

Holistic Approach to National Growth and Security: Significance of Peace, Stability and Regional Cooperation for Economic Progress in South Asia

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Introduction

Greeting, Good afternoon, and Ayubowan,

Honourable Chair and members of the Panel, it is a matter of great pleasure and singular honour for me to participate in the KDU International Research Seminar for third consecutive year. My thanks to KDU for providing me an opportunity to speak on such an important issue.

There is a natural nexus and interdependence between 'National Growth and National Security'. For next few minutes, I shall talk about "Significance of Peace, Stability and Regional Cooperation for Economic Progress in South Asia" in the context of 'Holistic Approach to National Growth and Security'.

National Growth essentially relates to the economic growth; however, it is also related to political stability, national cohesion, national integration and harmony among all ethnic/constituent components of a nation.

As for as National Security is concerned, it needs to be seen in the context of 'Comprehensive Security', which is a much wider concept as compared to traditional security or defence against territorial aggression, internal disturbances and civil war. The comprehensive security, inter alia, includes, human security, economic security, cyber security, energy security, food security, water security, environmental security and protection against natural and manmade disasters as well.

Therefore, when we contextualize the national growth and security, we understand that these concepts are interconnected and interdependent.

Without security, peace and political stability cannot be achieved. Similarly, in the absence of peace and stability, there can be no economic progress. Insecurity breeds chaos and destabilizes all facets of human life in the society. The worst causality is, of course, economic growth adversely affecting production of goods and services and commerce and trade.

A. Economic growth.

Economic growth is an increase in the national wealth of nation, i.e. production of goods and services, in a given period of time. Traditionally, aggregate economic growth is measured in terms of gross national product (GNP) or gross domestic product (GDP). Besides many other factors, domestic stability and technological progress are the main drivers of long-run growth. Sustained economic growth requires a substantial and continuing investment in human capital. One major form of such investment is higher education and contemporary technical skills. Higher economic growth helps nations to increase the average income of their citizens. It reduces unemployment and increases investments, especially in research and development, which leads to further economic development and progress. With increased economic growth, countries can spend more resources on social welfare projects, thereby enhancing the quality of life of their citizens.

B. Security.

Traditional meaning of the Security is freedom and protection from potential danger, such as attack/invasion by external enemies or a turmoil and upheaval caused through internal disturbances. However, in contemporary times,

security means much more than merely being secure from kinetic threat. We live in a complex world and we are affected by multiple factors. Therefore, the concept of Comprehensive Security, as mentioned earlier.

C. Peace.

Peace has been defined in many different ways. It means freedom from civil disturbances, war, and violence. Particularly, it refers to the time when people can live and work together happily without disagreement and disturbances. A state or period in which there is no war, or a war has ended.

Political Meaning: Absence of war, violence and disagreement.

Social Meaning: Mutual harmony, tranquility, calmness, and absence of hostility, antagonism and animosity.

D. Stability.

Stability means ability or state of being stable and not getting imbalanced or dislocated. Political and economic stability denote to smooth functioning of political and economic systems. Whereas, social stability means ethnic, religious and sectarian mutual coexistence, without threatening the harmony and right of peaceful living of others groups.

Peace and Stability - A National Goal/Objective

Peace and stability within a state and in its neighborhood, along with economic wellbeing of the citizens, are among essential goals of every nation in the world. In order to achieve these objectives, all nations / countries develop their national policies and strategies and pursue their foreign policies at regional and global level.

We live in a highly inter-dependent global economic system, which is steered by national interests of respective nations. At the domestic level, peace and political stability is essential for attaining economic progress, whereas at regional and global level, cooperation with other countries, particularly in respective regions, is equally important. Political and economic cooperation

helps to promote regional stability and connectivity, which are essential prerequisites for promotion of commerce and trade among various countries.

Regional Peace, Stability and Cooperation in South Asia

In order to ensure peace and stability, along with internal harmony and cohesion, each nation needs a peaceful neighborhood. Therefore, it is very important that, in addition to adopting friendly foreign policy towards neighbouring countries, each nation must adopt peaceful means to resolve international disputes and conflicts through mutual dialogue and negotiations.

The South Asian region, which is a home of more than 1.9 billion people, has remained colonized for almost two centuries, and in case of Sri Lanka for over four centuries. Such prolonged foreign rule has adversely affected the prospects of political development and economic growth in the region. Despite the fact that most of the countries in South Asia share common historical and cultural heritage, in the last seven decades of their independence, they have not been successful in developing practical foreign policy tools and instruments to forge meaningful regional cooperation. Notwithstanding the political rhetoric, which is expressed from time to time as a diplomatic gesture, no serious political will has been displayed to achieve regional cooperation and connectivity. The regional integration could facilitate promotion of commerce and trade and can open new opportunities for economic progress in the region.

Based on the idea of regional cooperation in South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in December 1985. Besides many other areas of cooperation, it was envisaged to enhance cooperation in the fields of human resource development, economic progress, trade, finance, education, energy, transport, and science and technology. Though, over a period of time, many SAARC institutions have been established in

different member states yet the progress towards meaningful regional cooperation and integration is not very encouraging. The last SAARC Summit meeting was held in November 2014. Since then, no meeting of heads of the states/governments could be organized, which indicates the lack of trust and absence of political will among its members to make use of this organization for promotion of regional cooperation.

There are many successful examples of regional cooperation in the world, such as European Union (EU), Organization of Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), African Union (AU), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Some of these organizations have performed better than others. All such organizations primarily operate on the principle of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. The main impediment in regional cooperation in any region is the hegemonic attitude of one or more member states towards others. South Asia houses almost 25 % of the world's population and has enormous human capital and natural resources. Through peaceful resolution of all conflicts among the member states and by adopting non-hegemonic policy towards the neighbouring countries, SAARC region can experience peace, harmony and political stability in all countries. With increased connectivity and removal of trade barriers, the region has great potential to promote intra-regional and trans-regional trade and commerce.

Since all SAARC member states are developing economies, they lack the resources to develop elaborate communication infrastructure, which could enhance the prospects of transnational commerce and trade across the region and beyond. Luckily, this opportunity has been created by Chinese financed 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its flagship project, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Whereas BRI is a global project,

allowing connectivity among all continents, CPEC allows smooth flow of trade between Chinese western region, Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Africa. Especially, it provides excellent prospects of economic development in SAARC region. Hence, it is in the interest of all SAARC members to take advantage of this emerging opportunity to ensure the development of industry in their respective countries and promotion of transnational commerce and trade.

Conclusion

Economic progress can only be achieved through peace and stability. Therefore, all member states of SAARC should resolve their internal disputes and external conflicts with neighbouring countries through mutual dialogue and negotiations. If peace and stability is ensured, besides adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal matters of other states, South Asia has a great future for economic progress and prosperity.

Author Biography



The Author is the former Pakistan High Commissioner to Sri Lanka who is having 38 years national and international military leadership and higher education management experience, including seven years as a General Officer in Pakistan Army, over three years in UN Peacekeeping and two years as Dean at a national university. He Holds a Post-Doctorate in International Relations (International Cooperation), a Doctorate in International Relations (Contemporary International Conflict Resolution), along with three master's degrees in military studies, War Studies and International Relations. He has also undertaken variety of command, staff and instructional assignments during military career, including number of sensitive and challenging positions demanding very high professional acumen and competence