Security and Governance in South Asia

The workshop on 'Security and Governance in South Asia' was organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, in collaboration with the Centre for Public Affairs, New Delhi, India, on 9 March 2018. South Asia is a complex region with a number of difficult security challenges. These were discussed in terms of their impact on economy, trade and foreign policy of countries in the region, and the effort by the states to enhance governance as a pre-requisite for security.

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The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) organised a workshop on 'Security and Governance in South Asia', on 9 March 2018 in Singapore. It was held in partnership with the Centre for Public Affairs (CPA), New Delhi, India. The one-day workshop examined the intersection between security and governance in terms of the response and capacity of South Asian states to deliver these fundamental public goods.

In his welcome remarks, Professor Subrata K Mitra, Director of ISAS and Visiting Research Professor at NUS, explained that ISAS was both a think-tank, dedicated to the study of contemporary South Asia and connecting stakeholders from policy makers, academics and the

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business community in Singapore; and a research institute, committed to making a contribution to knowledge. He emphasised that workshops were special ISAS events, exploring cutting edge issues in detail and making key contributions to knowledge and policy. In this case, the workshop was aimed at understanding the combination of order and insecurity that could occur when governance was weak. He noted that, while the South Asian countries might appear peaceful, with stable democratic systems, on the ground, there were multiple sources of insecurity. He emphasised that the research community at ISAS was increasingly aware that there was a need to extend governance, and to bring security in.

Keynote Address: South Asia – Missed Opportunities and Neglected Challenges

Ambassador Shyam Saran, Former Foreign Secretary of India, delivered the keynote address for the event. He began by stressing the importance of the theme of the workshop, demonstrating that the issue was of great importance not just to countries in South Asia, but also throughout the world, in an environment which was transforming at an unprecedented pace. In this challenging environment, issues of governance and security were of vital importance, especially because they were transnational in nature and of global dimensions. Adding to this complexity, Ambassador Saran noted, was that independent, sovereign states claimed authority over everything within their national boundaries and remained the primary agents trying to govern the world.

Ambassador Saran highlighted the need for credible, impartial institutions and processes for governance. Using an example of the India-Myanmar border trade, he emphasised that undermining governance would lead to insecurity. The illegitimate trade of goods on the border, along with drug smuggling and illegal arms movement, compromised security. South Asia's porous borders and economic factors predicated these flows. He noted that similarly, on the most militarised border in the region, between India and Pakistan, there was a rampant flow of drugs, which also created pathways for terrorists. This underscored the need for strengthening governance in order to improve security.

South Asia was a single geo-political, geo-economic and ecological space, Ambassador Saran noted, with a shared history and culture. Despite this self-evident rationale for regional economic integration, South Asia continued to remain at the margins of the global trend towards such integration. One of the key reasons for this resistance to integration was the region's asymmetry, he explained. India, being the largest country in the region, the linguistic and ethnic spill overs from its borders caused apprehension and fear of domination among its neighbours. They were then likely to engage in hedging tactics as a countervailing force. He argued that India must take the lead in changing the regional landscape from one of a contested space to a community for peace and prosperity. It could do so by positioning itself as a transportation and communication hub for the region. Ambassador Saran opined that, as a convenient, efficient and cost-effective trade and transit hub for South Asia, India could turn the region's asymmetry into an advantage and its neighbours would cease to look upon it as a threat.

In fact, the South Asian countries, as in East Asia, ought to tap *proximity* as their biggest asset to improve economic prospects and bring prosperity to their people. He noted that, with a combination of modern cross-border infrastructure and smooth and efficient movement of goods and people across borders, proximity would reduce transport and transaction costs of trade and enhance the competitiveness of South Asian economies.

In closing, Ambassador Saran spoke about the ecological degradation to the region as a neglected challenge for all countries. Expanding populations, resource depletion and widespread environmental degradation had caused acute ecological crises, which were exacerbated by the effects of climate change. He urged the countries to look at this crisis with a South Asian perspective in order to generate collaborative and transnational responses.

Panel I: Governance and Security – The Case of India

Dr Jivanta Schottli, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS-NUS, chaired the first panel on 'Governance and Security: The Case of India'. The panellists for the session were Professor Mitra; Mr Zafar Iqbal Choudhary, Editor, The Dispatch (Jammu and Kashmir); and Dr Ajay K

Mehra, Honorary Director, CPA. The panel focused on India's security challenges, success in managing them and an analysis of on-going conflicts.

Professor Mitra opened the panel with a presentation on 'The Ministry of Home Affairs, Intelligence and Governance in India'. His presentation focused on the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the management of intelligence in India and highlighted its importance for both governance and security. Professor Mitra discussed two key problems in the management of intelligence – the first on concurrent responsibility, whereby agencies passed on intelligence in a selective manner, depending on their own assessments and personal linkages; and the second on the lack of security culture and consciousness, for which leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi paid dearly. He stressed the need for stringent standard operating procedures to make the rules of security binding on all. However, for this security culture to develop, there was a need for transparency in the security domain for the larger public. In highlighting the resilience of the Indian state, Professor Mitra stressed on the capacity of the Indian political system to adapt to a changing environment through institutional innovation and appropriate policies. Thus, in contrast to other post-colonial states, India had the capacity to successfully turn rebels into stakeholders, which made up for what it lacked in the management of intelligence.

The next speaker, Mr Iqbal, spoke on 'Power Politics: An Uninterrupted Fuel for Conflict in Kashmir'. In his presentation, he focused on Kashmir, which caused three wars between India and Pakistan, cost more than 50,000 lives and faced a separatist insurgency for close to 30 years. He highlighted that a 'live war' in Kashmir was the norm for both India and Pakistan, with no end in sight. Years of dialogue and negotiations had not yielded any result, leading to the perception that parties in both countries had a vested interest in keeping the conflict alive. Mr Zafar went on describe the politics of Jammu and Kashmir since 1947 and noted that weak political institutions had left a vacuum that was filled by separatists and pro-Pakistan activists. He argued that the power politics within Kashmir, on display most recently in the alliance between the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 elections, had left the electorate deeply dejected and alienated. In his concluding remarks, Mr Zafar emphasised that achieving peace in Kashmir would be impossible unless the exigencies of politics were not delinked from the Kashmir issue.

This was followed by Dr Mehra's presentation on 'Revolution, Governance and Security – India's Seven Decade-Old Policy Predicament'. Examining Naxalism, India's Maoist movement, he noted that it captured the problems of both governance and security. A combination of a lack of governance and mal-governance was inevitably going to lead to discontent, resentment and rebellion, eventually turning into a security problem. He noted that, while the government and successive political leadership, in the States and at the Centre, were aware of development deficits and issues relating to governance that were feeding the left-wing extremism, they took a predominantly security-centric approach. The government prioritised the enabling of security forces through training, equipment and technology. Therefore, he emphasised that development deficits, conflict over land and harsh security approaches were key factors behind the continuation of Maoist movements.

In analysing Naxalism today, Dr Mehra outlined two key findings that showed the movement to be in terminal decline. Firstly, the core leadership of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was ageing and young leadership was not forthcoming, nor were new recruits. The committed cadre had also been killed by security forces or surrendered and they had also managed to alienate the local population. Secondly, the security operations of the government had become more sophisticated and targetted, based on intelligence. These had resulted in low casualties and increased effectiveness. Despite these improvements, however, Dr Mehra cautioned that the root causes for the development of revolutionary politics of the Maoist variety – mal-governance, development deficits and land reforms, had yet to be addressed.

Panel II: Governance and Security across South Asia

Dr Mehra chaired the second panel on 'Governance and Security across South Asia: Internal and External Factors'. The panellists for the session were Mr Imtiaz Gul, Executive Director, Centre for Research and Security Studies, Pakistan; Dr Dilara Choudhury, Professor of Political Science, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh; Dr Sinharaja Tammita Delgoda, Distinguished Fellow, Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka; and Dr Yang Lu, Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Belt and Road Initiative, Tsinghua University, China. The panel focused on the regional context, and explored internal and external factors contributing

to security challenges in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, including the role of China in the region.

Mr Gul spoke, via video-conference, on 'Pakistan's Response to Terrorism'. He elaborated on the marked decline in terrorist incidents and fatalities in the country due to a coordinated anti-terror campaign, the application of hard power, anti-terror legislation and administrative measures taken against anti-state, militant groups. However, he cautioned that Pakistan remained under intense pressure from the United States (US) to do more against safe havens and the continued differentiation between good and bad Taliban. In addition, Pakistan was under tight international scrutiny, most recently placed on a grey watch list of countries found to be deficient in complying with international counter-terror financing and administrative measures. Therefore, Mr Gul recommended that Pakistan's military needed to step up its efforts to target militant groups, improve legislation to ban all militant and associated groups, and rationalise the discourse on relations with India.

Following Mr Gul's presentation, Dr Choudhury presented on 'The Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh: Security, Governance and Solidarity', referring to the exodus of more than one million Rohingyas into Bangladesh. In a resource and capacity-constrained host country, she highlighted the governance and security challenges in the provision of humanitarian assistance when there was a heightened risk of spread of infectious diseases, mental and physical health issues due to trauma, fear, depression and malnutrition along with trafficking and others forms of abuse of women and children. The upcoming monsoons posed another imminent threat, as the Rohingya shelters were located on cyclone, tidal wave and landslide prone areas. In light of this, Dr Choudhury noted that Bangladesh had three options – repatriation, relocation or integration of the Rohingyas. Of these, relocation/resettlement was the only option but also the most difficult since none of the regional countries except Indonesia were party to the United Nations (UN) Convention of 1951 or the 1967 Protocol and all South Asian countries had refugee problems of their own. She was critical of India for siding with Myanmar on the issue and failing to recognise and uphold basic human rights of Rohingyas. In conclusion, Dr Choudhury urged for regional and international solidarity on the Rohingya crisis and cautioned that Bangladesh must not stop collaborating with international partners, UN agencies and regional countries and continue to push for resettlement into a third country.

Dr Delgoda followed with a presentation on 'Sri Lanka: The Politics of Imbalance'. He examined the country's foreign policy and explained that Sri Lanka had, since independence, attempted to maintain balance and non-alignment with countries like the US and Russia, China and Japan, India and Pakistan. This balanced approach was a source of strength and stability for Sri Lanka and allowed it to exert influence in the international arena. However, Dr Delgoda noted, this changed dramatically during Sri Lanka's struggle with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa's administration largely abandoned Sri Lanka's traditional policy of balancing, witnessed through strained relations with India, the US and the Western powers, and increased dependence on China. After coming to power, the current Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration had declared its intention to rebalance the country's foreign policy, but three years later, it is widely perceived as appeasing India and the West. In conclusion, Dr Delgoda argued that Sri Lanka, desperate to compensate and rebalance, has veered from one extreme to another, generating a profound imbalance. This has cost the current administration diplomatically, economically and politically, as it sustained a stunning loss in the local elections in February 2018. He cautioned that a country's foreign policy should be the protection of national interests and strengthening its position in the international arena, but for Sri Lanka, it was the cause of vulnerability, strife and social divisions.

Dr Yang's presentation on 'Security and Development in South Asia: The Role of China' examined the strengthening of China's ties in the region through increased investments and infrastructure activity. Comparing China's and India's approaches to the region, she observed that India's approach was characterised by the assertion to secure power and strategic primacy in the region. China's development-oriented approach sought to strengthen bilateral ties in the region. Dr Yang argued that even though India had political leverage in South Asia, the rise of China's influence had changed the dynamics, with neighbours either choosing one power over the other or adopting balancing strategies between the two. If India could accept China's role in providing increased socio-economic development opportunities, then a power distribution model of 'co-governance' of India and China could emerge. In conclusion, Dr Yang noted that communications, dialogue and cooperation are needed between India and China for regional stability and prosperity.

Panel III: Plenary Session

Professor Mitra chaired the last panel discussion of the day and was joined by Dr Partha S Ghosh, Senior Fellow at Institute of Social Sciences, India and Professor Ajay Darshan Behera, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University, India.

Dr Ghosh presented on 'Porous Borders and Migrations', focusing on South Asia's borders and their relationship with governance and security. He noted that in the last seven decades, 50 million people had either permanently or temporarily crossed borders in the region in search of security, better living conditions and religious or ethnic proximity. This created societal and inter-state tensions. In addition, he argued that refugees and migrants impacted the politics of the host society by putting pressure on available scarce resources and amplifying communal and ethnic sentiments. Dr Ghosh highlighted that South Asia was a civilisational space and events had regional reverberations. Thus, relations between the two largest communities of the region (Hindus and Muslims) were critically important and India could play a key role in maintaining social equilibrium. However, he observed that present political trends in India were not encouraging. Hindu fundamentalists were humiliating Muslims at home and branding them as the 'other'. For instance, the Rohingya issue showed how India treated a humanitarian crisis as a purely Islamic fundamentalist issue, calling them 'illegal immigrants'. This trend, he cautioned, would embolden Islamic and Buddhist fanatics in neighbouring countries and regional peace would be destroyed, especially due to the regions fluid borders and cross border ethnicities. In conclusion, Dr Ghosh stated that regional peace had nothing do with strict or fluid borders, UN-enforced ceasefire line or cross border migrations. It depended instead on regional tranquillity, inter-ethnic harmony and broad-based social justice.

The last presentation of the day by Professor Behera was on 'Security and Governance in South Asia: Conceptual and Policy Challenges'. He examined theoretical and policy issues arising from the broadening notion of security, from states to societies in general and South Asia in particular. He observed that countries in South Asia were challenged by a myriad of governance issues – counter-terrorism, cyberspace regulation, human trafficking, illegal migration and corruption among others. However, the concept of 'securitisation' had allowed these issues to get framed as security issues. This framing was a problem and created policy challenges. He recommended de-securitising issues by taking them out of the realm of security and bringing

them back into 'normal politics'. Thus, reconceptualising the idea of national security itself would restrict the ambit of security to what threatened the state and human lives. In conclusion, Professor Behera stated that there was a need to redefine security for the sustainability and stability of states. However, this could not come about by securitising the state-building process which was part and parcel of domestic political processes.

Conclusion

Professor Mitra concluded the workshop by highlighting the importance of the workshop for both South Asia and Singapore. He mentioned electoral democracy, autonomy as a means to an end or an end itself, good governance and intelligence, policing and democratisation in the context of the Naxalite movement, hard and soft borders, securitisation and democracy and maritime security as themes that had emerged from the workshop and which would be addressed in the shape of an edited volume.

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