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SOME PROBLEMS OF THE SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the problems of the security system in the South Asian region, and tries to analyze this topic in a broader way and approach it in a modern context.

KEYWORDS

South Asia, regionalism, regional system of security, RSCT, traditional threats, non-traditional threats.

INTRODUCTION

The South Asian region is an important region due to its strategic location, economic instability, and historical and cultural development. Bordering Afghanistan and Central Asia on the one hand, the Persian Gulf countries on the west, Southeast Asia on the east, and especially China on the north, despite the fact that the population has a common regional heritage, culture, and history, it has been under the colonial burden for a long time, the region has strong regional security dynamics. South Asia still faces considerable challenges beginning with the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan to traditional security threats such as ethno-religious conflicts, radicalism, border issues, and more modern threats

such as climate change and environmental pollution, poverty, economic instability and human and drug trafficking. In addition, the possession of nuclear weapons by two rival countries in the region and the interest of foreign powers such as the USA, China, and Russia in this region also affect the regional security system. The cooperation mechanisms established by the countries of the region are either ineffective or have not lived up to their potential. Therefore, there is always a need for deeper research into the regional security system of South Asia.

METHODS

Content analysis, event analysis, systematic analysis and historical methods were used in the process of writing this article.

RESULTS

The South Asian region geographically refers to the area that includes Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. In general, the word region is a somewhat controversial term that is used more to describe different continents. Sometimes you can see that the word region is used to refer to concrete regions. Because the words «region» and «subregion» are often used interchangeably, their difference is sometimes unclear. When it comes to the world of politics, the term region takes on a political description, and it can refer to an area that is not envisaged from a geographical point of view. Australia is included in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and similarly the definition of the Central Asian region sometimes includes Afghanistan; these are examples of defining regions from a politicized point of view. Similarly, some researchers add Afghanistan to the South Asian region. It is known by "AfPakistan" or "Af-Pak". The term "AfPakistan" was first used by B. Buzan, the author of the theory of regional security complexes, and it shows that some western political scientists look at Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single military-political region. According some sources, the origin of the term "Af-Pak" is attributed to the American diplomat Richard Holbrooke. According to Holbrook, Afghanistan and Pakistan should be considered as a single military-political region for the following three reasons:

1. The presence of a common theater of military operations in the territory of these two countries;
2. Unresolved border disputes along the "Durand Line" of 1893; the use of the open border regime,

which is a tribal area, by the Taliban and other terrorist networks.

3. And at the same time, the fact that Afghanistan is a full member of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation - SAARC, which is an integration organization of the South Asian region (Buranov S, 2021, p.320-321).

However, the Obama administration soon dropped the term due to some protests from Pakistan (foreignpolicy.com, 2010). But it can still be found in political literature. At the same time, in the literature, it is possible to find cases where the region of South Asia is called a subregion, and it is noted that it is separated from the Persian Gulf region by Afghanistan, and its eastern border goes back to Myanmar.

Thus, we considered that in international relations, regions can be part of some political programs rather than a purely geographical unit. And similar approaches can be seen in the example of the South Asian region.

If we look at the issue of international security from a regional point of view, this is a concept that primarily refers to the external aspects of national security. These aspects consist of establishing and conducting bilateral or multilateral relations with other subjects of international relations - other states, regional institutions, military alliances and integration blocs located in this region. International security on a regional scale is a function of the historically changing international order. Based on this, regional security is closely related to the current state of international security, on the one hand, and dominant national security strategies of the countries of this region on the other hand. Regional security is a situation in which the countries of the region feel free from any threats of military attack, political and economic pressure Kuszta A. (2017).



In general, Buzan's theory, which is widely recognized and used to explain regional security systems, defines security complexes as the fact that the security problems of countries located in the same region are interrelated and that external forces can enter it. According to him, since the period of decolonization, the regional level of security has become autonomous and has become visible in international politics. The end of the Cold War further increased the importance of regional security dynamics. After the end of the main opposition based on bipolarity, all countries are concentrated on strengthening security relations with their immediate neighbors. Great and powerful countries do not interfere in issues outside of their region. According to Buzan, this situation does not fall under the scope of "unipolar" or "multipolar" regimes. Nor is it globalization and the overall "new world order". This new structure can be explained by RSCT, that is, the theory of regional security complexes.

The authors of the theory of regional security complexes, B. Buzan and O. Waever, divide the period of historical formation and development of the issue of regional security into three stages. The first stage is from 1500 to 1945, the second stage is the period of the Cold War from 1945 to 1990, and the third stage is the period after the Cold War (Buzan B, Weaver O, 2003, p.14).

The increasing role of regionalism in world politics in general is a characteristic of the Cold War period after the World War II. There were also attempts to create security systems during the first phase proposed by Buzan and Weaver. For example, one of the most common formations at this time were military alliances formed by smaller countries against a common enemy. Such alliances were often short-term and ad hoc, not institutionalized and weak in terms of

mutual trust. It's quite interesting that there were also the first attempts at regional economic integration in the past. An example of this was the Hanseatic League, which was established in the middle of the 13th century to ensure the free and safe movement and trade of merchants in the German city-states (Ignatenko A.V., 2005, C.134). It is known from the literature that the Hanseatic League had many characteristics of today's regional integration blocs.

The first stage ended with the failure of the League of Nations, but after the World War II, the process of ending colonialism led to the globalization of international relations, i.e., the activation of the states of the regions that had little influence on world politics in previous periods, and the increase in the importance of regional security. Regional structures rapidly increased, and the number of subjects of international relations increased. It would not be wrong to say that the first regional agreements and structures, which appeared with the foundation of the European Union, are the example that aroused enthusiasm for the organization of regional integration systems in this period. Because of their success, the transition of Europe, which has historically been in a state of constant conflicts, to the path of sustainable development, has shown that the creation of security mechanisms of regional integration will be effective in strengthening mutual trust in the region.

After the Second World War, the disagreement in South Asia, which was initially in the form of a religious dispute, now led to a conflict between the two countries. That is, the countries in this region were at war with each other. During this period, the position of the Indian National Congress, which contributed greatly to India's independence, was very uncompromising towards Pakistan, and the main wars in this region also took place during this period.

If we approach the question of how the regional security system was formed in the South Asian region and how these processes took place from the point of view of RSCT, if the process of securitization before independence was based on the demands of Muslims to achieve political and cultural autonomy, then these has shifted towards territorial disputes between the two countries, the balance of power and accusing each other of interference in internal affairs. Pakistan and smaller countries in the region - Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives - all have close economic, political and social ties to India and realize that they are partly isolated from each other and partly even altogether unable to compete with India, due to this connected to the complex.

As we mentioned above, modern South Asia is the region with the highest dynamics of threats to regional security. Currently, both domestic and foreign researchers analyze security problems in this region by dividing them into traditional and non-traditional threats. And this approach is reflected in the policy of the countries of the region.

First of all, if we talk about traditional threats, in the first place, it should be mentioned the unresolved border disputes, which pose a serious threat to security and occasionally lead to military conflicts. There are dozens of such disputes in one region. For example,

- Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan;
- The issue of recognition of the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan;
- Sir Creek dispute between India and Pakistan;
- Aksai Chin and Arunachal dispute between India and China;

- India-Nepal border problem;
- The issue of movement of insurgents along the border between India and Bhutan;
- India and Bangladesh water dispute;
- The issue of Rohingya refugees between Bangladesh and Myanmar;
- Land and water border dispute between India and Bangladesh;
- The issue of movement of insurgents along the border between India and Sri Lanka (Mohammad T. I., 2020, P.62).

Bilateral territorial disputes between India and Pakistan led to three wars in the region in 1948, 1965 and 1971. In addition, small crises are still taking place along the Line of Control between the two countries. The bloodiest was the Kargil war, that emerged in May-July 1999. At the same time, other border disputes, such as India's open border issue with Nepal, transit and water issues with Bangladesh remain as a major obstacle for regional cooperation.

Another traditional threat in South Asia is internal religious-ethnic conflicts, and almost every country in the region has a certain concentration of ethnic, religious and left-wing forces linked to regional and global terrorist groups and organized crime. The region also faces political complexities due to its diversity of languages, religions, cultures, and ethnicities. In particular, religion remains one of the major factors influencing political security in South Asia. As a result of the activities of radical Islamic groups in Pakistan many terroristic acts have been committed in recent years. According to South Asian Terrorism Portal, there are 44 active terrorist groups in Pakistan, and the number of inactive groups comprise

26. It should be noted that the former government of Afghanistan and India have continuously accused the government of Pakistan of supporting terrorist groups. US officials also claim that Pakistan's conscience is not clear in the fight against terrorism. If the intensity of terrorist attacks in Pakistan showed the highest level in 2009-2010, after a relatively slow period, it can be observed that it is gradually increasing again since 2020. In India, there are 69 organizations based on religious and ethnic radicalism (<https://www.satp.org/terrorist-groups/india>). These statistics can be continued on the example of other countries of the region, except Bhutan. The most frequently mentioned religious-ethnic separatist groups include the Baloch separatist movement in Pakistan, the Sikh separatist group Halistan in India, and the Kashmir, Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram movements. In addition, the armed leftist movement - the Naxals - has been active in several states of India. In addition, some researchers consider the strengthening of the position of Hinduism as a threat to the security of modern India. Bangladesh had reached an agreement with the Chittagong separatists after a long struggle, and now faces a tense situation over the Rohingya refugees. In Nepal, internal conflicts that lasted for many years were resolved only by 2006, and the monarchy was abolished and the country switched to a democratic system of governance. Although Sri Lanka's civil war lasted for more than three decades between the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese has ended, political tensions have not been completely resolved. The long-term political instability that continued after the Gayoom regime in the Maldives destroyed the economy of the island-state. The Kingdom of Bhutan is considered peaceful compared to other countries in the region and was ranked the seventeenth most peaceful country in South Asia in the Global Peace Index 2023 (Global Peace Index 2023). And finally, the events that we all

witnessed - the withdrawal of US military forces from Afghanistan and the establishment of a government of "Taliban". The Taliban government, which is not recognized by the international community, has not yet made significant progress in improving the security situation in the country.

Another threat to security is the arms race. After the two largest countries of South Asia had nuclear weapons, which has led to the emergence of a type of threat that some observers consider unconventional, is the risk of nuclear proliferation. After many years of investigations the involvement of Pakistani nuclear weapons maker Abdul Qadir Khan and a large group of associates were revealed. This network is known to have delivered nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya, and Abdul Qadir Khan himself claims that the highest circles in the Pakistani government were aware of this. So, this event has caused concern of the world community with the risk of further spread of nuclear weapons technology and at the same time, it has caused certain mistrust towards the government of Pakistan in this regard.

With the appearance of nuclear weapons in the region, the regional security complex has moved to a new dimension. This has created a relative balance between India and Pakistan, while at the same time creating strong international tensions and increasing the importance of regional security.

In recent years, it can be observed that the arms race between India and Pakistan is intensifying again. After India initially chose the path of nuclear weapons, Pakistan, which could no longer feel safe, followed it. India began developing ballistic and cruise missiles, and Pakistan sought parity. India announced its Cold Start doctrine, to which Pakistan responded by developing tactical nuclear weapons. India is

developing a defense system against ballistic missiles, in response to which Pakistan is likely to respond by changing the location of its nuclear weapons (Ghazala Y. J, 2017, P.18).

After the Balakot airstrikes in 2019, the security situation and the balance of power changed again. The significance of this attack was that now India abandoned its policy of strategic deterrence. During the 1999 Kargil crisis, India decided not to cross the Line of Control between the two countries. In Balakot, India entered the Territory of Pakistan and struck targets there. This sent a clear warning to Pakistan not to support groups in Kashmir. On August 6, 2019, the special status of Kashmir was revoked. The Pakistan declared this action as a unilateral illegal step. The Parliament of Pakistan condemned these actions of India, the National Security Committee lowered the level of diplomatic relations. Train traffic, all cultural ties, as well as most trade ties between two countries have been stopped. It should be noted that all the countries of South Asia, except Pakistan, evaluated this act as an internal affair of India and fully supported it.

Today, a multidisciplinary approach to security is advocated by many observers, and even though unconventional threats may seem unrelated to the military situation, weapons, and subversive activities, and the security sector in general, their destabilizing ability cannot be denied. The following non-traditional problems that threaten the regional security of South Asia can be listed:

Climate change and environmental pollution;

- poverty and inequality;
- poor governance and instability;
- drug and human trafficking;

- economic crimes;

- food and water safety.

South Asia is the region most affected by climate change. The intensive melting and receding of glaciers in the Himalayas increases the risk of seasonal flooding in the main rivers of the region, the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra. Intensity changes of monsoon rains and extreme heat will affect harvesting. Also, sea level rise and strong cyclones have been threatening the region recently. As a result, millions of people may suffer from natural disasters, suffer from water and food shortages, and possible power outages.

It should be noted that all countries in the region are already feeling the negative repercussions of climate change and environmental pollution. For example, the monsoon rains in Pakistan in 2022 had devastating consequences and left thousands of people homeless. A state of emergency was declared on August 25 and Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif announced that 33 million people, or 15 percent of the country's population had been affected by the floods. Monsoon rains in 2023 were especially disastrous for India due to the atmospheric rivers that have been created due to strong evaporation in the equatorial parts of the Indian Ocean moving towards South Asia. Experts predict that this phenomenon will continue in the near future due to global warming (Shwarup Sh & others, 2023). The lack of suitable agricultural land in Bangladesh and the frequent occurrence of natural disasters may have negative consequences such as hunger, malnutrition and the production of low-quality food products among the population. Due to different topographical conditions and climate zones, even though Nepal has a relatively small area, it is sensitive to climate changes and environmental problems. The main impact of climate change on Nepal can be

earthquakes, landslides, floods, fires and lightning strikes (Pravitelstvo Nepala. Statistika po okrujaushchey srede/izmeneniyu klimata, 2022). Sri Lanka is also among the top ten countries most affected by disasters such as drought, floods, rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and sea level rise (<https://www.novayagazeta.eu>, 2022). Bhutan, the smallest and least populated country in the region, is mostly covered by forests and therefore has almost zero emissions. The country's government has included the preservation of forest areas, which are considered national wealth, as a matter of national importance in the Constitution and has undertaken not to reduce them below 60 percent.

The issue of poverty and inequality has always been one of the pressing problems in South Asia. Even recently, in terms of the poverty level, the region was second only to Africa in the world, and the poor people estimated 15.09 percent of the population and amounted to 256.24 million (Tonmoy I & others, 2021). In the last decade, this scene has changed a little, and the socio-economic development of the region has gradually increased. Significant changes have taken place in India and Bangladesh in this regard. Residents of the region had the opportunity to communicate more with the world. The percentage of the population connected to mobile communication and the Internet has doubled since 2014. For example, India with its 700 million internet users has become the second largest online market after China. Before the pandemic, India's employment figures were at a historical high point.

Despite the progress in democratization, in most countries of the region, internal politics is polarized and effective governance has not been established. The powerful leaders who came to power through democratic elections have been promoting

programs that mainly have elements of narrow-scale nationalism. This increases the tension in the society, which is already nationally and ethnically divided. For example, the rivalry between India and Pakistan has been the reason for the leadership of nationalist leaders for several years. Although the central government appears to be strong in India, some fragmentation can be observed at the federal level. In Pakistan, the government has long been unable to get rid of the decisive influence of the military on the country's politics.

CONCLUSION

The South Asian region, home to 21% of the world's population and consisting of 3% of the Earth's fertile land, remains a region with high security dynamics. The region borders Iran and Afghanistan on one side, and China, the world's second economic giant, on the north. Myanmar separates the region from the ASEAN countries in the east. The fifth largest economy in the world, which is developing rapidly in the region - secular, multi-ethnic, democratic India, Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban, which is not recognized by the world community, has not been able to solve its internal problems. It includes countries such as Pakistan, developing countries such as Bangladesh, and the relatively small countries of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

According to the theory of Buzan and Waever, all the countries of South Asia form an integrated regional security complex, depending on each other. The South Asian security complex is also undergoing an internal transformation, gradually changing from bipolar to unipolar following the strengthening of India and the weakening of Pakistan. There are a number of traditional and non-traditional security problems that are an obstacle to the sustainable development of the

region, which can only be overcome by strengthening regional ties and mutual cooperation.

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