the foregoing each country has had its relationships looked at somewhat

independently of each other, it is clear that these relationships form an interconnected web.

Within that web some relationships emerge that some protagonists do not really want, and some persist that one or other party would like to change but cannot. For example, during the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto years, Pakistan would have liked a more anti-US policy but did not manage to get very far with it. Both the US and India would often have liked a closer relationship with each other. Russia at times would have liked a closer relationship with Pakistan. In this section I look at a way of conceptualising the web of relationships that offers some insight into how they are formed and why they persist.

I do not claim that this analysis, which is simplistic in some senses, explains everything, nor that it can predict everything. The inspiration for this analysis derives from Bhaneja (1973) *The Politics of Triangles*. We start with the simplest case of one triangle. Suppose Pakistan, the USA and India form a triangle, and that each of the edges is either positive or negative. If they are positive it means the two countries basically have a common point of view and co-operate. If negative, it means they have different interests, do not co-operate, and in some sense compete.

There are four basic arrangements of negative and positive values on three sides. These are + + +, + + -, + - -, and - - -. If these plusses and minuses are added up, then overall the value of these four possible sets of values becomes +, -, +, -. The two which come out positive are called stable patterns, and the two which come out negative are called unstable. To see why, we can plot them and look at the implications (Figure 14. 5). In the first

case, Pakistan, India and the USA all like each other, all co-operate, so the pattern is stable.

Counting the number of positive sides gives an index of Harmony, in this case $H=3$. In the second case Pakistan and India dislike each other intensely. The USA tries to like both, but at some stage India may turn to the USA and say ' You are helping my enemy, you are either against my enemy, or I will reject your friendship. ' Pakistan will do the same. In essence, the Americans are forced to choose. A likely outcome is therefore for the USA and India to fall out. Thus a triangle of Harmony 2 which is unstable becomes a triangle of Harmony 1 which is stable. This is also of course the third state.

It is also possible for the unstable triangle of Harmony 2 to reach the stable form of Harmony 3, if the two warring factions can be persuaded to bury the hatchet. The last state is the unstable state of three negatives. History is riddled with examples of this, and the outcome: Churchill forming a pact with the ' Devil himself' - Stalin - to defeat Hitler, and more recently the Croats and the Bosnians who had fought each other nevertheless formed an alliance against the greater common enemy, the Serbs, in former Yugoslavia. This behaviour is predicted in the Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft written in India about c. 50 BCE for Kautilya, the Mauryan Emperor. In it is to be found the dictum ' My enemy's enemy is my friend'. Figure 14. 5 suggests further implications. The arrows show possible shifts from unstable to stable states, hence there is no arrow from 14. 5b to a more harmonious state - either 14. 5c or 14. 5a. To get from 14. 5b to 14. 5a requires that the first shift is to the unstable state 14. 5c. This will require an act of will, ' making friends with my

friend's enemy'. Clearly it is a risk-bearing strategy. Although for much of the time international relations are ambivalent, crisis tends to clarify them.

In the triangle USA, Argentina, UK during the Falklands crisis, in the end the USA decided to supply advanced sidewinder missiles to the UK, not Argentina. In his reaction to the attacks of al-Qaida in 2001, President Bush of the USA declaimed, ' you are either with us or against us'. It is, however, conceptually easy to develop more sophisticated and realistic models with both positive and negative values on multiples of the same links.

Forexample, we could draw a positive link between Pakistan and India at the level of common cultures, another at the level of cognate languages, while having a negative link for the governmental level.

Neither is there anything to stop one assigning different significance to different edges: the USA-Russia edge dominated all other edges in the thinking of the United States until very recently. This basic idea is first generalised to the case of six states which form a small network of relationships. The six states are Afghanistan, Russia (or, its former guise the Soviet Union), China, India, the USA, and Pakistan. These six states can be simply drawn as a hexagon, in which it is possible to draw a line between all pairs of countries. (Figure 14.) The countries are called nodes, and the relationships edges. There are then $6 \times 5 / 2 = 15$ possible such edges. Many subsets of three edges also make triangles - and in this six sided figure the 15 edges define $(6 \times 5 \times 4) / (3 \times 2 \times 1) = 20$ possible triangles. So instead of dealing with Stability and Harmony in one triangle, we now have to consider Stability and Harmony for 20 [pic] Figure 14. 5 Triangular Relationships [pic] Figure 14. 6 Triangular Relationships: South Asia and External Powers [pic]

Figure 14. 7 Triangular Relationships: South Asia and External Powers: New Alliances riangles and 15 edges. An interactive computer programme is used to explore the relationships in this network. I sketch the situation at the end of the 1960s in Figure 14. 6. Bigger actors and their relationships can form one key, but so also can particular local associations . In this case I have taken the USA-USSR hostility to be the key to the post-Second World War world, and I have taken Indian-Pakistani hostility to be a regional key. The USA would like to have friendly relations with both India and Pakistan, but that produces an unstable triangle.

The USA has to choose while local hostility between India and Pakistan remains. The USSR initially is not well disposed towards India, a bourgeois state, but certainly does not like the theocratic state of Pakistan. In the USA-USSR-Pakistan-India complex the warming of US Pakistani and USSR-India ties will be mutually reinforcing, and productive of a stable pattern of alliances. The USSR-India ties will reinforce China's rivalry with India, now seen from Beijing as a partially client state of the USSR(a fate China struggled to avoid). US and Chinese relations are hostile, partially over Vietnam.

The last line drawn is between Afghanistan, before the Russian invasion, and China, and is assumed to be positive, as part of Chinese containment of Russia. This pattern has low ranking Harmony (5 edges positive out of 15) and moderate Stability (12 triangles out of 20). There are therefore 8 triangles remaining which are unstable, which will have forces pushing them to find a more stable state. [pic] Table 14. 2a The Starting Relationships in South Asia [pic] Table 14. 2b NumbeRof U nstable Triangles on Each Edge

Table 14. 2a shows this pattern of 'starting relationships', and Table 14. b the number of unstable triangles associated with each edge. There is only one edge which is completely associated with stability - the Pakistan-Indian edge. This is an unpredicted but very deep structural property of the relationships shown in Figure 14. 6. In simulating dynamic change, I postulate the most unstable edge will change first. This is either the Afghan-Russia edge, or the Chinese-US edge. If the US-Chinese edge is changed positive first (Nixon goes to Beijing in 1972), then the pattern of instabilities change, and it is the -Afghan edge which has most instability.

This has to be turned from positive to negative - so Harmony is going down while Stability increases. The next change is the Russian-Afghan edge - which can be made positive by invading Afghanistan and sustaining a pro-Soviet government. The result of this is shown in Figure 14. 7. The final result is universal Stability 20/20 - but Harmony stays at the fairly dismal level 6/15. There are two competing alliances US-China-Pakistan versus India-USSR -Afghanistan - i. e. competition at the individual state level has been transformed into competition at a higher hierarchical level.

The point about the pattern that has been achieved is that it is very difficult to change any one part of it without changing other parts. The pressure of knock-on effects is immediate: or, to put it another way, the knock on effects are so difficult to achieve that the system will push back to its original stable form. The picture overall is one of great stability, and one which cannot be changed without ramifications on other axes. It is for this reason that changes of regime do not necessarily make such radical differences. So long

as Bhutto remained anti- Indian and pro-Chinese, Pakistan's pro-American stance is difficult to change.

It also has a certain graphic dramatic appeal, in that the crossing point between two antipathetic axes - China+Pakistan+USA vs USSR+Afghanistan+India - is in the centre of the world, the land of mythical Mt Meru, somewhere in the Hindu Kush, Pamir, Karakoram mountains. The competing alliances resulted in the wars over regime change in Afghanistan. One of the striking aspects of the analysis is that given a particular structure, the actual historical sequence is not necessarily important. In other words, the Soviets can invade Afghanistan before Nixon makes up with China - the same alliances emerge.

The analysis also says much about the difficulties of the Himalayan States and Bangladesh (not shown). For example, Nepal might like to strike a balanced friendship with both Delhi and Beijing, but it cannot do so too strongly, since then an unstable triangle will emerge. Certainly India does not want a close ally of China south of the Himalayas. Bangladesh finds it difficult to have close ties with both India and Pakistan, and simultaneously with India and China. If the China- Bangladesh-Pakistan triangle ever got very strong, India would feel frozen out and threatened in Bengal.

The West and post-Soviet Russia have achieved some better accommodation - although the relationship is fragile. China and Russia have mended some fences. If (and I have to emphasise the condition) the USA and Russia ever came really close, and if Indian-Pakistani hostility remains, then the pressure is on the USA and Russia both to choose the same ally in South

Asia. India is the more likely candidate, because of its size, potential market, and regional dominance. For the moment, the war against the Taleban of Afghanistan has again pushed the USA into working with Pakistan, but the triangle USA-India-Pakistan is unstable.

The key to making a Pakistan-India-US alliance work is clearly solving the deepest structural impediment in the matrix, the hostility between India and Pakistan over disputed Kashmir. Concluding Remarks This chapter has looked at South Asia in its international context at some different moments in time, and from a variety of perspectives. The arguments which these perspectives support are both deductive and inductive. The major deductive viewpoint is that provided by Mackinder and Cohen, that South Asia is an independent geopolitical region, strategically placed as one of the rim-land regions flanking the central Eurasian heartland.

The actual calculation of stability and harmony in the web of triangular relationships and the prediction of change is deductive, but the starting relationships in the webs are modelled empirically however crude the binary relationships may appear. The four most significant countries which this account has focused upon are the USA, Russia, China and India. In terms of the ability to project power, the USA has had greater capacity than the USSR /Russia, and China greater than India.

The reason for the latter differential can be found at least in part in the fact that China has inherited, by coercion if necessary, the whole of its own geopolitical region (with the exception of off-shore Taiwan/Formosa, arguably not part of the mainland region anyway), whereas India has not inherited the

whole of its equivalent region, because it was made to accept the principle of self-determination in 1947. The antagonism of the two successor states in South Asia has a bitterness about it which can only spring from fraternal civil war, the threat of which precipitated the division, and the reality of which accompanied its birth.

Kashmir has become the symbol of all that the two nations stand for, and the resolution of the conflict one way or the other would seem to represent a judgement of history - between the Indian claim that the creation of Pakistan was essentially unnecessary, and the Pakistani claim that it was the only way of protecting the rights of the Muslim minority. The judgement of history will probably be made from the victor's viewpoint, hence either side will go to any lengths to protect its claim.

Both will turn for support to outside powers, the weaker of the two having aligned itself with the greater super-power and with the greater Asian regional power. With the demarcation of new state borders, the space-economy and the mentality of the citizens begin to adjust to the new lines. Over the course of history there have been periods when much of what is now Pakistan was separate from the powers of the Ganges valley, and more closely related to Afghanistan and perhaps Persia. These periods add up to a small proportion of historical time, but they do occur.

Perhaps such a period is being or is about to be repeated. However, the gains to be made from settling the quarrel between India and Pakistan are great, and both sides know this. At least the dialogue can continue, inside SAARC, inside the Commonwealth (which Pakistan left but rejoined -

although as of 1999 its membership has been suspended after the military coup of Pervez Musharraf) and with direct bilateral meetings. But the states are taking on their new characteristics – and perhaps what was not so true in 1947 is becoming truer now – a more Hindu and less secular India, and a more Islamic and less secular Pakistan. It is a conclusion which, sadly, fits with Huntington's (1997) Clash of Civilizations, in which he sees civilisation/cultural differences as the underpinning of the new world order. Finally, many people wonder whether Mackinder's century is over. This is for two main reasons – one being the simple truth that the USA managed to establish bases in central Asia to support the war in Afghanistan, despite profound Russian disquiet. The second reason is that global geography is changing.

The Arctic has been warming for the last half century, and the area of sea ice has shrunk by half. There is speculation that soon the North-west Passage, skirting northern Canada, will be open to shipping, hugely shortening trade routes between say Europe and Japan. But it may also open up Russia's Arctic shoreline as well, connecting the world heartland with the maritime periphery. It will also enable the Arctic ocean to be exploited for oil, gas and minerals, and already there is a major political struggle between Denmark, Canada, Norway and Russia to maximise their respective claims.

The NATO, CENTO, SEATO thesis of containment is then old-hat not just because of failed or hostile states around the Persian Gulf, but also because such profound shifts in global geography will change South Asia's relevance. Indeed, in geopolitical strategic terms, it might well become far less relevant than it is today. Its interest for the rest of the world will be in its population,

and hence market, in its competitive industrialisation and consequent competition for resources. cs