Transnational Security: Local Approaches to Global Threats?

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Synopsis

Globalization-driven transnational threats are highly relevant to our states. While these threats change depending on regions, some remain common to all. Few threats more relevant to South Asia will be discussed in this paper focusing on how these impact our security and how Bangladesh is becoming excessively vulnerable to these.

Commentary

The notion of security threat has changed radically with the compression of time and space. Threats that often used to be confined within the boundary of the states, have now permeated through borders making ramifications amplified and actions required more collaborative.

Transnational security threats, often termed as 'trans-state' or 'trans-sovereign' security threats, have emerged as violent by-product of globalization. According to Paul J. Smith, transnational security issues can be defined as 'nonmilitary threats that cross borders and either threaten the political and social integrity of a nation or the health of its inhabitants'. Due to the unrestrained nature, prevention and detection of these threats often become difficult for leaders of a state and policymakers.

Key threat areas

In the context of South Asia and more specifically Bangladesh, religio-political militancy and terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, small arms proliferation, and transnational criminal organisation are few transnational threats that destabilize the overall security situation of the region.

Religio-political militancy and related terrorism has been a global occurrence, which transcends national borders and solution of which requires international involvement. Much like global pattern of terrorism, terrorist networks in South Asia are also extremely extensive, and conducting their illegal activities and attacks across borders. In addition to being home to some violent separatist movements and pocket of religious radicalization, vulnerability of South Asian countries increases due to weak democracy and turbulent politics.

Another threat that imbalances the security not only of this region, but also of the whole world is drug trafficking. Most of the drugs produced in 'Golden Triangle' and 'Golden Crescent' find their destination to Europe through South Asia, a major transit route in drug trafficking. While drug trafficking causes abundance of drug in the region, narco-terrorism, rising insurgency, and terrorism funding remain other significant impacts of it.

Human trafficking, in South Asian region, takes place for different motives- sexual exploitation, domestic service, slavery etc. While domestic laws of the South Asian countries largely deal with this issue, their inadequacy requires the international law to interfere. Economic vulnerability of people and high unemployment rate in the region worsen this situation.

Small arm proliferation contributes significantly in deteriorating the law and security situation of this region. Because of porous borders, South Asian countries now have easy access to illegal arms. These weapons, small yet lethal, have made intra-state, ethnic, or separatist conflicts more violent and bloody. While light weapons are used mainly in separatist movements in India and Sri Lanka, political and criminal motives are stronger in Bangladesh in the usage of small arms.

The biggest threat to our security is posed by the transnational organised crime groups, driving their illicit activities by exploiting the transnational networks. The traffickers or smugglers arrested by the law enforcement agencies are often linked and part of the same illicit business. A huge amount of money is circulated in this circle. It is often assumed that a portion of this money is spent on funding local insurgent groups and international terrorist and militant organisations.

Climate change remains another significant security threat that affects the whole world. South Asia remains one of the most distressed regions due to it. Rising sea level will cause frequent floods which will further submerge the large urban and port cities, and distress the overall economic growth of this region. Rice cultivation will be damaged- affecting a significant portion of GDP of few countries including Bangladesh.

Diseases and epidemics threaten the stability of states. With highly dense population, weak healthcare system, large number of people hailing from low socio-economic group- an outbreak of disease can be fatal for this region. Since diseases cannot be constrained within any geographical border, states of this region should come together to build up a common structure to prevent and cure of possible outbreak of epidemics.

Regional impact

Lack of regional cooperation in approaching these issues has made the impacts more adverse. Since countries continue to differ on how to solve these issues, terrorists, drug peddlers, traffickers etc. take advantage of this difference and strengthen their criminal activities. In addition to the lack of collaboration, state fragility, weak democracy, and inability to maintain law and order in national level make some countries more vulnerable than others and that adds up to the deterioration of the security situation of the whole region. While the population in general suffers due to these criminal activities, floating population faces greater exposure to security threats. Uncontrolled amount of money floating in the illegal system also hacks the economic integrity of national and regional system. With the infiltration of arms, drugs, and money, the governing system faces obstacles, population suffer, and law and order situation deteriorates. The feeling of insecurity in people later contributes in greater distrust in governance and vulnerable population often find their solace in alternative ways that might not always be lawful. The popular grievances time and again have ended up in uprising, insurgent and criminal activities- and South Asia is no exception to that.

Impact on Bangladesh

Situated between the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, geographical location of Bangladesh becomes vulnerable as it works as an important route to communicate between the two.

With the current heightened risk of terrorism, the activities of cross-border terrorist financing, narco-terrorism, and arms trafficking are predicted to rise. Looking back at history, we can see that the 2004 event of ten trucks arms and ammunition haul in Chittagong had different transnational linkages. According to a popular assumption, the arms were going to a third destination through Chittagong. Given the current status of international terrorist and militant activities, the rate of small arms trafficking can easily go up. Displaced and marginalised communities in Bangladesh face insecurity to a greater extent. Deprivation of basic human rights, lack of national identity, inability to access the law and justice system make them more vulnerable than others. Playing on these vulnerabilities of marginalised and displaced population, terrorists use them as a ground for potential recruitment. Threat that significantly affects the security situation of Bangladesh is human trafficking. Bangladesh has been pointed as a source and transit point for men, women, and children to be trafficked for labor and sexual exploitation by many international organisations. Dhaka is part of the main trafficking route of South Asian region, which makes it easier to traffic people. This whole scenario is exacerbated by rampant poverty, high unemployment rate, and lack of rule of law. In addition to these, loose law and order situation and lengthy judicial process make Bangladesh comparatively less incompetent to deal with terrorism, arms and human trafficking, which eventually multiply the impact on Bangladesh.

Apart from all these, climate change is another threat that puts all the progress of Bangladesh- one of the seven climate change hotspots- at stake. Due to climate change, Bangladesh sees more frequent floods, cyclones, and landslides. A recent Guardian report says, ten million people are at risk of becoming climate change refugee over the next decade which undoubtedly is going to affect the whole country. Epidemics and pandemics are also speculated to affect Bangladesh on a large scale because of its dense population and weak healthcare system.

All these multidimensional transnational problems amplify in Bangladesh due to mostly-inefficient handling by governmental and non-governmental organisations. Having said that, we cannot expect one country to solve the issues that resonate throughout the region.

Approach towards Transnational Threats

Due to the dynamic nature of transnational threats, it requires transnational reaction. States' approaches toward these threats should be broadly focused as opposed to the existing narrow ones. In national level, countries should ensure rule of law, strong judiciary system, and good governance to keep the impact of these threats under control. Internal capacity of governance should also be strengthened. However, for a lasting solution, countries must cooperate, connect, and coordinate with other countries in policy-making and policy implementation to decrease the intensity of transnational threats.

 A supranational approach is necessary by forming common regional mechanism to properly deal these threats. Regional intergovernmental organisation like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has the potential to be an excellent platform for the South Asian countries to unite to fight

transnational security threats. Only effective and strategic collaborated inter-regional international approach can solve problem of such magnitude.

Finding efficient and lasting solutions to these threats has become the demand of time. A consensus about the nature, intensity, and development of these challenges is yet to emerge among states. Solution can be possible only when states are willing to work together on the same platform for the sake of ensuring a greater security.

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