

# GEOPOLITICS OF SOUTH ASIA

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# What is Geopolitics ?

- ❖ Geopolitics is derived from the greek word “ge” means earth and “politike” means politics. Hence, geopolitics is the study of the effects of geography on international politics and relations.
- ❖ The word ‘Geopolitics’ was coined by the Swedish political scientist **Rudolf Kjellen**.

According to Cohen(2003), 'Geopolitics' is defined as,

“the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other, political processes....Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequences of this interaction.”

# Why South Asia matters in world politics ?

- During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the domination of Europe while America dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century .
- The first decade of the twenty- first century has been marked by the rising prominence of South Asia as a result of the rapid and newfound economic growth of India, the growing strength of extremist militant groups in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the continued strategic rivalry in the region between India and China.

# Geopolitical Overview of South Asian Sub-Continent

- South Asia is a macro- geographical region wherein various countries in close geographical proximity share various commonality of interests. These interests could incorporate a whole gamut of historical, geographical, economic, political, social and cultural aspects.
- In fact , it is a region where geography, history, politics and culture are truly intertwined and a realm of one of the oldest civilizations in the world where people from all races and religions have co-existed over a long period of time.
- This mosaic of different cultures has given it a unique identity that is unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

# Geopolitical dynamics and inter-relationship of South Asian countries

- South Asia is known to constitute one of the “critical regions” or “security complexes” in the world primarily due to the fact that most of the South Asian countries are engrossed in varying degrees of inter-state disputes and conflicts.
- While the British imperial rule brought the South Asian states within a common colonial system, it simultaneously sowed several seeds of discord that continue to plague inter-state relations in the area even today.
- The differences between India and Pakistan over the two-nation theory and between Sri Lanka and India over the nationality of Tamilian plantation workers can be seen in this regard.

- The historical fact that Pakistan and Bangladesh are the several limbs of what was once a united India under the British rule bestows a unique complexity to the entire region.
- Ethnic and linguistic diversities further complicate the scenario.
- India is clearly the regional giant in terms of population , economy and conventional military strength. As compared to the surrounding neighborhood countries, India has dominance in its periphery . Still, it maintains balanced relation with other south asian nations, following the 'Kautilian dictum'.

# India and Pakistan

- ❖ Historically chaotic, Pakistan and India's relationship persists very unstable and cold even today as it was during independence.
- ❖ In the words of a former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan, **G.Parthasarathy**,  
“Promoting peace between India and Pakistan is like trying to treat two patients whose only disease is an allergy to each other.”

# India and China

- At the institutional level, India and China are two major powers in Asia with global aspirations and incompatible interests. . In recent years, these two countries have been striding forward with steady economic growth and vigilant assertion at several global forums. As a result of which some amount of friction is visible in their bilateral relationship.
- The geopolitical milieu of Asia makes it certain that it will be extremely difficult, rather impossible, for Hindi- Chini to be bhai-bhai.
- The two sides are sheltered in a classic security dilemma , where any action taken by one is immediately interpreted by other as a threat to interests.
- Indian analysts apprehend a Chinese policy of encirclement in Asia. This refers to China's various investments in building up port facilities in the Indian Ocean, characterized by some strategists as a 'string of pearls' strategy to counter India's aspirations in the region.

# The Juncture of Regional Politics : India, Pakistan and China

- China and Pakistan have an interesting diplomatic relationship based upon the mutual antagonism towards India.
- Taken separately , India, China and Pakistan are all engaged in regional competition to survive and emerge as the regional power.
- Geopolitically, the diplomatic relations with China help Pakistan pose a credible enough threat to India. Therefore, India is increasing defense spending by allocating more resources to build its nuclear arsenal.
- At the same time, India needs to deter Pakistan by flexing its capabilities without triggering a Chinese response and attack.

# Trust - Deficit in the region

- One of the prominent features of the current regional sub-system is the presence of an extreme trust deficit among the various actors in the region.
- Trust deficit can be experienced between India and Pakistan , and China and India.
- Besides this, trust deficit exists between even seemingly friendly partners like U.S. and India, Russia and China.
- This is also the case with traditional partners such as Iran and India, Russia and India.
- Trust deficit along with other issues like unresolved disputes, misunderstandings or the occurrence of any crisis could push the region towards more conflict and friction.

# South Asia's changing geopolitical landscape

- Over the years, certain geopolitical developments molded the South Asian landscape, forcing both India and Pakistan to adapt and change their foreign policy priorities.
- A significant driver of change in South Asia's political geography has been the string of infrastructure projects in the sub-continent.
- The largest and the most discussed has been China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which envisages a large road and railway network.
- The China-Pakistan- Economic Corridor or CPEC, a vital part of BRI , which connects the western part of China to the Gwadar Port in Balochistan, gives China easy access to the Arabian Sea.
- In Sri Lanka, China's development aid has grown at a rapid pace with Beijing acquiring the strategically located Hambantota port in the country.

- These projects in Pakistan and Sri Lanka have given China, strategic access points in the oceans surrounding India, a key area of Indian influence.
- Faced with certain new foreign policy challenges, India has sought to reorient its priorities and relationships.
- As China looks forward to establish on its relationships in South Asia, India has also begun to look beyond its traditional neighborhood and has focused its outreach towards Southeast Asia and Central Asia .
- Furthermore , the geopolitical matrix of China-Pakistan pushes India towards maximizing its power relative to China and Pakistan by aligning more with USA and other similar allies.
- These factors are all set to fundamentally reconfigure the geopolitics of South Asia.

# Conclusion

South Asia is one of the regions where there is an intricate link between security and co-operation. Considering the geographical and political factors, it can be said that the role of geopolitics in defining the security architecture is much crucial in South Asia. It is therefore need to be emphasized that when it comes to co-operation in such politically fragmented and geographically asymmetric region like South Asia , it is primarily the political will of member states, to respond to the co-operative agreements that determine the success of the regional integration.

Thank you...