



IPCS Annual Workshop

Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2009

Conference Report

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Armed Conflicts in South Asia : An Overview

PR CHARI

If we were to isolate 2008 and consider it separately from years in the past; then what is that would set 2008 apart from other years in the past? What does it look like as a unique year in retrospect? There were five critical developments in 2008.

- South Asia was deeply hit by the global economic meltdown, affecting its vast population of poor people further.
- Inter-state conflicts seemed to become even more unlikely in 2008, however, the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai was a close call which could have led to an inter-state conflict between the two countries.
- Terrorist attacks become more virulent and spectacular. For example, the attack on the India embassy in Kabul, the Marriott hotel in Islamabad and attacks in Mumbai reflected a mix of what can be described as suicide and suicidal attacks.
- There was an increased resurgence in armed conflicts and as a result greater casualties in 2008. About 5,400 civilians were killed in Afghanistan and 300 members of the ISAF; a huge humanitarian disaster awaits in the Jaffna peninsula even as the crisis is unfolding; Nepal also witnessed heavy casualties because of youth wing violence, naxalite violence, and violence by the armed forces.
- Elections were held in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. The conventional wisdom dictates that elections promote democracy; however, is this true for South Asia?



Democracy's faltering footprints in South Asia: In Pakistan, there is an uneasy coalition in power and the Taliban is spreading across the country. Pakistan could easily "descent into chaos" or it can return to a military rule. Election was also held in Bangladesh to a rather unusual development, where the military returned to barracks. However, the BDR revolt shows that all is not well in Bangladesh and there is a need to watch the situation of how democracy unfolds there with some care. In Nepal, a Maoist government came to power but it faces daunting challenges such as framing a constitution, and more importantly the task of integrating the PLA with the Royal Nepal Army; all this in the face of internal violence and a near revolt by the Madhesis in the Terai region. In Afghanistan, elections are due in 2009 and one can only speculate on the stability of the government that will come to power. Similarly elections will be held in India in mid-2009 and it is almost certain that a coalition government will be formed. Therefore, all South Asian countries are at different stages of democratic evolution and having elections do not necessarily mean stability and peace.

Failed and Failing States: Six South Asian countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar rank in the first 25 states in the



Failed States Index (FSI). In each of these states i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the situation about their positioning in the FSI has worsened since 2007. In 2007, they were less prone to failing or having failed; however, in 2008 they seem to have edged upwards in this direction. India provides a core of stability in this darkening picture of instability in South Asia; however, there is a state of instability on India's peripheries - Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. Therefore, although there is a core of stability within India, its peripheries are weak and borders with failing states. How does this phenomenon failing/failed states impact on armed conflicts in South Asia? It shows that a number of South Asian states are vulnerable to civil violence and internal conflicts; they become the breeding ground for organized crime/terrorism; and trafficking of various kinds which can spill over borders and affect regional stability.

Cross border and domestic terrorism is going to be the most important problem in immediate future. It is therefore important to review the basic parameters of national security in South Asia. This requires more emphasis on internal security, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. Unfortunately there is a lack of appreciation regarding the changing contours of national security which reflects in the weapons acquisition policies of all the countries of South Asia. The thinking in the armed forces and national security establishments is still linked to the past and not the future. Powerful nuclear and conventional forces are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the present security threats.

Finally, what about the peace processes? India-Pakistan peace process is in recess, it is uncertain as to when it will be resumed and how successful it would be in the present climate of distrust. In Nepal, the peace process is still a work in progress; in Sri Lanka there is no room yet to establish a peace process until the Jaffna situation is resolved. There is also uncertainty about the peace process in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, if Pakistan believes that the Swat modality, which risks the Talibanization of Pakistan, is feasible, it would then prove dangerous to not only Pakistan but also to India and the rest of the region.

AFGHANISTAN, FATA & SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza

During 2008 there was increased pessimism from the US administration regarding the situation in Afghanistan. The key trends were:

- Increased violence, high profile attacks and insecurity. This demonstrates a shift in the Taliban's tactics and growth in their strength.
- Delivery of International aid to Afghanistan was inconsistent and ineffective.
- Linkages between non-state actors increased in 2008.
- Narcotics trafficking continued and must be recognised as a key problem in Afghanistan; it provided approximately US\$1-2 million of funding to the Taliban in 2008.

It is more appropriate to talk about conflict containment rather than management in Afghanistan. The US tactic of arming tribal militias has been borrowed





from Iraq, but there are problems with initiating it in this conflict as it promotes impunity and impedes the building of state institutions. Talking to the 'moderate' Taliban also presents a challenge: reconciliation minus a strong government is problematic. The US troop surge planned for Afghanistan may be looked upon as an occupational force. Overall, there was no coordinated strategy towards Afghanistan in 2008.

Mayank Bubna

- What held Afghanistan together in 2008? The national government; economic aid; military successes?
- What does stability mean there? Every collapse in Afghanistan is recognised as a return to the status quo.
- What is working? For example, India's development aid there has been successful.
- We must look at past military tactics and focus on economic delivery and aid.

D. Suba Chandran

There were six major trends in 2008:

- Spreading anarchy not in concentric circles or coordinated, but rather jumping from location to location. There were three categories of conflict:
 - ⇒ Areas under total control of the Taliban (e.g. Swat)
 - ⇒ Areas of high intensity violence (e.g. Peshawar)
 - ⇒ Areas of sporadic violence (e.g. Islamabad)
- Increase in sectarian divisions within tribes causing internal rifts. Also, the Taliban showed itself to be a large non-monolithic organisation with internal disagreements.
- Increase in suicide attacks based from the FATA. Many occurred in Swat which may demonstrate a strategy of using suicide attacks in regions where the Taliban have less presence and influence. Tribal jirgas have also been attacked and elders killed.
 - NATO supply lines were attacked in the Khyber Pass. Supply materials and trucks were targeted. Even sectarian militants seem to use this strategy.
 - Islamabad and Lahore are now being attacked from the FATA. Is this a form of "strategic punishment"?
 - Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) increased significantly. Jirgas aimed at resettlement are proving largely ineffective.

Fighting and secret deals throughout 2007 and 2008 showed that the state strategy is not uniform. US drone attacks were a political failure but a military success and will continue.

Raghav Sharma

Civilian government has not helped in Afghanistan due to internal squabbling. Increased violence demonstrated the nexus between differing groups and a





blurring of agendas. Sectarian violence spread to the countryside and became more organised. There was an obvious lack of political will to reign in this violence. The civilian law and order machine has been infiltrated by sectarian actors and the police are corrupt which leads to frequent defiance of state law with impunity. Hate speech and propaganda intensified. A number of polls demonstrated that poverty may be pushing people toward extremism. Many actors (including clerics and the ISI) have a stake in continuing sectarian violence so conflict management is difficult.



Rekha Chakravarthi

- In the section on Principle Actors, the role of the State, especially in promoting as well as not preventing sectarian violence, can be explored.
- One major trend has been the changing focus of sectarian violence. Previously, the problem was acute in Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta. It is now the NWFP and the FATA. In 2007 and 2008, Kurram, Dera Ismail Khan, Hangu and Khyber Agency (intra-sectarian violence) were the hotspots for sectarian tensions. The paper could, therefore, investigate the change in focus of sectarian violence more thoroughly with examples.
- Exploring the change in focus of sectarian violence may also be accompanied with exploring linkages between sectarian groups in the FATA, the Pakistan Taliban and the Sunni Deobandi groups in Punjab besides the linkages between Shi'a groups and external support.
- Data tables would make numbers clearer and trends easier to identify.
- What is the role of Jirgas in Conflict Management; how effective have they been? There are anti-terrorism acts that prohibit possession or distribution of material designed to ferment sectarian violence. Why haven't these laws been used? Similarly, the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology sponsors interfaith and inter-sectarian meetings and workshops. Is this only symbolic?

J&K AND NAXAL VIOLENCE

Kavita Suri and D Suba Chandran

There were five major trends in 2008:

- There was overall decline in terms of violence. The number of violent incidents in J&K since 1991 is in three figures. The numbers stands at 700 plus, less than thousand, around 40 per cent less than in 2007. The number of civilian casualties is in two figures, about ninety plus. These figures are based on the J&K Police records. There is also a decline in security casualties, which is less than one hundred. Finally, for the first time, the number of active militants is 800 plus and not over one thousand.
- Terrorist-led violence is increasingly becoming regionalized and localized in J&K.
- Local recruitment is dying; militant groups are unable to get new recruits.
- Hizbul Mujahideen is no longer a force it used to be. It is corrupt, criminalized and its role in the valley is declining drastically.
- Human intelligence is getting better; Indian intelligence forces' infiltra-



tion is increasing; grenade attacks have decreased. Fencing the LoC has brought down militant infiltration; however, groups that infiltrate do so in numbers of 20-25 unlike in past when groups would infiltrate in numbers of 8-10.

As far as conflict management is concerned, the voter turnout for the election held in December 2008 was positive. Cross LoC trade, bus service, people-to-people contact is not affected despite the 26/11 attacks.

Bhashyam Kasturi

- How do trends change from year to year and how they do they impact the security environment? For example, what are the reasons for violence getting localized? Why are some districts safe and some violent? Is that a societal issue, or is it because of the changing role of external forces?
- What are the reasons for infiltration happening in larger groups?
- To what extent are the internal and external forces relevant to the changing trends in violence in J&K?
- The fact the elections were held successfully with a high voter turn out suggest that there is basic political and military control over the situation. The issue is what are destabilizing factors? In terms of changing trends, can we identify what the factors that destabilize this situation?





Devyani Srivastava

Major trends in 2008:



- There was systematic violence against the security forces, defensive as well as offensive attacks.
- Causality of security forces were more than that of the Naxals.
- New methods by the Maoists in targeting the security forces, involving surprise elements.
- Swarming attacks, landmine blasts, gunfire continue to be the modus operandi.
- Continued targeting of public infrastructure including rail way tracks, construction companies, telecommunication and power transmission centres.
- Anti-SEZ protests remained low key in 2008.
- Naxals continued to use strike and bandhs to disrupt public life; however, no economic blockades were imposed.
- Maoists continued to target civilians including suspected police informers. Extortion and abductions constituted another form of terrorizing people.
- There was heavy violence during the election campaigning in Chattisgarh in November and the voter turn out was very low.
- Abductions, extortions and looting remain the main source of funding for the Naxals.
- The use of codex wire was reported for the first time in Jharkhand.
- Poppy cultivation in Jharkhand was another source of funding to the Naxals.

Conflict Management

- The government made efforts to counter naxalism through a strategy involving political, socio-economic and security measures.
- The National Investigative Agency Bill extended the definition of terrorism to include left wing extremism.
- Counter guerilla warfare is a key strategy of the government. The government aims to replicate the Greyhounds in other states as well.
- The government also approved the formation of a special trained Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) force to be trained along the Greyhounds.
- Rehabilitation of the surrendered militants remains a primary loophole of the government's surrender policy.
- Implementation of development schemes includes the Backward Districts Initiative (BDI) and the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

Mallika Joseph

- Naxal violence has been there for the last fifty years; but why is it that in the last ten years it has gained more virulence? Is it because the state has failed its people only in the last one decade or is it because people are becoming more aware of the state's responsibilities towards them?
- Why is it that a section of people feel marginalized in the last decade to lend support to the Naxal movement?
- The major stakeholders in the conflict can be explored in the section on principle actors.



- The government has always been aware of the fact that the Naxal problem is a socio-economic problem. The analysis of the report by the Planning Commission is therefore not new. It is because the government has been unable to offer a socio-economic package, it has been able to provide only a law and order strategy.
- The Andhra Pradesh government realized that only a law and order centric counter-naxal strategy did not work and only when the strategy included socio-economic packages, land reforms, and land distribution methods did it work. So it not entirely correct to lay the success of the AP counter-naxal strategy only to the Greyhounds.
- The analysis in conflict management reflects, in parts, that what we lack is a national counter-naxal strategy. There are various strategies adopted by the state governments and some consultative support offered by the union government; however, what is lacking is a coherent and comprehensive national-naxal strategy. The author should be more forthright in mentioning this rather than in parts.
- A concrete set of recommendations to the key players should be included.

NORTHEAST & BANGLADESH

Bibhu Prasad Rhoutray

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the security situation in the Northeast has improved in 2008. Data released by the MHA shows a drop in fatalities among both civilians and the security force and a significant increase in the number of extremists neutralised. But does bringing down deaths and increasing the statistics under neutralisation alone answer the security concerns? This paper aims to analyse this aspect.

In October, three big blasts rocked the capitals of Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Manipur has been the most violent in the past year, like the previous 4-5 years, followed by Assam. In the latter case, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) has been the predominant violent group, affecting 20 out of the 27 districts of the state and the mastermind behind most of the attacks across Assam. Whenever it gets pushed to a corner it seeks help from the Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and makes a violent comeback. Manipur faces 15-20 violent insurgent/extremist groups that affect all nine of its districts.

These groups assert their domination through abductions for ransom and by passing decrees like those stipulating at schools will only teach in the local language or banning the export of rice to Myanmar; clearly indicating their domination over the state administration as well.

Tripura was being signalled out as a basket case till about 5 years ago, but has made a dramatic turnaround since; however, it still needs a lot of attention and work. As on date, the state dominates insurgent capacities. Nagaland, the fourth case discussed in the paper, is a state stuck in a limbo as there has been no progress in the peace talks. The ceasefire has only allowed NSCN-IM and NSCN to regroup and gain strength and its demand for a greater Nagaland has neither gone down well with the state or the other groups/states concerned. Nagaland has a very active civil society, unlike other cases, but the state seldom takes it into account.





Weakening the insurgent/extremist groups seems to have been the predominant state strategy so far. But state security forces have been incapable of holding out on territory the Army has reclaimed from insurgents/extremists due to lack of coordination, cooperation and training.



Mirza Rehman

- The role Army and security forces have played in changing the course of civil society movements is important and should be examined.
- Arunachal Pradesh has to be a part of any discussion on the Northeast or we miss out on a very important component.
- The situation in the Northeast is precarious and has reached a point wherein it can seriously trouble the mainland. This has to be highlighted.

Sandeep Bhardwaj

Bangladesh's security situation has improved compared to previous years. Military rule was a primary reason behind the clampdown on left and right wing extremists and the number of violent incidents dropped as a direct consequence of military rule. Right wing violence did not see an upsurge even after the military retreated to give democracy its due place again. The military targeted law and order problems on a priority basis and undertook large-scale delegitimisation of left wing extremists to restore order. Bangladesh witnessed its most legitimate and peaceful elections since independence after military rule. Bangladesh's judiciary and legislature need more separation and independence. There is also the need for laws on terrorism and money laundering. Generally, political will is the most important factor in replicating the success of 2008 in 2009.

Smruti Pattanaik

- The military has been effective in curbing extremists, not wiping them out and this has to be explicitly mentioned.
- The society per say is getting more violent and criminalised and this is a major factor in the prevailing situation and also merits mention.
- The judiciary deserves credit for its new found active role.

NEPAL & SRI LANKA

Oliver Housden & Paul Soren

The situation in Nepal was assumed to improve considerably after 2007, but despite positive developments in the political sphere of the country in 2008 (e.g. the elections and the drafting of a new constitution), the conflict still remains unsolved with low intensity and armed violence continuing throughout the year in 2008.

With the announcement to hold elections to a constituent assembly on 10 April 2008, violence sparked again with all major political actors being involved. For the fear of being left out of the democratic process nearly every



riots and other violent incidents.

While the main actors of the conflict remained the same, the ongoing political developments and changes caused a change in the structure of these actors. Before 2008, 7-10 armed groups were responsible for the violence in Nepal, but with the major parties joining the political mainstream in 2008, parts of them felt betrayed so the number of small armed groups suddenly rose considerably (30-40). Besides political organizations, ethnic and religious groups started protesting against the government and eventually resorted to violence because they feared that their interests might not be sufficiently addressed, especially after the government signed an agreement with the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJF). There also still exist royalist movements like the Nepal Defence Army, which seek to restore the monarchy. Many of these small groups have started to replicate the Maoists strategy in order to achieve their political goals and they still recruit children that are involved in violence.

The challenges lying ahead for Nepal are severe. Violence did not stop after the elections. Even though the CPN-M has won the elections, the Maoists still resort to violence. Nepali society is becoming more and more desperate, facing unemployment and realizing that their expectations in the government and political parties have not been met yet. Intra- and inter-party conflicts still stall the process of political development and drafting of the new constitution bears complex difficulties. The aspirations of all groups of society have to be addressed and the disputes and debates about the type and structure of federalism shows how much dissent can be found in a diverse society like Nepal.

Overall, future developments in Nepal seem to be uncertain, but the abolishment of violent struggle for political goals would probably be the most stabilizing factor for the political system.

N Manoharan

The situation in Sri Lanka has changed dramatically throughout the year 2008. For the first time in the history of the conflict, government forces were able to make considerable progress in fighting the LTTE. But although the LTTE has lost much of its territory, violence is continuing. With regard to future developments, distinguishing between three dimensions of violence is useful. The first dimension of violence, comprising bomb attacks, ambushes and the like will probably continue for some time even if the LTTE lacks much of its former infrastructure and capability. The second dimension, namely sleeper cells, will be able to conduct operations of the first dimension throughout Sri Lanka, but will eventually die out. The third dimension of violence is probably the most dangerous to peaceful developments in the country. The guerilla warfare will continue for a long time, thus undermining efforts to solve the conflict.

Despite the astonishing success of the army's counterinsurgency in 2008, the costs of this victory were high. With regard to the human costs one can distinguish between people being caught in the cross fire (life threatening, severe injuries and casualties), and people becoming refugees or internally displaced people. On the other side the material costs of the conflict have risen considerably in face of the counterinsurgency. The war machinery and an economic downslide have caused severe problems for the Sri Lankan economy.





The future tasks of the government are difficult. It has to engage in demilitarization, democratization, development and devolution. They have to filter the civilians from the militants in the newly seized regions, they have to conduct elections in the East in order to incorporate the population as soon as possible into the political process, and they have to provide better funds for the respective provincial council in order to foster development. As people cannot wait any longer in this war-torn region there has to be at least an interim agreement in the near future. After that a conclusive solution for the conflict can be worked out, which has to be acceptable to all parties involved in order to secure peace and stability in Sri Lanka.

Zarin Ahmad

- Conclusion about the future of this conflict seems to be too idealistic. On the one hand the author has argued that violence will prevail to some extent and on the other hand he concludes that there is a secession of hostilities.
- A clarification of India's policy and attitudes towards the conflict in Sri Lanka is somewhat missing in the paper. It would be useful to pay more attention to this subject.
- Also more attention should be paid to the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka, which comprises approximately 4 per cent of the population. They are not well represented in the peace process and as they have lost much of their bargaining potential their situation will probably worsen, causing new problems and threats to peace and stability.
- A point with regard to the use of reliable sources and media information was made. As one has to rely on what you read, one has to be very careful in choosing the sources. Media reports on the security forces for example are highly biased and one should keep in mind, that the media also takes position in some way, when reporting enthusiastically about certain events.
- The last point raised concerned the methodological or theoretical framework. The discussant proposed to pay more attention to ethnography when dealing with conflicts such as in Sri Lanka, because the tendency to understand relations between states more as relations between people enables to have a more dynamic view on the subject that can probably provide for better insight.

STATE FAILURE & ARMED CONFLICTS

Sonali Huria

This is a thematic paper on 'failed or failing' states and armed conflict. In South Asia, due to weakening democratic institutions and severe challenges to state authority, states are failing. There are many destabilizing tendencies across borders like conflict spill overs, refugee movements, and weapons proliferation. Failed states are also called fragile, failing, faltering or weak states. Mostly they are poor and facing different types of violent conflicts. When we try to understand state failure, a state which is unable to carry out its assigned functions is said its 'failed.' So how a state is or ought to be and how effectively or ineffectively it performs its designated role helps to determine whether it is 'successful' or 'failing.' There is no single definition of





or not, like poor governance, corruption, and inadequate provisions of fundamental public services to its citizens, and effective control on its territory.

Is South Asia Failing? In terms of human development and human rights indicators, South Asia seems failing. According to the annual Failed States Index (FSI) 2008, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, parts of Latin America, and almost the whole of South Asia are becoming severely unstable due to these so-called 'failed' or 'failing' states. Out of the 177 countries 5 from the South Asia- Pakistan (9th), Bangladesh and Myanmar (12th), Nepal (23rd), and Sri Lanka (20th) have been placed in the top 25 failing states. The index ranks Bhutan, Maldives, and India as relatively more stable than their regional neighbours. The Global Peace Index 2008 which ranks countries on the basis of 'ongoing civil and trans-national wars' points out Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka as the most dangerous and unsafe places in the world.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 and Global Hunger Index 2008 also highlight more disappointing facts like poverty and hunger levels in these countries. South Asian countries are also among the most corrupt and in terms of human development indicators, they have a dismal record. There is growing concern regarding terrorism, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) as well as the spread of conventional weapons, which pose a grave threat to human security. Weak states are also vulnerable to the outbreak of diseases and epidemics.

State failure and armed conflict: Attempts have been made to study state failure and armed conflict theoretically. The nature of armed conflicts in South Asia has been marked by conflicts for independence, state formation, ethnic, tribal assertions; violent socio-economic movements and nation building. Mohammed Ayoob has made an attempt to explain the security predicament of the Third World. Poor economic conditions, repressive political systems, relative deprivation, and corruption, compounded by ethnic and other identity fault lines have all served to contribute to the rise and continuation of conflict. Ethnicity in itself is not a cause for conflict but a sense of deprivation among various ethnic communities enhances the possibility of conflict. The present discourse on failed states is an attempt to understand state weakness and linkages to armed conflicts.

P Sahadevan

- Make clear what the concept of Failed State is? And in order to operationalise it, see it in South Asian context.
 - Don't go totally by other indexes, you should really examine which states are failing or failed states in South Asia?
 - As the study is an annual exercise and has a limited timeframe, time factor should be kept in mind. For example, Bhutan might be potentially failing state in 2007 but can be better in 2008. So this categorization is dynamic not static.
 - It should be made clear as to which one is primary variable in the chapter - state failure or armed conflict?

