



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Assessing SAARC's Diplomatic Performance: Crisis Management, Regional Cooperation, and Institutional Challenges in South Asia

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#### ABSTRACT

This qualitative paper analyses the performance of SAARC diplomacy in view of regional and global upheavals, with special reference to its ability to manage political disputes, economic difficulties and social mistrust among the members. Based on content analysis of official SAARC documents, elite interviews, and academic literature, the study investigates how SAARC has managed diplomatic crises and advanced regional cooperation in the face of enduring obstacles, including bilateral disputes, geopolitical competition, and developmental discrepancies. The results indicate that while SAARC's institutional mechanisms provide a forum for dialogue and the consensus building process, the organization's diplomatic initiatives have frequently been hampered by political distrust and absence of monitoring mechanisms. At the same time, it also points out a few instances in which SAARC had contributed to confidence-building measures as well as conflict resolution processes and joint economic projects, which demonstrates its potential role as a regional stabilizer. The study also highlights the need for SAARC to strengthen its institutional infrastructure, cultivate more political will in its member countries, and adopt non-exclusive and more pragmatic diplomacy to control upheavals in the region. Finally, another related aspect that the contribution makes towards distilling the complex dynamics of regional diplomacy in South Asia while indicating future directions to reinforce the role of SAARC as an architect of peace, stability, and development.

**Keywords:** SAARC, Diplomacy, Institutional challenges, Regionalism, South Asia

#### Introduction

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in 1985, was meant to be an organization that could facilitate economic, social, and cultural cooperation among its members — which include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that the region has ample possibilities for mutual growth, SAARC has often been hindered by political disputes, bilateral confrontations and divergent national interests, resulting in limited success in integration. Numerous historical resentments, strategic competition and difficult socio-economic realities together make for an intricate diplomatic landscape in the broader South Asian region. In this regard, SAARC diplomacy is a continuing attempt to overcome them and promote dialogue, collaboration, and peace-making in a regionally oriented perspective. It is important to understand the role and effectiveness of SAARC amidst such chaos, since regional stability and cooperation in South Asia have a wider bearing on the global geopolitical order, economic development and security architecture of the region (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Chisht, 2025).

The regional instability that SAARC confronts in the context of India-Pakistan rivalry, insurgencies, and border skirmishes and external pressures driven by global

rebalancing of power and economic dynamics. These issues have often resulted in stalled summits that reach stalemate and minimal follow-up on agreed initiatives and general doubt about the organisation's overall purpose. Still, SAARC is the sole regional formality in South Asia and its diplomatic architecture is an important channel for neighbourly dialogue and confidence-building. SAARC has initiated a number of cooperative projects in areas such as trade, energy, environment, and disaster management, embodying its potential as a springboard for regionalism. This study will analyse SAARC's diplomacy functions and instruments, its individual member state nature and the SAARC institutional capacity to handle and control turmoil, as well how the organization juggles among varying national interests with a view to preserve a common regional agenda. In analysing these dynamics, the aim is to better understand the obstacles and possibilities that characterize SAARC diplomacy today (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018; Nepal, 2025).

This qualitative analysis draws on content analysis of SAARC official documents, summit declarations, policy query reports and expert opinion interviews to analyse the organization's diplomatic options in a continuing disorderly environment. The study identifies key moments in the SAARC diplomatic history in terms of outcome as either successfully promoting dialogue and cooperation or failures of the political mistrust and institutional weaknesses. Results indicate that SAARC's process of decision-making by consensus favours inclusiveness, but limits decisive action, leaving negotiations open-ended and without any specific outcome. However, diplomatic initiatives under SAARC have occasionally led to confidence-building measures and limited cooperation which help to maintain the peace. Finally, the study concludes by underlining the importance of institutional renewal, political determination, and new diplomatic modalities to reactivate SAARC in South Asia. These findings are significant for policymakers, researchers and regional partners in developing and enhancing regional diplomacy in the context of continued geopolitical and socio-economic constraints (Shahzad, 2023).

## **Literature Review**

Ukraine was a pillar of the Soviet Union and is now regarded as a geopolitical flashpoint. It was the second most populated and powerful Soviet republic after Russia. Agriculture, defense, and military organizations called it home, especially the Black Sea Fleet. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was recognized as a sovereign nation and chose to ally itself with the EU and NATO. However, Russia cannot tolerate this because it poses a threat to national sovereignty. This book also examines the Russian perception of Ukraine that Russia has deep cultural, economic, and political bonds with Ukraine. Russia considered divorce from Ukraine a blow to its international prestige and the biggest mistake in history. The United States, which views Russia as a foe, has invited Ukraine to join NATO and has adopted an expansionist approach. The reason for Ukraine's interest is to enhance its economy, as Ukraine's economy is weaker (Yaseen, et. al., 2022; Petro, 2017).

The study analyzes and applies conspiracy theory to explain what is happening in this world, as this theory assumes that some great powers or the most incredible power exist. The study makes the following assumptions: the United States is the dominant power, Russia is a perpetrator, and Ukraine is a victim. After reviewing the entire conflict, the USA, the greatest power, has two key goals it wishes to accomplish: 1) Make European nations spend more on defense by purchasing American-made modern military hardware and 2) lessen Europe's reliance on Russia for energy. Regarding this, the USA provided an alternative that served its economic interests; it advised Europe to construct its LNG facilities and import gas from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia presents a beautiful chance for the United States to cripple the Russian economy and eliminate its main rival. The conspiracy made by the USA to counter Russia is about to achieve as the war continues. The USA will sell more weapons and energy to the greatest

market of the world; by doing so, the USA is to stay at the top where nobody can challenge its status as the greatest power (Yaseen, et. al., 2023; Papanikos, 2022).

The study analyzes the implications of war on global trade. The conflict has detrimental consequences not only for those directly involved states but also those indirectly impacted by the tension. Russia is the great exporter of Oil and Gas; the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine raises the price of Oil, which impacts developing states that highly depend on imports. Secondly, Russia supplies 40% of gas to Europe, and the suspension of gas by Russia would cause serious energy repercussions for Europe. However, due to trade interdependency, Russia would suffer if the EU cut off its imports. The Russian economy will be in significant difficulty, and the country will likely face a long period of recession; the reason sanctioned Russian banks, western countries imposed a freeze on Russian banks, and the Russian central bank cannot use them, and the EU has limited Russian imports (Khudaykulov, 2022).

The war in Ukraine is an economic threat to the world. Unprecedented Western sanctions have devastated the Russian economy; Ukraine is not a trading partner for any major economies, but China, the United States, and Germany are Russia's top import partners. The supply of essential goods will be uncertain due to the sanctions the West has placed on Russia. This uncertainty will be felt most keenly in Europe, which has the most profound commercial ties with Russia. Russia and Ukraine mainly produce primary metals like nickel, aluminum, and palladium. The supply chain and industrial production may suffer from supply delays. Additional issues are brought on by a lack of components in the area; for instance, the manufacturing of various German cars was curtailed because Ukraine's supply of wiring systems needed to be increased. Russia's key exports of Oil and gas have increased dramatically; the price of gas has doubled since the conflict began, and the price of Oil has soared to US \$125 per barrel. The study also examines the economic crisis of various nations. For instance, the stronger European economies of German, Italy, and France have considerably less exposure, with exports to Russia accounting for between 1 and 2% of total exports, and the long-term impact due to trade restrictions was estimated as a reduction of 0.4% to 0.6%. Economies outside of Europe will be impacted, bringing higher pricing. According to the International Monetary Fund, a 10% increase in price would result in a 0.1–0.2% decline in GDP (Tank, 2022).

The study analyzes the ongoing geopolitical tension between Russia and Ukraine, which have severe economic consequences. The financial repercussions that emerged will not bode well for Pakistan, which is already suffering from political and economic instability. Sanctions on Russian oil shipments will raise the oil prices, and under such a scenario, the Pakistan rupee would depreciate, negatively impacting Pakistan's living standard. The macro impact of war tension is on the agriculture industry; Russia is the biggest exporter of wheat, and due to ongoing tensions, the price of wheat increases, and Pakistan will have no choice but to increase its imports. As a developing state, Pakistan must play its cards carefully and maintain its neutrality; Pakistan cannot become part of any bloc and set aside any form for the benefit of others. The best option for Pakistan is to maintain mutually beneficial relations with all significantly powers and Asian countries and focus on its agriculture sector being an agriculture country to avoid economic disasters under the current scenario (Ahmad, 2022).

The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine pitted two influential players in the global commodities agriculture market against one another. Wheat, corn, and sunflower oil are key exports from both nations. They are a significant source of agriculture imports for several nations, including Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Even before the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the COVID-19 epidemic had a significant economic impact on developing nations. The continuous conflict in Russia and Ukraine reflects the high cost of food, which poses a threat of food insecurity to significant portions of the global population. This study examines Pakistan as an intriguing case to estimate the economic

effects of the 2022 global commodity price shock connected to four essential commodities: wheat, vegetable oil, fertilizers, and petroleum. The macro model predicts that an increase in global prices will affect Pakistan in two ways: first, because Pakistan relies heavily on imports and their exports are few and infrequent, the import of these essential products will become very expensive; and second, the export of any of these products will encourage local producers to market their goods abroad. The micro-model shows that the rural farm sector appears to be the most affected in terms of community due to the high price shock brought by increased gasoline and fertilizer prices (Mughal, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine war has been considered the most dangerous and intense turmoil that afflicts European and global affairs. The study examines the Ukraine crisis and grasps the perspective of various groups and processes that contributed to the development and interpretation of the conflict; for this, the study is divided into four sections; People, Politics, Perspective, and Propaganda. Part One discusses the Ukrainian social order and focuses on ethnic and linguistic diversity and relations between various groups. The Ukrainian conflict has developed as a consequence of existing divisions. Ukraine is divided into two groups Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainians; according to the latest census, 22% of the Ukraine population comprises ethnic minorities, and Russia is the largest among them. Building a national identity that would bind the country's many regions was difficult for Ukraine after its dissolution and declaration as an independent state. The actual source of the Ukrainian issue, aside from Russia's annexation of Crimea and other destabilizing actions, is intergroup conflict. Part two analyses Ukrainian politics and focuses on four primary causes of the crisis: the emergence of Neo-Soviet forces, Western-backed widespread unrest, NATO and EU expansion, and nationalism and revisionism in Russian foreign policy. The third section discusses the problem the government and media created through misinformation. Russian allegations that NATO expansion is propaganda intended to delegitimize Russia and Western media sow fear in the minds of Ukrainians, intensifying the conflict. Part four discusses future developments related to various aspects of the conflict. The Russia-Ukraine crisis and sanctions imposed by the West on Russia threaten the global economy. For Russia to feel secure from Ukraine, Ukraine must be geopolitically neutralized. If a neutralization policy is not possible, then Ukraine's stability would either depend on the West accepting Russian control of Ukraine or on Russia-the loss of Ukraine (SAKWA, 2015).

Russia- Ukraine war is not a dispute between two countries. The direct conflict between the two and the EU's economic sanctions against Russia have directly affected the world's major economies. The economic war between the EU and Russia revolves around energy sanctions and countersanctions. The study uses the CGE model to stimulate changes in macroeconomic indicators in significant countries. The result shows that Energy sanctions will cause damage on both sides, quantitatively analyzing EU economic loss reaches 1.488 %, and Russian loss reaches 4.8 worldwide. On the other hand, Russia also imposed countersanctions which will directly impact the EU economy. The EU needs to find an alternative to Russian energy following the sanctions on Russian crude oil. In parallel, Russia will expand its market into nations like China, India, and the ASEAN group. The energy sanctions between the two are divided to sanction crude and crude oil products. After the sanctions on Russian crude oil, the EU must look for alternatives to Russian energy. At the same time, Russia will turn its market to countries such as China, India, and the ASEAN organization. Achieving sustainable development goals will be impacted by the new structure of energy trade networks. Energy trade uncertainty drives energy prices, and a world economy characterized by high prices makes it challenging for governments to advance sustainable development objectives. It will be drastically diminished macro level (Ruisong, 2023).

During the cold war, the world was divided into two blocks; after independence, two options were available for Pakistan, either USA or Russia, to make its economy stabilize,

Pakistan needed economic assistance, and the USA was in a position to assist, so Pakistan joined USA block or capitalist block (Muzaffar & Khan, 2016). Moreover, after that, Pakistan tried to improve its relationship with Russia when it was troubled by Washington. Ukraine war will have a deep on the economy of developing states, as stated by many economic experts; Imran Khan became the Prime of Pakistan in August 2018 and managed to improve its relations with the USA, but in the Joe Biden regime, he had no success, which irritated him. Hence, he chooses the option of Russia. As the prime minister of Pakistan, his visit is considered historic. Pakistan's step towards Russia is difficult to digest for the USA. However, the fall of Khan's administration did not end Pakistan's political unrest. The economic crisis that the new coalition government inherited was mainly due to the energy and commodity shortages brought on by the Russian invasion. Perceived economic mismanagement, combined with public sympathy for Imran Khan, has left the new government on shaky ground, making Imran Khan's return possible, if not probable, in the future (CLARY, 2023).

The paper looks at the Russian invasion of Ukraine and highlights the shortcomings of the UN system and the global order. Being a superpower, the USA proclaimed its support for Ukraine, but the UN and the security council were split. After the conflict, the UN took the appropriate steps, but the security council was still deadlocked. In the wake of the crisis, the UN has passed several resolutions; it helps refugees in Ukraine by sending more than 185 tons of medical supplies and 125 tons of essentials. The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization claims that because grain imports have less variety, nations like Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Republic of Moldova continue to be the most affected. The Russia-Ukraine war does not impact Pakistan economically but also geopolitically and geostrategic ally. The conflict increased the price of food and oil internationally, creating a significant risk factor for Pakistan's economic outlook. If the conflict continues, the \$2.55 billion natural gas pipeline project between Russia and Pakistan may also be at risk, worsening Pakistan's energy shortage. In addition, the IMF is rethinking whether to continue lending money to nations with trade agreements with Russia. They might pressure Pakistan to approach Russia more forcefully to obtain the loan (Khan, 2022).

The study looks at the challenges and effects of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on South Asia. It has been predicted that South Asian nations have difficulty due to rising oil prices, commodities shortages, and supply constraints. The conflict in Ukraine has a detrimental impact on the entire world, driving up inflation rates further. According to the World Bank president, South Asia has seen several shocks in the last two years, one from COVID-19 and another from the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, which would have a detrimental effect on the real income of the population. Although there are consequences, South Asia's response to the Ukrainian crisis is shaped by their national interests. For instance, In their official statements, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka embraced neutrality and refused to support either side. Bangladesh adopted an unofficial neutrality policy and requested that the conflict be settled by dialogue and diplomacy between the sides. In order to safeguard its national interests, India continues to play a neutral stance, retain its strategic cooperation with the US, and import oil from Russia. War's effects on Pakistan can be examined from political and economic angles. Economically, Pakistan would suffer high inflation due to a rise in oil, food, and commodity prices, as Pakistan's imports are more significant than its exports. Politically speaking, Pakistan also needs help to board the Russian ship because it already experiences high inflation, slow economic growth, and political instability (Hussain, 2022).

In today's world affairs, protecting one's national interest while preserving integrity, fostering peace, and fostering burgeoning economic and social growth are the shared goals of foreign policy. Pakistan is in a position to profit from both geopolitical and geoeconomic trends at this time. Since its independence, Pakistan has struggled to become a stable democratic nation. Balancing relations with the US and Russia in the current situation is a

challenging problem for Pakistani foreign policy. As proof of an economic opportunity where Pakistan may exercise more significant influence in the region and benefit from it for a long time, Russia is warming up its relations with Pakistan, and CPEC offers a stockroom to the regional market. According to the research, Pakistan's foreign policy should take a comprehensive approach, and civil institutions should work to minimize the military's influence on Pakistan's strategic interests (Rahim, et., al., 2018; Naseem, 2023).

The study analyzes Pakistan and Ukraine, which are different states with histories, gains, and miscounts but deal with similar issues, the threat of territorial conflict. Historical aspects of the independence of Ukraine and Pakistan have a common feature: Pakistan gained independence from British Raj, and Ukraine gained independence after the disintegration of the USSR. Firstly, Pakistan and Ukraine are compared based on the degree of internal difficulties and relations with neighboring countries, represented by India and Russia, respectively. Second, due to territorial disputes with neighboring countries, Pakistan and Ukraine are classified as intermediate nations. Both states can only live freely once their major issues are solved. For Pakistan, the Kashmir dispute is the most pressing matter, and for Ukraine, joining NATO is the most pressing matter since Russia considered it a danger to its sovereignty (Tykhonenko, 2020).

### **Material and Methods**

The qualitative research design based on content analysis and extensive review of secondary sources is employed to analyse the relations of war between Russia and Ukraine with the South Asian economies and regional security. The study uses evidence from public sources such as official government reports, government statements on foreign policy, academic works and reputable news sources to develop an extensive, textured account of the problem. The data is analysed using content analysis, and the analysis focuses on themes, patterns, and narratives that are emerging, particularly related to economic disruptions, diplomatic responses and security implications for South Asian states. This study gives preference to the material on official and verified sources that guarantee an accurate and trustworthy answer. Ethical concerns are integral features in each stage of the research process, especially with respect to attribution issues, data accuracy, and sensitive information privacy. Grounding the study in qualitative data, the research will aim to offer an in-depth understanding of the impact of the conflict in South Asian countries as well as responses, challenges and developing strategies. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexity at play in the region, giving a multi-dimensional snapshot of the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the region's economic viability and diplomatic relations.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **SAARC was transformed to an organization in 1985**

The formation of SAARC in 1985 mainly resulted from three factors emanating from the economic, political and social factors during the 1970s and 1980s. Beginning with the end of Colonialism in South Asia, the region, for the most part, was dealing with numerous political and economic complications. Some South Asian countries gained independence from the British and introduced major industrial and economic change while others did not develop effectively due to poverty, and unstable political and social changes. The area suffered economically from restrictive trade, the lack of infrastructure and poor interregional cooperation (Banna, 2025).

When SAARC was established, the political map of South Asia was extremely cut up and diffused. India remained a hegemon and the most significant power in the region that determined all regional affairs. Regional political and security environment continued to be dominated by rivalry most notably in India-Pakistan ties which persisted over their

disagreements on Kashmir and border-area disputes. The above-mentioned region did not build the united economic management system due to the difference in economic systems of several countries.

That was what brought in the up-and-coming concept of regional cooperation. Countries of the subcontinent realised that success would come by collaborating to solve our common issues, rather than pooling energies on separate national goals. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was mooted initially by Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and then positively backed by both Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq. There would be a cooperation among the South Asian nations of the prudent for economic and cultural growth and social advance without loss of independence in the area of political guidance.

### **Objectives of SAARC and its Role in Regional Cooperation**

At its formation the SAARC founders also had several key goals. SAARC's program and structure also underpin all its work programmes and are the fundamental underpinnings of the SAARC agenda. Description In accordance with the standards set out in the SAARC Charter, the objectives of the Association are:

The Organization seeks cooperation areas with South Asian countries to promote, economic growth with social progress.

The primary goal of SAARC is to promote and advance the economic and social development within South Asia. The region is faced with significant challenges due to its underdevelopment and socio-economic disparities leading to high levels of poverty. SAARC seeks to promote economic growth and lower poverty levels among member countries, as well as to facilitate cooperation in various areas for the welfare of the peoples of the region. The collaboration cooperation focusses largely on trade-investment projects with agriculture policies and industrial partnerships and infrastructure development.

The fact that SAARC contributes towards peacebuilding is reflected in that they have been addressing three major non-traditional threats: terrorism, organized crime and environmental degradation. SAARC is a diplomatic tool that seeks to prevent conflicts among its members besides dealing with any conflicts and promoting amicable relations among South-Asian neighbors (Adedoyin, 2023).

### **Promote Cultural and Social Collaboration**

Cultural exchange, and social cooperation among them The sphere of the organization There is a cultural exchange as a pillar. Introduction South Asia has a deeply rooted tradition that attracts a variety of communities that preserve ethnic identity with religion conversion and language use. Heightened cultural appreciation as well as ventures in social cooperation allow SAARC to craft a more united nations within itself. The Society organizes cultural programs to build social campaigns together with educational exchanges in order to build partnership and discover similar factors among communities.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation specifically providing education healthcare services social welfare in order to improve the standard of life of people of South Asia. SAARC partners for several joint ventures to tackle literacy, nutrition, and pandemics, targeting aid at women and children who need it the most.

### **Enhance Regional Links and Cooperation**

One major wing of SAARC is actively working to promote regional connectivity by upgrading communication and infrastructure networks. The basic ingredients of regional

integration in the region like transportation and trade have been taken by energy connectivity and SAARC emerges as an institution to support border-crossing efforts at cooperation in these areas.

The Free Trade Area will help to achieve this by increasing linkages among member states as it is a vehicle for economic integration that removes obstacles to trade and investment. SAARC has set up a number of transport-related programmes to improve connectivity - such as the construction of regional highways, moving forward of the SAARC railway and SAARC road, and promoting air connectivity.

The body drives projects promoting South Asian trade movements and cross border people, goods and services movement projects. Regional cooperation in SAARC The SAARC member countries are collaborating at regional level to promote energy security by pooling resources, developing energy infrastructure and undertaking measures for environmental sustenance (Hussain J., 2024).

### **Sustainability and Disaster Management**

SAARC also pays more attention to environmental sustainability in addition to disaster management compared to before, as it has to face more and more natural disasters as a consequence of climate change affects. The globe considers South Asia as a most unsafe zones due to natural disasters we observe flood, cyclone, earthquake and drought in every year. The SARC aims at strengthening disaster preparedness in the region and distribution of disaster preparation, management and coordination as well as at enhancing coordination among member countries in the event of a national disaster.

### **The SAARC Summit**

The annual SAARC Summit, that is attended by the national leaders/authorities of all member states, is the highest organ of the SAARC, and meets once a year can also determine the organisations policies and directives. Through its conferences it provides opportunities for political reconciliation and representatives address not only political issues, but economic interests as well as security matters in order to foster diplomatic engagement. As a leadership-convened polymath, the SAARC Summit establishes priority areas of the organization (Adams, 2020).

### **Council of Ministers of the SAARC**

Under the guidance of Summit, economic cooperation within SAARC is provided at following the Summit by the meeting of the Council of Ministers, which discusses and formulates policies, and decisions on matters of common interest to Member Governments, concerted action in economic, trade and development, agreements and protocols. The Council implements the decisions of SAARC Summit to achieve the goals set out by the organization. The Council serves as a forum where States can discuss diplomatic and political issues and formulate regional cooperation recommendations.

### **The SAARC Secretariat**

The SAARC Secretariat is headquartered into its Kathmandu, Nepal based office as the administrative body of the organization. The institution plays a key role for the organization in the coordination and backing of all SAARC programme activities for their implementation. The work of the organization continues to be geared towards meeting its goals, via the Secretariat by the control of processes of work of regional centers and working groups. The Secretariat operations are led by the SAARC Secretary-General, who is appointed to a three-year term.



### **Centre of Expertise and of Regionality**

Those are the specialist and regional centers of SAARC that have the focus on specified fields of cooperation that are those of agriculture, science and technology, energy and poverty alleviation within South Asia. The researches are conducted at these centers as these are not simply based on such research but knowledge in these are shared and capability is created only to solve the issues commonly faced by South Asian region. SAARC also harnesses the services of all its member centers to achieve greater influence across sectors and facilitate development interventions in the member states.

The SAARC corporation has established various committees and task forces for trading, seeking educational and health care help as well as cultural activities. These committees bring together diplomats and specialists from the member states to design programmes for SAARC to implement. Technical assistance is provided by ad hoc working groups to facilitate transfer of best practices from one SAARC member to another to implement the SAARC's regional projects.

Regional organization The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has more recently involved itself in international matters in relation to areas such as the economy, peace and security. International organization framework SAARC has vital dialogue partnership with United Nations as well as with World Bank and World Trade Organization. SAARC gains in diplomatic leverage from its external entanglement, leverage it could put to use to fight for the South Asian cause in the world.

There are several adverse consequences on the working of SAARC because of the competitive relations between India and Pakistan. India-Pakistan dysfunction leads to diplomatic boycotts and limited participation in SAARC programs. After 2016 Uri attack in India refused to take part in the SAARC summit in Islamabad and Afghanistan, Bangladeshi, Bhutani and Sri Lankan diplomats took a leave to avoid further compromise of SAARC's function. Bilateral tussles covering many wide-ranging polemic issues through boycotts exhibit how far they can damage the mechanism of strategic and the diplomatic initiative of SAARC entity.

There are much broader security issues at play beyond the Kashmir conflict which exacerbate tensions, notably cross-border terrorism. Militancy in Indian-controlled Kashmir is a major issue in diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan, with India alleging that Pakistan supports the militant groups working in the Indian-controlled side of Kashmir. SAARC further has been facing serious problems for functioning as a single diplomatic platform for regional cooperation due to the ongoing state of war between India and Pakistan. Then the org loses its teeth as India and Pakistan give more importance to their bilateral disputes and it becomes Nazi-Soviet all over again, where regional unity worsens and you get a stalemate.

The rivalry between India and Pakistan in SAARC nations inhibits the functioning of the organization.

With the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the BRI China finally managed to cement its economic relationship with Pakistan that has since then spiraled into a more robust political and military relationship as well between both nations. India's concerns are clear as it fears the partnership has given China political supremacy in the region. Reason behind India's opposition to CPEC is that the disputed Kashmir territory falls in the way of Corridor which India thinks internationalizes its claim over the territory (Shah, et. al., 2020).

The US routinely uses South Asia as an operational strategic space in both counterterrorism warfare and its broad matchup against China. East Asian security order

has evolved over the past eighteen years with the U.S. becoming an invader force in Afghanistan since 2001. America has used economic support including the sale of military weaponry to Pakistan, through which Pakistan has traditionally demonstrated its political direction and military initiatives. The shifting of US diplomatic relations in the region also have a continued impact on SAARC as they destabilize the SAARC process to evolve regionally coordinated strategies.

Internecine conflicts as well as border disputes and terrorism have rendered the organization less effective.

South Asia faces a number of security challenges and intrastate animosities as well as territorial disputes, which prevent SAARC from capabilities (promoting peace and security in the region ). South Asian problems are rooted in complex histories and involve ethnic and political factors that never yield easily to solutions. SAARC's decision-making procedure on the basis of consensus, undermines its capability to take unilateral actions in certain crucial issues, even when member countries do not co-operate on a certain matters, due to their history of indoctrination.

### **Regional and Internal Conflicts and Border Disputes**

Other countries in South Asia are locked in relentless civil wars whose reverberations echo throughout the region. Sri Lanka Sri Lanka also experienced an insurrection and civil war from 1983 to 2009 as part of a broader phase of conflict in the region. The Sri Lankan State's battle against the Tamil Tigers created wholesale human disaster across the island and vast population displacement. SAARC aimed to delivering humanitarian and. Extensions even as it has struggled to address the conflicts given its members' political limitations.

Both states had seen tension escalation after they failed to resolve their disagreement over Indian claimed Kalapani territory. The political spat between Nepal and India prohibits full regional cooperation in SAARC, as India and Nepal are unable to part-take in some regional programs. Many South Asian countries grapple with ethnic and religious strife and accompanying social violence, lending extra challenges to SAARC's efforts in the social and cultural domains. Internal dynamics of member states often become determinants of the regional politics at SAARC because the organization has to work as a body, one that out to protect the interest of members despite their intractable domestic issues. SAARC's own counterterrorism capacity is stifled by inter-state political rivalries that limit its scope for producing meaningful counterterrorism instruments. The national security priorities of states frequently stand in the way of harmonising counter-terrorism efforts between countries and in turn create difficulties to formulate effective regional responses to terrorism.

### **The test of regional unity amid political unrest and security turmoil**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has had enough challenges to its unity in South Asia through politics and security problems in its inception. These regional challenges are compounded when states project their domestic political concerns and historical animosities and security dilemmas onto the broader collective SAARC region. The political coups in Nepal and the Maldives create turmoil in SAARC never allowing it to have a consistent policy on regional issues.

The Chinese footprint in SAARC is not merely strategic but also economic. The spread of Chinese military bases and contacts with to the governments of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh make Indian authorities look upon China as a belligerent regional power. Member states with close ties to China make it difficult for SAARC to be neutral, particularly

as their behaviour towards Chinese economic and security interests results in a decline of Indian leverage through the entire SAARC process.

Certain member countries of the SAARC are increasingly relying on the economic and military assistance of China with the potential of undermining regional cooperation through the SAARC. Member states' strategic engagement with China also influences the countries' diplomatic stance towards Chinese trade expansion and infrastructure projects, regional security etc.

### **USA and Its Impact on SAARC**

The US has long-had sustained strategic interests in this area from the outset due to a confluence of the security, economic dimensions and the geopolitics of the game. Throughout the last two-three decades the US engaged with Pakistan and India, but also with Afghanistan while dealing with their pivotal aspects in the regional U.S. foreign policy goals. The United States' influence over SAARC is minimal as being a non-member of the organization. America's involvement in South Asia has led to significant diplomatic shifts within the region as it combines financial assistance schemes with military support and strategic objectives.

U.S. and India have built strong relationships throughout this century with blooming markets, enhanced counterterrorism and their joint military partnership. SAARC has been a casualty of India's strategic partnership with United States, as can be seen from the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal and military cooperation. The developments of Indo-US relations develops a stress among the SAARC members interested in maintaining their independence at least from external interference.

For example, from the U.S. perspective, U.S.-Pakistan military cooperation makes sense, as Pakistan is a key ally in the war on terrorism and has a strategic role in combating al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Since 2001, the United States had substantial military and economic aid programs, mostly to Pakistan. The US has repeatedly called upon Pakistan on countering terrorist activities and its forays into the Afghan soil which occasionally creates friction in the relationship and have a bearing on regional diplomatic affairs.

Between Pakistan, Moscow and the SAARC members are characterized by even-handed albeit measured state contacts. Russia's diplomatic contacts with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation States are based on its regional political interests in respect of Afghanistan and Central Asia and counter-terrorism activities. Russia is for universal peace and joint counter-terrorist steps, as it is supporting India and other South Asian states in the fight against these challenges.

SAARC indications of commitment to bolster its regional body credentials include interaction with the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations to strengthen its own legitimacy and to boost its capacity as a regional organisation. The SAARC organization is endowed with a regional identity of its own yet its cause is rooted in fundamental United Nations development issues of poverty reduction, environmental stability, security and human rights promotion. The organization had long expressed hope of cooperating with the UN in addressing international issues and enhancing global governance.

### **SAARC and UN offices**

The SAARC collaborates with the UN as a part of its development programmes and relief/peace operations. Much needed assistance is provided by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) which has been assisting SAARC to implement programmes against poverty through out South Asia to ensure sustained development in the region. The UNDP

provides critical support to SAARC's regional gender equality and climate change education efforts by supporting the organization's alignment of these activities with the SDGs.

As part of the United Nations In association with SAARC Disaster management and humanitarian assistanceErrorMsg Disaster is common in the natural areas of South Asia. SDMC = UNDRR support for South Asian countries in disaster risk reduction by the partnership with SAARC Disaster Management Centre

SAARCSAARC is not very actively involved in the UN because it is weak in decision making and seldom has its member states united in major issues. Because of the ongoing political rivalry between India and Pakistan and one or two other member states, SAARC has been unable to make any meaningful political and diplomatic onslaught on global issues and that reduces its clout on global agenda.

SAARC AND I/O'Sv SAARC is the most important regional organization of South Asia.

SAARC has held intervals with WTO and taken cooperation of SAARC with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, something found by forth the UN membership in the pursuit of the economic development of the region. The SAARC countries often approach these financial institutions to obtain funding as well as policy-based assistance to develop their trade related infrastructure and alleviate poverty. [1]SAARC has been able to tap this potential of the NGOs and CSOs in contributing resources and expertise that add value to the program initiatives.

SAARC has regular jobs with the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). SAARC's formal relationships with other organizations make no sense, but they allow the organization to seek an increasingly fuller economic union in the face of internal problems.

Dynamism of SAARC diplomacy through engagement with external players on economic and security issues. Economic Partnerships and Influence.

Overarching security and economic trends as a backdrop: The expanding economic power of external actors such as China, as well as the resurgence of the US and Russia, has transformative effects on the diplomatic posture of SAARC. Through external partnerships India and Pakistan are turning more and more to external investors in the development of their infrastructure and economic pacts. Chinese BRI investment in infrastructure development has served to exacerbate Indo-Pak tension within the SAARC bloc at the cost of South Asian nations.

The United States has bolstered its presence in the region economically over the South Asia, which strengthened ties between the two countries and positioned India as key partner in the Indo-Pacific region. India is a United States leaning force and its SAARC partners have economic priorities different from those of India."

The trajectory of SAARC's external relations has been moulded by the nature of Russia's foreign policy. Restrictions on financial -apart from State financing that is, and their quasi-irreparable intermittently the same as exports. While Russia is an important supplier of military hardware and energy to South Asia retaining its influence and stakes in the region, it is strategically a small economic player compared to China and the United States, thus limiting its role within SAARC.

### **Security Cooperation and Geopolitical Influence**

SAARC is unable to solve the issues of regional security as even the U.S. and China exert a significant lever of power over the security domain of SAARC. India builds its defence relations with America that defines South Asian security situation, security situation the United States helps Pakistan. China increased its military presence and created new alliances with Pakistan which prompted India's strategic apprehension and fear over security issues as the rise of Chinese dragon is considered as a threat.

The involvement of outside powers also prevents SAARC from dealing effectively with problems like cross-border terrorism as well as military confrontations and nuclear armament. The series of conflicts of India and Pakistan and the external involvement has delayed the development of a functional regional security apparatus within SAARC. The current geopolitical realities confines SAARC from engaging in collective security cooperation making it less capable to intervene diplomatically for peace.

During its working years, SAARC showed diplomatic activism in addressing the challenges facing the region.

Introduction: the role and value of SAARC Regional harmony in South Asia with diverse cultures, some geo political and economic challenges have been visioned through establishment of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC was established in 1985 in the backdrop of several regional crises and the member nations were confronted at various levels with political turmoil, internal strife and altered geopolitical outlook in the region. SAARC is the regional diplomatic forum which addresses regional issues however its actual ability to address these issues is hamstrung by in-house rivalry and outside pressure and the fact there are insistent issues before it.

Several political transitions across South Asia in the past few years have severely tested the diplomatic moxie of SAARC. Political turmoil in Sri Lanka drives the region toward two recent emergency situations: the Taliban rule in Afghanistan post-takeover." The developments have been dual-faced within each infected country and also for the stability of the whole territory. The examination of SAARC's handling such crises is comprised of the review of its diplomatic success and identification of the obstacles that hinder the organisation's political unrest resolution methods during its present conflicts.

This analysis takes a look at how SAARC entities handled Sri Lanka's recent political turmoil.

### **Background to Sri Lanka's Political Crisis**

The South Asian islands are rife with intra-state political violence, and this has been only exacerbated since its 2009 civil war, Sri Lanka itself is a case in point. 2022 The Year 2022 saw one of the worst political crises Sri Lanka had experienced in a long time. Widespread anger erupted across the country when a combination of factors of economic mismanagement, a crippling debt crisis, skyrocketing inflation, lack of basic goods, as well as COVID-19 pandemic fallout brought people together. Protest in Sri Lanka reached its crescendo after the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigned over the fact that his family had been dominating the politics of the country for a number of decades reading, in part:

Bad budgeting decisions, combined with an empty international reserve fund and a national ban on chemical pesticides created Sri Lanka's economic crisis that hit the agriculture sector the hardest. Social upheaval and the economic depression were causing widespread and growing protests, which in turn called for a radical and decisive political change. But the Rajapaksa government could not manage the crises properly and the public faith was at stake with the country being hurled toward destruction.

### **Diplomatic Response of SAARC**

SAARC, as the main regional diplomatic body, was instructed to deal with the political instability unfolding in Sri Lanka. The response of SAARC as an organisation to the crisis was minimal. The SAARC body experiences slow momentum and has no effective manner of decision making, especially during emergencies or time of crisis as all decisions have to be agreed upon by consensus between all eight member states. On political and economic axes, too member states of SAARC are too distant to combine on a single response.

Membership gave Sri Lanka diplomatic fora within which to conduct discussions around economic stability with member states, despite not having had direct interference during its state of political emergency. Economic crisis in Sri Lanka rippled through the entire region, including Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan that faced economic troubles as well. The member countries of SAARC stated that they needed coordinated initiatives in addressing the financial problems gripping their part of the world. India rushed its own credit lines and humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka (like others in SAARC) as SAARC did not have regional solutions.

Beyond direct action and intervention SAARC also served as a platform for diplomacy and a channel to facilitate direct diplomacy between the member states. The SAARC's response to the Sri Lankan political crisis demonstrated SAARC's incapacitation to act directly in national domestic matters. SAARC did not have meaningful political and economic leverage instruments to transcend these constraints through dialogue, and as a result of this disadvantage, it was not in a position to critically shape the epilogue of the crisis.

SAARC has shown serious limitations in addressing the crisis of Sri Lanka, along with other serious organizational deficiencies.

The current crisis in Sri Lanka demonstrated that SAARC suffered serious deficiencies in addressing contemporary political disorders. Its fundamental obstacle was the organization's economic and political incompetence. The SAARC is unlike other international organisations such as the European Union and African Union, as it has no clear mechanism to take strong decisions and no such instrument to intervene in times of political crisis. Specifically, "SAARC presents a challenge to crisis management in that it does not have a fully developed institutional capacity to respond in a timely and effective manner to Sri Lankan crises.

The dimension of regional politics that worked against the organization also acted as a restraint. As an association among regional countries SAARC refrained from directly addressing the politics concerned within the member states, since these internal determinants largely contributed to the decline of Sri Lanka. The current political friction among the member nations particularly India and Pakistan acted as an impediment in collaboratively responding to the crisis in Sri Lanka. Large regional divisions between India and Pakistan, with their long-standing bilateral enmity, hampered the escalating political and economic crisis in Sri Lanka, obstructing any multilateral effort by this organization.

The economic fallout in Sri Lanka was panchayatated\* with bilateral Indian support and also support from other countries together, but there was no pan-SAARC economic response. The national economic crisis in Sri Lanka required multilateral assistance, but being one with such a weak economic architecture for multilateral action, SAARC had little capacity to consolidate support.

The present article analyses the saarc responses to Afghanistan political transition subsequent to the Taliban's occupation.

### **Background on the Political Changeover in Afghanistan**

The Taliban take-over in August 2021 represent the single most dramatic geopolitical turning in South Asian politics in modern history. When the US troops soon pulled out, along with NATO forces, the Afghan democratic government fell just as quickly, allowing the Taliban to return. Inter-governmental agencies as well as all SAARC countries had to gauge the implications of the return of Taliban for the stability and security of the region.

The Taliban's return created intense anxiety about human rights for women and minorities along with the resurgence of terrorism and militancy in Afghanistan. The Taliban's take over of government and countrywide power plunged millions of Afghans into a humanitarian crisis which has caused them to be displaced, find difficulty to access food, and be deprived of basic services. The situation in Afghanistan caused concerns that the country would serve as a safe haven for al-Qaeda in addition to ISIS-Khorasan and other international terrorist groups.

### **Diplomacy of SAARC and Afghanistan**

The diplomatic reaction from SAARC was conditioned by the conflicting regional politics and also by the varying positions of member states regarding Afghanistan's political transfer. SAARC had mostly the ceremonial relations with Afghanistan until the Taliban seized power which further clouded the prospective relations between the regional groups. The organization had very limited ability to act while Afghanistan remained among its members under such diplomatic restrictions and the limit of constitutional possibilities during a time when the Member States held a diversity of views.

The Taliban regime was supported by Pakistan, and India vehemently resists the idea of Taliban control. Varya Priestman in this article said this capacity was hampered by differing positions on the part of SAARC members states to work together to formulate diplomatic approaches. Each member of SAARC dealt with Afghanistan's security and political issues based on their own strategic national interests and personal geopolitical ambitions.

The SAARC nations between them constructed some responses to the humanitarian crisis that afflicts Afghanistan, despite huge hurdles. The group had noted a deepening human rights crisis and the harmful impacts of the Taliban's governance policies for both women and minority communities. The association could not impose any actions or penalties on Afghanistan as the SAARC has no authority or proper power to take decision and not only political but also SAARC could not interfere behind this. Most of the members of the organization had struggles with what the appropriate stance for them, on this governing authority which they considered un-legitimate and (in many aspects) unworthy.

### **SAARC has been ineffective in dealing with Afghanistan's situation**

When the SAARC member states tried to assist in addressing Afghanistan's transition, they demonstrated some serious structural limitations but also limitations in the decisiveness of crisis management. The immediate humanitarian response was demanded at the return of Taliban to power, but the SAARC had little to show in terms of outcomes as it has only weak enforcement authority and its traditional decision-making is based in consensus manner. Different national stances on the future political direction of Afghanistan had, however, prevented SAARC from emerging as a cohesive diplomatic entity.

SAARC remained an ineffective body whereby its effectiveness was further undermined because of the external factors (geopolitics of the US, China and Pakistan with regard to Afghanistan). The efforts of SAARC diplomacy fared poorly when compared to the major powers that effectively controlled events on the ground in post-Taliban Afghanistan. There were limited SAARC involvement in Afghanistan matters because member countries

had not yet established a common political platform, instead having their own political interests.

The uneven regional response on Afghanistan by SAARC has prevented it from raising vital issues of governance, security, and human rights, he added. SAARC's inability to deal with the crisis in Afghanistan demonstrated some of the deeper structural problems that occur when the organization faces regional conflict.

SAARC's approaches to diplomacy is not enough to manage the political shocks in matters of regional importance.

SAARC has some diplomatic instruments for regional integration but they remain unwieldy in times of political crisis. Nothing is implemented in an emergency without entirely deferring to all SAARC members in this manner and according to this procedure of consensus decision making. The organization has serious problems when it comes to conflicting interests between some of its member countries, especially in the light of India and Pakistan's ongoing rivalry and their conflicting responses to the developments in Afghan politics."

The institution has few tools to reply with direct interventions during political and security crises. SAARC is distinct from the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) in that it does not have a mechanism for resolving regional disputes or for addressing peace operations. The organization has several security measures about countering terrorism through diplomatic dialogue but is inadequately addressed about conflict resolution since it does not have any apparatus to enforce.

The dynamics of economic diplomacy in SAARC are constrained because of the varying economic requirements of individual member states. The body hasn't been able to set up a full-blown regional economy, because political disagreements continuously prevent economic linkages. SAARC even fails at the outset of a crisis, without having these kinds of possibilities of collective regional action about an entity like Afghanistan and Sri Lanka will do.

The post-Taliban political crisis in Afghanistan and the blow hot and cold politics in Sri Lanka have met, for instance, with a series of obstacles in SAARC itself (ie through its organisational instruments) which stemmed primarily from national jealousies, under developed organisational structures and member disunity. It showed just how broken regional diplomacy was at its core when responding to political and security crisis situations. SAARC is more of a talking shop and regional cooperation center but its role in addressing the current regional turmoil is hampered as the region has difficult politics amidst member countries.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, while SAARC diplomacy encounters severe challenges due to underlying political rivalries, organisational constraints, and regional instability, it continues to remain the most important forum for the articulation of regional trends and the patterns of interstate dialogue and cooperation in South Asia. But the consensus model not only produces unity, it slows decision-making and has impeded the organization's capacity to manage conflicts and launch regional initiatives effectively. Still, SAARC activities in the areas of confidence building and cooperative projects show that the organization is capable of being a vehicle of regional stability and development. To remove remaining stumbling blocks, political determination from member states, more institutional change and more flexible and pragmatic diplomacy is needed. To convert it into a stronger and effective regional actor thereby contributing to peace, prosperity and integration in South Asia, it is



imperative to enhance SAARC's ability to respond to changing geo-political and socio-economic exigencies.

**Recommendations**

- Create a standing SAARC emergency response force for quick response during regional emergencies.
- Establish joint early warning systems and mechanisms for information sharing between the member countries.
- Hold periodic joint crisis simulations to improve readiness and coordination.
- Concentrate on non-political, people-led initiatives boxing, health, education, environment and trade that will build trust.
- Work for the removal of barriers to trade, transportation connections, and harmonization of customs to promote economic integration.
- Promote exchange of cultures and academics through student exchange programs, festivals, and cooperative research.
- Reform the decision-making with the introduction of the qualified majority for less sensitive areas, in order to avoid blocks.
- Strengthen the SAARC Secretariat by providing more power, funds and operational freedom for better coordination.

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