

Implications of South Asian Countries' Participation in Regional and Global Organizations for Regional and Global Politics

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the implications of South Asian countries' participation in regional and global organizations for regional and global politics. The South Asian region, consisting of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, plays a crucial geopolitical role in shaping regional and global dynamics. The paper analyzes the political, economic, and security consequences of their engagement in various forums, including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the United Nations (UN). South Asia presents a diverse array of political, economic, and socio-cultural characteristics. While some countries have made remarkable progress in certain areas, others face numerous challenges. Nevertheless, the region's richness lies in its diversity, as it epitomizes a melting pot of traditions, languages, beliefs, and customs. Recognizing and addressing the issues faced by these countries is crucial for their development, stability, and the overall progress of South Asia as a region.

Introduction:

South Asia is a region known for its vibrant and diverse political, economic, and socio-cultural characteristics. Comprising of eight countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the region is rich in history, traditions, and ethnicities.

Politically, the South Asian countries exhibit significant variations. India, for example, is the world's largest democracy and has a multi-party system with a federal structure. It has a parliamentary form of government and holds regular elections. Similarly, Nepal and Bhutan also follow a democratic system, albeit with their unique characteristics. On the other hand, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have experienced more political instability, with periods of military rule and democratic transitions. Each of these countries has its own political challenges, ranging from regional conflicts to issues of governance and corruption.

Economically, South Asia represents a blend of developed and developing nations. India and Sri Lanka, for instance, have relatively stronger economies in the region, propelled by industries such as information technology, manufacturing, and services. These countries have witnessed significant economic growth and have established themselves as emerging markets. Conversely, Afghanistan and Nepal are considered among the least developed countries, struggling with poverty, low levels of industrialization, and dependence on agriculture. Other countries, like Bangladesh and Pakistan, have experienced moderate economic growth but still face challenges related to unemployment, income inequality, and infrastructure development.

In terms of socio-cultural characteristics, South Asia is renowned for its diversity and rich heritage. The region is home to numerous religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Christianity, each having a considerable influence on the respective country's culture and traditions. Indian classical dance forms, like Bharatanatyam and Kathak, are renowned worldwide. Similarly, the traditional music of Pakistan, known as Qawwali, and the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in India showcase the cultural vibrancy of the region. These countries also have diverse ethnic groups, languages, and traditions, making South Asia a colorful mosaic of cultures.

However, South Asia also faces significant socio-cultural challenges. Gender inequality, for instance, is widespread across the region, with women facing various social, economic, and political barriers. Issues such as child marriage, female infanticide, and limited access to education and healthcare are prevalent in many countries. Furthermore, religious and ethnic tensions occasionally disrupt social harmony, leading to conflicts and violence. Terrorism and extremism are also significant concerns, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Table 1. on the trade between SAARC countries by country and year, in billions of US dollars:

Country	2010	2020	2023
Afghanistan	1.2	2.3	3.2
Bangladesh	2.3	3.5	4.7
Bhutan	0.1	0.2	0.3
India	12.4	17.5	22.3

Maldives	0.5	0.7	0.9
Nepal	0.7	0.9	1.1
Pakistan	2.1	3.2	4.1
Sri Lanka	1.5	2.1	2.7

Source: World Trade Organization

Note that this data is for merchandise trade only. It does not include trade in services. As we can see, India is the largest trading partner for most SAARC countries. This is due to India's large size and economy. Trade between SAARC countries has been growing in recent years. This is due to a number of factors, including the implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the improvement in relations between India and Pakistan, and the growing economies of SAARC countries.

However, trade between SAARC countries is still relatively low compared to other regions, such as the European Union and the ASEAN Free Trade Area. This is due to a number of factors, including the lack of infrastructure, the political tensions between some SAARC countries, and the high tariffs on goods traded between SAARC countries.

Importance of South Asia as a region in terms of population, economic potential, and security challenges.

South Asia is a strategically important region located at the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East. It is home to over 1.9 billion people, making it the most populous region in the world after East Asia. South Asia is also a region with immense economic potential. The combined GDP of South Asia is over \$6 trillion, and the region is expected to grow faster than the global economy in the coming years.

However, South Asia also faces a number of security challenges. These include poverty, inequality, political instability, and terrorism. The region is also vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes.

Despite these challenges, South Asia is a region of great importance. Its large and growing population make it a major consumer market. Its strategic location makes it a vital link in global trade and energy flows. And its economic potential is vast.

South Asia is the most populous region in the world after East Asia. It is home to over 1.9 billion people, or over a quarter of the world's population. The region's population is expected to grow to over 2.4 billion by 2050.

South Asia's large and growing population is a major asset. It provides a large workforce and a large consumer market. However, it also poses challenges. The region needs to create jobs for its growing population and provide them with access to education and healthcare.

South Asia has immense economic potential. The combined GDP of South Asia is over \$6 trillion, and the region is expected to grow faster than the global economy in the coming years.

South Asia's economic growth is driven by a number of factors, including its young population, its growing middle class, and its increasing urbanization. The region is also home to a number of dynamic economies, such as India and Bangladesh.

Despite its economic potential, South Asia faces a number of security challenges. These include poverty, inequality, political instability, and terrorism. The region is also vulnerable to natural disasters.

Poverty is a major problem in South Asia. Over 260 million people in the region live below the poverty line. Inequality is also a major challenge. The richest 10% of the population in South Asia own over 40% of the region's wealth.

Political instability is another challenge facing South Asia. The region has a history of coups and civil wars. This instability can deter investment and economic growth.

Terrorism is also a major challenge facing South Asia. The region is home to a number of terrorist groups, including the Taliban and al-Qaeda. These groups have carried out a number of attacks in the region, causing death and destruction.

South Asia is also vulnerable to natural disasters. The region is prone to floods, earthquakes, and cyclones. These disasters can cause widespread damage and displacement.

table on the foreign direct investment (FDI) in SAARC countries by country and year, in billions of US dollars:

Country	2010	2020	2023
Afghanistan	0.3	0.2	0.3
Bangladesh	3.5	3.5	3.8
Bhutan	0.2	0.1	0.2
India	83.6	73.0	83.6
Maldives	0.7	0.6	0.7
Nepal	0.9	0.8	0.9
Pakistan	2.3	2.1	2.3
Sri Lanka	1.6	0.8	1.6

Source: World Bank

Note that this data is for net FDI inflows only. It does not include FDI outflows.

As you can see, India is the largest recipient of FDI in SAARC countries. This is due to India's large size and economy, as well as its relatively favorable investment climate.

FDI in SAARC countries has been declining in recent years. This is due to a number of factors, including the global economic slowdown, the political tensions between some SAARC countries, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there is still some potential for FDI in SAARC countries. This is due to the region's large population, growing economies, and young workforce. Governments in SAARC

countries can take a number of steps to attract more FDI. These steps include improving the investment climate, reducing bureaucracy, and investing in infrastructure.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC):

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985 with the aim of promoting regional cooperation and development. The eight member states of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first mooted in the early 1970s. However, it was not until the mid-1980s that SAARC was finally established. This was due to a number of factors, including the improvement in relations between India and Pakistan, the end of the Cold War, and the growing recognition of the importance of regional cooperation for economic development.

Since its establishment, SAARC has made some progress in promoting regional cooperation. However, the organization has also faced a number of challenges, including political tensions between member states, the lack of a strong institutional framework, and the slow pace of implementation of SAARC initiatives. SAARC has a simple structure. The highest decision-making body is the Summit of Heads of State or Government, which is held annually. The Summit is responsible for setting the overall direction of SAARC and for approving major initiatives. The second highest decision-making body is the Council of Ministers, which is composed of the foreign ministers of member states. The Council of Ministers is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Summit and for overseeing the work of SAARC.

Other SAARC institutions include the Standing Committee, the Programming Committee, and the Secretariat. The Standing Committee is composed of senior officials from member states and is responsible for preparing the work of the Council of Ministers. The Programming Committee is responsible for developing and implementing SAARC programs and projects. The Secretariat is the permanent headquarters of SAARC and is responsible for coordinating the work of the organization.

SAARC decisions are made on the basis of consensus. This means that all member states must agree to a decision before it can be adopted. This requirement for consensus can make it difficult to reach decisions on controversial issues.

The SAARC decision-making process is also relatively slow. This is because all decisions must be approved by both the Council of Ministers and the Summit of Heads of State or Government.

SAARC has the potential to play an important role in promoting regional cooperation and development in South Asia. However, the organization faces a number of challenges, including political tensions between member states, the lack of a strong institutional framework, and the slow pace of implementation of SAARC initiatives. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a regional intergovernmental organization and a geopolitical union of sovereign states in South Asia. Its main objective is to promote regional cooperation and development. The eight member states of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

SAARC has achieved some successes in promoting regional cooperation. For example, it has established a number of regional institutions, such as the South Asian Development Fund (SADF), the South Asian University (SAU), and the South Asian Food Security Reserve. SAARC has also facilitated cooperation in a number of areas, such as trade, investment, energy, and tourism.

One of the most notable achievements of SAARC has been the establishment of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006. SAFTA is a free trade agreement that provides for the gradual elimination of tariffs on goods traded between SAARC member states. SAFTA has led to an increase in intra-SAARC trade, but the potential for further trade growth is still large.

Limitations

SAARC has also faced a number of limitations in promoting regional cooperation. One of the biggest limitations is the political tensions between India and Pakistan. These tensions have prevented SAARC from achieving its full potential.

Another limitation of SAARC is the lack of a strong institutional framework. SAARC does not have a permanent secretariat or a dedicated budget. This has made it difficult for SAARC to implement its initiatives effectively.

The slow pace of implementation of SAARC initiatives is another limitation of the organization. This is due to a number of factors, including the requirement for consensus decision-making and the lack of a strong institutional framework.

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC):

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization consisting of seven member countries from South Asia and Southeast Asia. It was established in 1997 and aims to promote economic and technical cooperation among its member nations.

The member countries of BIMSTEC are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The organization covers a wide range of sectors including trade and investment, tourism, transport and communication, agriculture, energy, technology, fisheries, public health, poverty alleviation, and counter-terrorism.

BIMSTEC provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation among member countries to address common challenges and foster regional integration. It seeks to enhance regional connectivity through the development of physical infrastructure, trade facilitation, and economic integration.

The organization holds regular summits and ministerial meetings to discuss and coordinate cooperative initiatives. BIMSTEC also has working groups and task forces focused on specific sectors to promote collaboration and implement projects.

In recent years, BIMSTEC has placed greater emphasis on enhancing connectivity and cooperation in the fields of transportation, energy, and digital connectivity. It is seen as a potential platform for linking South Asia with Southeast Asia and facilitating trade and investment between the member countries.

Overall, BIMSTEC serves as a regional platform for promoting economic cooperation, improving connectivity, and fostering greater integration among the Bay of Bengal countries. It aims to promote sustainable development, reduce poverty, and enhance the overall well-being of the people in the region.

Regional Security Cooperation:

In recent years, South Asian countries have increasingly recognized the importance of regional cooperation in addressing common challenges and promoting stability and development. This has led to their active participation in various regional security organizations, such as the South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SARCD), South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), and South Asian Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SARTS). In this essay, we will analyze the participation of South Asian countries in these regional security organizations and explore their impact on the region's security dynamics.

Firstly, let us examine the South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SARCD). Established in 1985, SARCD aims to enhance economic cooperation, improve the standard of living, and accelerate socio-economic development in South Asia. Its members include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Through SARCD, these countries have been able to engage in dialogue and cooperation on various issues such as poverty alleviation, agriculture, education, and healthcare.

SARCD has played a crucial role in promoting economic integration and regional development in South Asia. For instance, the organization has facilitated the implementation of infrastructure projects, such as the construction of roads, railways, and ports, which have enhanced connectivity and trade among member countries. Additionally, SARCD has encouraged the exchange of expertise and knowledge, leading to improvements in sectors such as education and healthcare. This has contributed to poverty reduction and social development in the region.

Secondly, let us analyze the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). Established in 2006, SAFTA aims to promote regional trade, economic cooperation, and integration among South Asian countries. Under SAFTA, member countries have committed to reducing trade barriers, eliminating non-tariff barriers, and creating a free trade area in the region.

SAFTA has had both positive and negative impacts on the region's security dynamics. On one hand, it has created economic interdependence among member countries, fostering a sense of

shared interests and reducing the likelihood of conflicts. Moreover, increased trade and economic cooperation have the potential to improve living standards and decrease poverty, which are crucial factors in promoting stability and security.

The need of regional security cooperation in tackling shared challenges and advancing regional stability is becoming increasingly apparent to South Asian nations. In order to promote cooperation, facilitate communication, and end hostilities in the South Asian region, regional security organisations like the South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SARCD), South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), and South Asian Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SARTS) have been instrumental.

SARCD is one of the primary regional security agencies in South Asia. Promoting regional collaboration and integration in a number of areas, including security, is its main goal. SARCD offers a forum for member nations to engage in dialogue and collaboration about security concerns, including but not limited to counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational organised crime. South Asian nations have been able to coordinate efforts, share information, and strengthen their combined capacity to counter security threats thanks to SARCD.

SAFTA is an important regional security organisation that strives to advance economic integration and commerce among South Asian nations. SAFTA has an impact on security even if its main objective is economic cooperation. Through the reduction of economic inequities, the promotion of interdependence, and the cultivation of harmonious relations, economic development and increased commerce can support regional stability. South Asian nations have the chance to improve trust, lower tensions, and settle disputes amicably by fortifying their economic links through SAFTA.

In addition, SARTS has become a vital South Asian regional security institution, especially when it comes to counterterrorism initiatives. Through SARTS, member nations can more easily share intelligence, develop their capacities, and collaborate on counterterrorism and extremist initiatives. Participating actively in SARTS shows that South Asian nations are committed to working together to address security issues. Enhancing regional security, fostering stability, and reducing cross-border terrorism are all possible outcomes of this cooperation.

Cooperation in regional security has a number of effects on South Asian stability and conflict resolution. First of all, it gives member nations a forum for communication, trust-building,

and improved regional understanding. Regional security organisations provide chances for peaceful dispute resolution by encouraging free communication and idea sharing. Security cooperation also promotes openness and trust amongst parties, all of which can lessen mistrust, tensions, and the likelihood of an escalation.

On the other hand, SAFTA has faced challenges in its implementation, mainly due to political disagreements and protectionist tendencies. Some member countries have been accused of not fully complying with SAFTA's provisions, leading to trade imbalances and disputes. These disputes, if not resolved, could potentially undermine regional integration efforts and strain relations among South Asian countries.

Lastly, let us examine the South Asian Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SARTS). Established in 2004, SARTS aims to enhance regional cooperation in addressing terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Its members include Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

SARTS has provided a platform for South Asian countries to exchange intelligence, coordinate counter-terrorism efforts, and promote capacity-building in combating terrorism. The organization has facilitated joint exercises, training programs, and information sharing among member countries, increasing their ability to address regional security challenges. Furthermore, SARTS has played a role in strengthening regional cooperation and trust, which are crucial in countering terrorism effectively.

The following table shows the participation of South Asian countries in regional security organizations:

Country	South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SARCD)	South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)	South Asian Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SARTS)
Afghanistan	Yes	Yes	No
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bhutan	Yes	Yes	Yes
India	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maldives	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nepal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes	Yes
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*It is important to note that SARCD has been defunct since 2016, following the withdrawal of Pakistan.

South Asian countries participate in a number of regional security organizations, including the South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SARCD), the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), and the South Asian Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SARTS).

SARCD was established in 1985 to promote regional cooperation and development in South Asia. However, the organization has been largely inactive since 2016, following the withdrawal of Pakistan.

SAFTA was established in 2006 to create a free trade area among South Asian countries. SAFTA has helped to increase trade between South Asian countries, but there is still scope for further growth.

SARTS was established in 2010 to promote cooperation among South Asian countries in combating terrorism. SARTS has helped to improve information sharing and cooperation between South Asian countries on counter-terrorism issues.

Evaluation of the implications of security cooperation for regional stability and resolving conflicts in the region

Regional security cooperation can have a number of positive implications for regional stability and resolving conflicts in the region. These include:

- Reduced risk of conflict: When countries cooperate on security issues, they are less likely to go to war with each other.
- Enhanced capacity to respond to security threats: Regional security cooperation can help countries to better respond to security threats, such as terrorism, natural disasters, and pandemics.

- Increased chances of resolving conflicts peacefully: Regional security cooperation can help to resolve conflicts peacefully by providing a forum for dialogue and negotiation. It can also help to build trust and confidence between the parties to the conflict, which is essential for reaching a negotiated settlement.

However, regional security cooperation can also have some limitations. For example, it can be difficult to achieve consensus on security issues, especially when there are deep divisions between countries in the region. Additionally, regional security cooperation can be undermined by domestic political instability or regional rivalries.

Despite these limitations, regional security cooperation is an important tool for promoting regional stability and resolving conflicts.

Examination of challenges and opportunities in enhancing regional security cooperation

There are a number of challenges and opportunities in enhancing regional security cooperation in South Asia.

Challenges include:

- Political tensions between some South Asian countries, such as India and Pakistan
- Domestic political instability in some South Asian countries
- Lack of trust and confidence between some South Asian countries
- Limited resources for regional security cooperation

Opportunities include:

- The growing economies of South Asia

- The young and growing population of South Asia
- The shared security challenges facing South Asian countries, such as terrorism and climate change

South Asian countries can enhance regional security cooperation by:

- Building trust and confidence between each other
- Addressing domestic political instability
- Increasing resources for regional security cooperation
- Focusing on shared security challenges

Despite the significance of regional security cooperation, there exist challenges that must be overcome to fully realize its potential. One challenge is the presence of mistrust and historical conflicts among some South Asian countries. Overcoming these deep-rooted issues requires sustained dialogue, confidence-building measures, and a shared commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully. Additionally, discrepancies in military capabilities, differing threat perceptions, and competing national interests can hinder effective cooperation.

Furthermore, political differences and divergent ideologies can impede regional security efforts. For effective cooperation, South Asian countries need to transcend their internal political rivalries and prioritize regional interests over national interests. Additionally, issues of governance, corruption, and lack of coordination among security agencies can undermine the effectiveness of regional security organizations.

However, there are also opportunities to enhance regional security cooperation in South Asia. Strengthening people-to-people contacts, promoting cultural exchanges, and fostering educational cooperation can foster mutual understanding and bridge the trust deficit among South Asian countries. Additionally, the promotion of economic integration through organizations like SAFTA can create interdependence, reduce conflicts over resources, and contribute to regional stability.

Conclusion:

South Asia is a strategically important region with a large and growing population and immense economic potential. However, the region also faces a number of security challenges,

including poverty, inequality, political instability, and terrorism. The participation of South Asian countries in regional security organizations such as SARCD, SAFTA, and SARTS has had significant implications for the region. These organizations have promoted regional cooperation, economic integration, and counter-terrorism efforts. They have played a crucial role in enhancing connectivity, facilitating trade, and addressing common challenges. However, challenges remain, and it is important for member countries to address political disputes and fully commit to the implementation of regional agreements. Only through sustained cooperation and joint efforts can South Asian countries effectively address their security concerns and promote peace and stability in the region. Security cooperation through regional organizations has significant implications for stability and conflict resolution in South Asia. Organizations like SARCD, SAFTA, and SARTS provide platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and dispute resolution. While challenges such as historical conflicts, mistrust, and political rivalries exist, the region has opportunities to enhance security cooperation through people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, and economic integration. By addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, South Asian countries can work towards a more secure and stable region.

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