

Speech on
'A Security Architecture for South Asia'

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests and Participants,

Aas-Salaamu-A'laikum and Good Morning.

It is my great pleasure to join you at ISSI today and I would like to thank Ambassador Qazi for his kind invitation and very gracious hospitality.

In today's speech, I would like to encapsulate the compounding non-traditional and traditional issues posing South Asia and envision a security architecture for the region, similar to the ASEAN regional framework, within which these security risks can be effectively addressed. I would also like to stress the need to invigorate regional economic cooperation through this architecture, particularly in trade, energy and infrastructure, in addition to facilitating collaboration on security issues.

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent transformation of the global distribution of power from a bipolar to a multi-polar structure had profound

ramifications on the perception of security, which resulted in 'regionalism' receiving a renewed impetus as a means of sustaining peace and stability. Despite sharing a common history, cultural and religious similarities, South Asia remains one of the least integrated regions in the world, both in terms of security cooperation as well as economic integration.

In the past, neither the critical regional issues of human security nor the examples set by robust regionalism in South East Asia were enough to overcome decades of mistrust and launch this region towards a co-operative security architecture.

The concurrence of positive trends in regionalism and prevalence of non-traditional security threats should culminate in the visualization of a comprehensive security apparatus in South Asia. Although recent initiatives by SAARC to tackle regional security issues are encouraging, the lack of a security architecture akin to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or African Union (AU) renders many of its recommendations to fail in crossing over from deliberation to application.

I would like to outline the contours of a security architecture in South Asia, using the ASEAN Regional Forum as a model. Since incorporating the proposed architecture within SAARC would require amendments to the SAARC Charter, this is conceptualized as independent of SAARC. In the future, plausible pathways could be examined to incorporate the architecture within SAARC, following necessary amendments to the SAARC Charter and organizational structure.

Firstly, I would like to give you an overview of South Asia in relation to crucial security and economic issues, followed by a brief analysis of the range of

traditional and non-traditional security risks posing the region. This would be followed by an analysis of the recent initiatives undertaken by SAARC to mitigate these risks. Based on the ground realities of South Asia and taking examples from other regional bodies, I would like to present to you a provisional model of a security architecture in South Asia.

Regional Scenario in South Asia

The South Asian region, comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka has about 23% of the world's population and 15% of the world's arable land, but receives less than 1% of global foreign investment and tourism revenues, only 2% of global GDP. Furthermore, South Asia is still home to about 410 million of the 720 million poor living in the Asia-Pacific region, despite the rapid economic growth in India and, to a lesser extent, other countries in the region. Compounding the formidable economic and social challenges facing South Asia are numerous traditional and non-traditional security threats. Yet while South Asian countries confront both military and human security dilemmas, national budgets tend to favor military spending. Excessive spending on defense continues to have an adverse impact on the capacity of the countries in the region to provide adequate resources to spend on human security programs. This is one of the principal reasons why the level of poverty continues to remain so high in South Asia. Furthermore, far from mitigating security threats, the substantial diversion of resources has helped make South Asia one of the major flashpoints in the world, with domestic compulsions and threat perceptions further fueling the existing arms race between some South Asian countries. Threat perceptions in the region are also

influenced by the fear of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, or even an accidental use of nuclear weapons or a false alarm provoking a nuclear conflict between regional rivals.

Low-level of Economic Integration

For all its economic potential, South and Central Asia remains one of the least economically integrated areas of the world. As of 2011, South Asia's intraregional trade has stalled at around 2 percent of its total trade volume since 1980, and represents only a third of the region's GDP. This is significantly less than what one would expect, given the region's set of geographic circumstances, GDP, population, and existing trade arrangements. By contrast, East Asia's intraregional trade constitutes approximately 15 percent of its total trade volume and represents almost three quarters of its GDP.

Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Threats in South Asia

South Asia is plagued, perhaps more than ever before, by multiple security threats. In many cases, traditional security threats have been aggravated by NTS threats, though it is only in recent years that policymakers have begun thinking of the challenges facing their countries and the region as a whole as Non Traditional Security issues. Further aggravating the security of the region are the adverse economic and political ramifications of transnational terrorism and transnational crime. Countries in South Asia are beginning to comprehend the inadequacy of national security apparatuses in countering traditional and non-traditional risks and there is a fundamental need for a cooperative security architecture to

mitigate these escalating threats. Now I would like to briefly describe traditional security risks as well as six of the key non-traditional security risks posing South Asia today.

Traditional Security

The main impediment to regional security in South Asia is the lack of confidence among member states. Decades of mistrust and confrontation have rendered South Asia to be a deeply divided and compartmentalized region susceptible to volatility and instability. The South Asian region is mired by mistrust, confrontation and conflict which are further aggravated by poor governance and misunderstandings. Negotiation on disputes has not produced the desired results but countries are slowly beginning to realize the futility of confrontational means of resolving conflicts.

List of Non-Traditional Risks in South Asia

- I. Food and water
- II. Health
- III. Environmental Security & Climate Change
- IV. Illegal Migration & Human Trafficking
- V. Energy Security
- VI. Transnational Crime & Transnational Terrorism

Food & Water Security

Substantial increases in food prices are forcing governments and development agencies in South Asia to reassess the policies for agriculture, food security, and international trade that they have pursued over the past three decades. In South Asia, food costs constitute the major portion of the average household's spending. If food prices continue to rise without a matching increase in salaries and incomes of people at the bottom of the economic ladder, it is estimated that approximately 100 million people could be pushed back into poverty, generating a host of political, social, economic, and environmental challenges. A well-coordinated approach is clearly required to tackle the problem of food security at both the national and the regional level.

Along with the issues related to food, access to safe water and sharing of water resources between the countries in South Asia have become matters of critical importance. Nearly 63% of the South Asia's population has no access to sanitation facilities, while 11% of the population does not have access to safe drinking water.

Health Security

The AIDS epidemic poses a crucial security threat in South Asia, particularly to India. Since India shares a porous border with its neighbors, cross border movement of infected patients poses severe threats to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Adding to this threat is the re-emergence of new strains of older diseases such as tuberculosis (TB) and cholera that are increasingly resistant to medical treatment. The unprecedented scale of

movement of people and goods, along with the misuse or over-use of antibiotics, rapid urbanization, poor sanitation and weak health care infrastructures, exacerbates the possibility of a global pandemic and threatens to overwhelm the health care capacities of many South Asian states.

Environmental Security and Climate Change

South Asia is among the world's most vulnerable regions to both natural and man-made disasters. Over the last 25 years, disasters have killed nearly half a million people in South Asia and inflicted colossal financial damages. India had by far the highest number of disaster events, but flooding in Bangladesh claimed the most lives. The importance of environmental security is not confined to man-made and natural disasters but is also reflected on issues of environmental degradation and sustainability. South Asia as a region is characterized by extremely high environmental stress resulting from floods, scarcity of water, high urban population density, energy shortages, deforestation, and air pollution. Climate change is expected to exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities in South Asia, leading to the further depletion of scarce food and water resources, augmenting migration and increasing the number of internally displaced people.

Irregular Migration and Human Trafficking

Regional migration has risen to the top of the security agenda in South Asia, due in part to concerns that irregular migration flows could result in extremist elements entering in to a country in a clandestine way and then engage in acts of terrorism or organized crime resulting in undermining the security of the country. Concerns relating to migration although in most cases are played up and

exaggerated to serve the interest of some political parties, specially prior to elections, given the impact of migration patterns on national security interests and interstate political relations, this important development within South Asia, has become a highly emotive issue and will need to be addressed. Some may even argue that migration management has become a critical issue in South Asia. It should also be stressed that throughout South Asia two types of migration is taking place, across borders and within individual countries.

Energy Security

Access to efficient and clean energy has become a critical issue for the functioning of economies. Not only are South Asian economies growing rapidly, but the demand for energy is also growing at an unprecedented rate. The uneven distribution of energy supplies among South Asian countries has generated significant vulnerabilities for their economies. Threats to energy security in South Asia are predominantly caused by lack of political will among several energy-producing countries to share resources with neighboring countries, as well as by the lack of regional cooperation in distributing energy. Apart from regional issues, rising costs of fossil fuels (specifically, oil and gas) and environmental hazards caused by coal-generated power plants will be a source of energy insecurity in the foreseeable future.

Transnational Crime and Terrorism

The absence of regional security cooperation has led to the proliferation of terrorism and transnational criminal elements throughout South Asia, with severe consequences.

The bulk of transnational criminal activities in South Asia comprises of smuggling and human trafficking. Despite the negative economic impact of smuggling of consumer goods, the most nefarious form of smuggling is in arms and drugs. The exploitation of poor local people as 'drug mules', the corruption of border security and the social costs of drug compound to create a significant human security concern.

Recent terror attacks have exemplified the ability of transnational terrorist organizations to instigate volatility and insecurity in an entire region by igniting confrontation between two of the largest military powers. Evidence exists of collaboration between terrorist groups from regional countries, as well as extremists seeking safe haven or expanding their bases by residing in neighboring states.

Initiatives by SAARC

SAARC was envisioned initially as an organization that would facilitate peace, economic integration and prosperity in the region. In the past, any initiative within the framework of SAARC to discuss cooperation on issues of traditional and non-traditional security threats was not possible since it was argued that discussion of such issues was outside the terms of reference of SAARC. However, in recent years, most notably at the last four SAARC summits, the subject of combating terrorism within South Asia has been given the highest priority. Both traditional and non-traditional security issues are now being

addressed by several SAARC member states within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and also within SAARC itself.

The inclusion of Afghanistan in SAARC has further highlighted the importance of the need for a platform to discuss security issues. India's emergence as a major global power, combined with the security challenges, particularly terrorism, faced by South Asia as a region and by each of its member states individually, has led to the realization, at the highest political level, that an effective regional security architecture has now become necessary to ensure the security and development of South Asia.

Contours of a Security Architecture in South Asia

One of the fundamental steps in achieving cooperative security is the formation of a holistic security architecture which would espouse security cooperation between politically diverse nations through a wide network of institutions.

The proposed architecture is envisioned as independent of SAARC as incorporating it within SAARC would require modification of its charter. In the future, provided that structural and legislative amendments are undertaken to facilitate the incorporation of the architecture within SAARC, it could act as the overseeing body. The constituents of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), particularly its annual security dialogue can be implemented within this architecture. Since several member states of SAARC are discussing security issues under the ARF, it is only viable that a forum should exist for the discussion of South Asian security issues.

Any security architecture in South Asia must be based on developing multilateral cooperation and initiating public diplomacy to counter the wide range of security threats posing the region. Such an initiative must be part of strengthening the process of regional cooperation on energy, trade and infrastructure as economic integration can facilitate and compliment collaboration on security issues.

Structure:

The administration and implementation of the architecture would be undertaken through three major mechanisms:

1. Inter-governmental - This would include periodic meetings of Foreign Ministers, Home and Trade Ministers of all South Asian countries.
2. Government / Non-Government – This would include regular meetings of government officials, think-tanks and civil society from the eight member states of SAARC.
3. Non-Government –This would include regular meetings of think-tanks, non-state actors and members of civil society.

The three above mechanism or bodies, will be supported by a small regional secretariat.

The main activities of the three above mentioned bodies will be as follows:

1. **Dialogues:** Dialogues on critical security issues as well as economic issues would be undertaken through seminars and workshops. Participation would include Government and Non-Governmental representatives.

2. **Research:** Extensive collaborative research would be undertaken on major security concerns, particularly climate change, health security and disaster management. Research would also explore the possibilities of greater collaboration on energy, trade and infrastructure development. Research would be undertaken by academics and think-tanks; the outcome of their research work and the findings would be disseminated to Governments and relevant NGOs.

3. **Training:** Training of Law enforcement officials would be undertaken at the Inter-Governmental level. At the initial stage, joint exercises between law enforcement officials of different South Asian nations will be undertaken.

4. **In the future capacity building measures could be undertaken through:**

- Joint Peace Keeping Operations
- Joint Disaster Management missions
- Joint Institutional arrangements for dealing with NTS threats, including data collection on food, water and energy security
- Annual meetings of heads of intelligence agencies

- Joint ventures towards energy cooperation in the region
- Joint Infrastructure projects, particularly in relations to sea ports and regional highways

Pathways to Cooperative Security in South Asia

One route to peace and stability in South Asia, which has gained prominence in recent times, is the socio-economic development route. This route can perhaps be the most important pathway to peace and thus the proposed Security Architecture stresses on the need for greater economic cooperation among the countries in trade, investment and energy cooperation, as ensuring equitable sharing of resources, sustainable growth and prosperity can go a long way to create a safe and stable environment in South Asia which will be conducive to robust security cooperation. Security collaboration is thus inherently linked to economic integration and addressing both issues under a single architecture which has both Track 1 and 2 elements, but is not constrained by the modalities of SAARC, is, in my opinion, the most practical approach to collectively address the diverse range of issues facing our region.

Concluding Remarks

While accounting for the severe constraints and impediments in overcoming deeply entrenched regional acrimony, it is my belief that a regional security architecture is an important step towards regional cooperation on traditional and non traditional security issues and economic integration. Confidence building, preventative diplomacy, conflict prevention are all steps, which if undertaken through an institutional mechanism as suggested here, may

eventual draw all our countries to collectively fight our common threats as well as benefit from each others economies.

This conference provides an excellent platform for the discussion, dissemination and analysis of the contours of a security architecture in South Asia. I look forward to a robust discussion on these issues with you all and hope to draw some constructive conclusions at the end of our deliberation.