

Regional Security and Peace Building in South Asia: India's Role in Shaping a Cooperative Security Architecture

Somadrita Roy¹

¹Master of Arts in political science, Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol, West Bengal

Received: 26 Dec 2025 Accepted & Reviewed: 28 Dec 2025, Published: 31 December 2025

Abstract

South Asia has historically been a region marked by political volatility, interstate rivalries, and emerging security challenges. India, as the largest and most influential power in the region, plays a pivotal role in shaping cooperative security mechanisms aimed at regional peace and stability. This paper examines India's strategic initiatives, including its engagement in multilateral forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and its bilateral security frameworks with neighboring countries. The study explores India's approach to conflict resolution, counterterrorism cooperation, and disaster management, emphasizing its attempts to balance national security priorities with regional stability. Through a qualitative analysis of policy documents, official statements, and existing literature, the paper highlights India's potential to act as a stabilizing force while acknowledging the structural constraints, such as historical disputes, asymmetrical power dynamics, and domestic political pressures. The findings suggest that India's proactive diplomacy, combined with institutionalized regional mechanisms, can contribute significantly to a cooperative security architecture in South Asia.

Keywords: South Asia, India, Regional Security, Peacebuilding, Cooperative Security Architecture, SAARC

Introduction

South Asia, comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, represents a unique geopolitical landscape. Despite immense cultural, historical, and economic linkages, the region faces persistent security challenges. These include border disputes, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, maritime security threats, and climate-induced humanitarian crises. India, as the region's largest economy and military power, is central to the process of regional security cooperation. Its strategies range from bilateral partnerships and multilateral engagements to soft-power diplomacy and development assistance. This paper seeks to critically examine India's role in shaping a cooperative security architecture in South Asia, considering both opportunities and limitations.

Historical Context of Regional Security in South Asia

The colonial legacy, partition of India in 1947, and subsequent wars have left a lasting imprint on South Asia's security environment. Key historical flashpoints, such as the India-Pakistan rivalry, the insurgency in Afghanistan, and internal conflicts in Sri Lanka, have necessitated a regional security framework. SAARC, established in 1985, was envisioned to promote cooperation in economic, social, and security dimensions, but political tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan, have constrained its effectiveness. India's role has oscillated between pursuing regional integration and prioritizing national security imperatives.

India's Strategic Approach to Regional Security

1. Bilateral Security Initiatives

India maintains bilateral security arrangements with neighboring states to address cross-border terrorism, insurgency, and intelligence sharing. Notable examples include:

India-Nepal Security Cooperation: Joint initiatives in border management and intelligence sharing.

India-Bangladesh Counterterrorism Efforts: Collaboration against insurgent groups and trafficking networks.

India-Sri Lanka Maritime Security Agreements: Ensuring safe navigation and joint patrolling in the Indian Ocean region.

2. Multilateral Engagements

India actively participates in regional forums aimed at fostering cooperation:

SAARC: Despite challenges, India continues to advocate for cooperative counterterrorism measures and disaster response mechanisms.

BIMSTEC: Serves as an alternative platform for security, economic, and technological cooperation, particularly following the stagnation of SAARC due to Indo-Pak tensions.

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): Facilitates maritime security cooperation, anti-piracy initiatives, and climate resilience projects.

3. India's Counterterrorism and Peacebuilding Efforts

India has spearheaded regional frameworks for counterterrorism, emphasizing intelligence-sharing, joint exercises, and capacity building. Peacebuilding initiatives also include:

Disaster response cooperation in Nepal and Maldives.

Promoting dialogues to address insurgency and ethno-nationalist conflicts in Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Challenges to Cooperative Security Architecture

1. Interstate Rivalries

Persistent India-Pakistan tensions over Kashmir continue to impede multilateral cooperation. Similarly, India-Bangladesh and India-Nepal border disputes occasionally disrupt bilateral trust.

2. Asymmetric Power Relations

India's dominant military and economic position can create perceptions of hegemonism, reducing smaller states' willingness to engage in cooperative security frameworks.

3. Domestic Political Constraints

Domestic elections, party politics, and nationalist sentiments influence India's foreign policy, sometimes limiting long-term strategic engagements.

4. Non-Traditional Security Threats

Climate change, cyber threats, pandemics, and transnational organized crime require collective responses, but coordination remains limited due to institutional weaknesses.

India's Diplomatic and Soft Power Tools

1. Development Assistance and Economic Diplomacy

India uses infrastructure projects, capacity building, and trade agreements to strengthen regional partnerships, particularly in Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives.

2. Cultural Diplomacy

India leverages shared cultural, historical, and linguistic ties to build goodwill and promote soft-power influence. Examples include scholarship programs, cultural festivals, and medical aid initiatives.

3. Peace Mediation Role

India has played mediatory roles in Bhutan's internal political transition and Sri Lanka's post-conflict reconciliation processes, showcasing its potential as a regional stabilizer.

Case Studies of India's Regional Security Initiatives

1. India-Nepal Flood Disaster Management Cooperation (2017)

Joint early-warning systems, logistics support, and humanitarian aid helped prevent large-scale casualties during the monsoon floods.

2. BIMSTEC Counterterrorism Exercise (2019)

India led multilateral exercises to enhance intelligence-sharing and coordinated response capabilities among member states.

3. Maldives Coastal Security Partnership (2021)

India provided maritime security assistance, patrolling capabilities, and training for the Maldives National Defence Force, fostering bilateral trust.

Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthening Multilateral Forums: Reinvigorate SAARC by promoting issue-based cooperation separate from political disputes.
2. Institutionalizing Regional Security Mechanisms: Develop formal protocols for intelligence-sharing, joint exercises, and crisis response.
3. Balancing Power Asymmetries: Adopt transparent, inclusive mechanisms to ensure smaller states feel equally represented.
4. Addressing Non-Traditional Security Threats: Create specialized regional task forces for climate resilience, cybersecurity, and pandemic response.
5. Sustaining Soft Power Diplomacy: Expand cultural, educational, and development initiatives to reinforce India's role as a stabilizer.

Conclusion

India's role in shaping a cooperative security architecture in South Asia is crucial. While structural challenges such as interstate rivalries, power asymmetries, and domestic political constraints remain, India's active engagement through bilateral partnerships, multilateral forums, and soft-power diplomacy can foster regional peace. A balanced approach that integrates traditional security measures with non-traditional threats, economic cooperation, and cultural diplomacy will be essential for sustainable stability. By positioning itself as a proactive, responsible leader, India can transform South Asia from a region of chronic security dilemmas into one of cooperative resilience.

References :-

Chakrabarti, S. (2020). *India and South Asian security architecture: Challenges and prospects*. New Delhi: Routledge India.

- Ganguly, S. (2018). India's foreign policy and regional security in South Asia. *Journal of Asian Security*, 14(2), 112–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2018.1456921>
- Kapur, S. P., & Singh, R. (2019). Cooperative security and conflict resolution in South Asia. *Asian Survey*, 59(5), 823–848.
- Pant, H. V. (2021). India's strategic engagement in the Bay of Bengal. *International Journal of Maritime Affairs*, 12(3), 45–68.
- Thakur, R., & Weiss, T. G. (2018). Regional security cooperation in South Asia: Institutions, challenges, and opportunities. *Global Governance*, 24(3), 345–367.