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Communication and non-communication in a regional system: the pathological cleavage pattern of South Asia

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Introduction

If 'network society' has arrived it is of importance to find out to what extent this has happened in South Asia. A geographical area, a good example of which would be South Asia, delimited as it is by huge mountains and vast seas, also constitutes a regional 'system' (in an analytical sense) to the the extent that particular dimensions of it are systematically studied, whether security, development, culture, communication etc. Here we are interested in communication, or rather political preconditions for communication, in relation to cooperation and conflict. There is obviously a trade off between these two phenomena, but there may also be conflict in some areas and cooperation in others at the same time. There is no society that is free from conflict, in fact Castells makes the point that human societies are made from conflictive interaction. The 'society' we are concerned with here is the South Asian area, or region.

By region is here also (in addition to the analytical region) understood a geographical unit with a common culture and history. In this case the region of South Asia also coincides with a regional association, SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which is another more formal way of defining a region, i.e. the actual list of members in the regional association (Indian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives). These are also the countries that are covered by SASNET.

While 'area' is an object, I consider 'region' as subject in the making. Region is a more dynamic concept than area (as in area studies). Wheras 'area studies' privileges geographical space (Herring, 2001), 'regional studies' is an approach to global studies and necessarily a part of it.

As SASNET is a network for research and training cooperation between Sweden and South Asia it is of importance to know to what extent South Asia is a region and what the nature of the intraregional relations are. From the point of view of communication it is furthermore important to find out whether the region is a regional security complex characterized by suspicion and fear or a security community where good intentions are more or less taken for granted by the population at large. This has implications also in the academic field.

The theoretical framework applied here is Globalism and the New Regionalism, i.e. the region is seen in a global context, responding to global challenges, and as an expression of the recent world-wide wave of processes of regionalization.

Globalism and the New Regionalism

We are currently experiencing a global wave of regional integration with its roots in the mid-1980s. In this new wave Europe has been in the lead. EU represents the most advanced supranational regional arrangement the world so far has seen, and consequently serves as a paradigm for 'the New Regionalism'. There are some good reasons for this somewhat eurocentic approach (which must not be taken too far).

The European Union (EU) is often referred to as an example to follow in other regions of the world. In more negative terms, the European integration process, and the introverted attitude this gave rise to (the infamous so-called Fortress Europe), has been seen as a threat to the global trading system, and therefore a pretext for organising competing regional trade systems. Thus there are different motivations behind the New Regionalism, and thus many different patterns of regionalization.

The New Regionalism differs from the 'old' in a number of ways:
• Whereas the old was formed in a bipolar Cold War context, the new is taking shape in a multipolar world order and in a context of globalization. The New Regionalism and multipolarity are, from a world order perspective, two sides of the same coin.
• Whereas the old was created 'from above' (often through superpower intervention), the new is a more spontaneous process from within the emerging regions, where the constituent states now experience the need for cooperation, as an 'urge to merge', in order to tackle new global challenges.

• Whereas the old in economic terms was inward-oriented and protectionist , the new is often described as 'open', and thus compatible with an interdependent world economy.
• Whereas the old was specific with regard to its objectives (some organizations being primarily security-motivated, others economically oriented), the new is resulting from a more comprehensive, multidimensional process.
• Whereas the old was concerned with relations between nation-states, the new forms part of a global structural transformation, or globalization, in which also non-state actors are operating at several levels of the global system.

The staircase of regionness
The New Regionalism goes beyond free trade arrangements to include also other economic, as well as political, social and cultural issues. The political ambition of establishing regional coherence and regional identity seems to be of primary importance. This I call "the pursuit of regionness". The level of 'regionness' defines the position of a particular region in terms of regional coherence.

In general terms one can speak of five levels of regionness:
• A *regional space* is a geographic area, delimited by more or less natural physical barriers: The subcontinent of South Asia is an example. The space is socially organized by human beings, at first in isolated communities but maintaining some kind of translocal relationship.
• A *regional complex* implies ever widening translocal relations between human groups. Such relations of embryonic interdependence constitute a "security complex", in which the constituent units, normally some sort of 'states', are dependent on each other, as well as on the overall stability of the regional system. The regional system can therefore on this low level of regionness be described as anarchic. It is paradoxically united through its conflicts
• A *regional society* can be either organized or more spontaneous, and this in cultural, economic, political or military fields. In the case of a more organized cooperation, region is defined by the list of countries which happen to be members of the regional organization in question. The more organized region could be called the 'formal' region in contrast to the process of regionalization from below.
• A *regional community* takes shape when an enduring organizational framework (formal or less formal) facilitates and promotes social communication and convergence of values and

actions throughout the region, creating a civil society, characterized by social thrust, at the regional level.

• A *regional institutionalized polity* has a fixed structure of decision-making and strong actor capability, just like a nation-state. Crucial areas for regional intervention are conflict resolution (particularly within former 'states') and creation of welfare (in terms of regional balance). This process is similar to, but not the same as state-formation and nation-building. With a strong regional civil society and an accumulation of social capital, there would be less need for a region-state.

Although, these five levels may suggest a certain evolutionary logic, the idea is not to formulate a stage theory, but rather to provide a framework for comparative analysis of emerging regions. Whereas the first four levels are historical generalizations, the fifth, i.e. the region-state, is rather a possible scenario for the future, coexisting and competing with other scenarios that may overrun and overtake it.

Since regionalism is a political project and therefore created by human actors, it may, just like the nation-state project, fail. A region in decline means decreasing regionness and ultimately a dissolvement of the region itself. The Balkans is one obvious case in Europe.

In the case of Asia, South East Asia represents an advanced region in terms of regionness (regional society/community), whereas East Asia and South Asia are rather anarchical regional complexes. However South Asia also, to a larger extent than East Asia, exemplifies what I call 'inherent regionness' due to a historical legacy of shared experiences going much further back than to the British Empire of India. It is my argument that recent experiences of nationbuilding has eroded but not destroyed this inherent regionness.

The South Asian Scene

<u>Cleavage pattern</u>
South Asia has recently been described as "the most dangerous place in the world". If we see South Asia as a historical civilization (or a regional macro-culture) recently and artificially divided into nation-states, it is easier to conceive the various threat perceptions, linked to ethnicity and religion, that exist (Ahmed 1998:63). Even the hundreds of millions hindus of India think of themselves as alone (as hindus) in the world. Sikhism only exists in the territory of Punjab (apart from the diaspora). The Indian sikhs constitute a majority in Punjab, but only two per cent of the

population of India. Pakistan is a homeland for the Islamic faith, but there are actually more muslims in India. In Sri Lanka the tamils are perceived as part of a hindu-tamil sea with a small Buddhist-Sinhala island. The Indian minority in Nepal represents the regional great power, and the Nepalese minority in Bhutan is similarly seen as representing a more powerful neighbour. A realist theory of interstate relations (the Westphalia model) does not take us very far in understanding this conflict pattern, which can be described as pathological.

This is not to say that realism does not play a role. The South Asian region has seen many regional great power (Indian) interventions in the smaller countries, some unilateral one even bilateral (Sri Lanka) but so far none regional. The security complex is characterized by the dominance of India, which inherited the British geopolitical outlook, but also the deep distrust between the great power and the second largest state, Pakistan Between them they have one of the most longstanding "ethnic" conflicts in the region. The Kashmir conflict, described as a 'communal riot with weapons' (Cohen, 1998) is often seen as the obvious cause of an eventual major war in the region.

Apart from cultural divisions and diverging nation-state perspectives, the heterogeneity of the region is enhanced by a number of refugee populations emanating from interstate and intrastate conflicts. The involuntary movement of people differs from earlier flows of people searching for better livelihoods (Muni and Baral, 1996). As has often been pointed out, refugee flows are related to the nation-building project, wehther its construction or its failure. The creation of Pakistan (the division of British India) led to 20 million refugees crossing the new international border in both directions, and the failure of Pakistan (the creation of Bangladesh) made 10 million Bengalees flee for India. More recent flows are Tamils from Sri Lanka going to India. There are also extraregional sources such as Tibet (refugees in India) Afghanistan (refugees in Pakistan), and Burma (refugees in Bangladesh).

The regional diversity is largely reflected within the individual states as well. Particularly India constitutes and enormous ethnic mosaic (Rana P.B.Singh, 2001).

The potential of an inherent regional civil society (based on what above was called inherent regionness) remains largely unrealized due to a dysfunctional Cold War-like Westphalian political raionality, if rationality is the right word. This has implications

for external as well as internal conflicts in the region. In fact both are intimately related.

The traumatic India-Pakistan conflict, which so far has exploded in three wars (minor skirmishes uncounted), has prevented all more organized efforts towards regionalism. This conflict born at the division has been fueled by later national. religious and ethnic struggles: the problem of Kashmir, the Bengalee uprising against West Pakistan, and the Sikh aspiration to create Khalistan. Bangladesh's relations with India soon turned sour because of Indian arrogance, refugee problems and conflicts related to water management problems. The relations between India and Sri Lanka became increasingly tense as the Sinhalese–Tamil conflict erupted and Tamils fled to Tamilnadu, where they also received covert military training. The northern mountain kingdoms of South Asia were more or less absorbed into the Indian Union through processes of democratization and anti-monarchy agitations, discretely encouraged from India. Thus, the bilateral conflicts in the region invariably involve India. The prospect of a multilateral intervention in a conflict is distant; the regional power would not even permit regional conflict management.

Usually networking is associated with constructive activities and innovations, but it is equally relevant with regard to criminality and violence. Mark Duffield has coined the term 'network war' for what sometimes is called 'new wars' or 'new conflicts' and usually refers to the post-Cold War conflict pattern. It is problematic to identify what is really new in this pattern. By network wars is meant non-territorial networked social systems pitched against each other. 'Although fear and intimidation are important ... also involved is friendship, trust, loyalty, devotion and group solidarity' (Duffield, forthcoming). The Tigers of Sri Lanka with their high mobility, connections with Tamil Nadu, and their international networks of diaspora Tamils may be an example of a network war that becomes a way of life rather than an abnormal temporary crisis. Maybe there is no normalcy to return to.

Attempts at Cooperation
The other side of conflict is lack of cooperation. South Asia is one of the last regions to wake up to the challenge of the new regionalism (Muni, 2000). It has been a region of distrust and conflict, penetrated by external powers, which, as a matter of fact, sometimes have been invited by individual states in the

region as part of their internal hostilities. Until the mid-1980s there was no formal regional cooperation whatsoever. To the extent that one can say that South Asia had reached a certain level of regionness, its network of relations was mainly conflictive, creating a violent security complex (Buzan and Rizvi, 1986).

The region was traditionally inward-looking, since the regional great power, being at the same time a unique cilivization, until recently strongly emphasized self-reliance and bilateralism. For similar security reasons, the smaller countries encouraged external links to decrease their dependence on the regional power. Sri Lanka once made a move towards ASEAN, while Pakistan took on a West Asian identity. However, there is at the same time a potential homogenization in terms of political regimes (moving towards democray despite recurrent backlashes) and economic policies of opening up, as well as an inherent cultural homogeneity reflecting the shared Indic civilization, until now subsumed under a variety of inter- and intra-state conflicts.

The early evolution of SAARC coincided with serious internal conflicts (Sri Lankan Tamil and Sikh separatism), and it is a proof of the inherent soundness and logic of the idea of regional cooperation that a number of important meetings, including the Summit in Dhaka 1985, took place in spite of these disturbances, which also had serious interstate (Pakistan-India, Sri Lanka-India) implications.

The crucial interstate conflict is, of course, that between India and Pakistan. It is a conflict that defines the regional security complex and provides a key to its transformation into a regional security community. Its elimination would make all the difference as far as further regionalization is concerned. Summits of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have emphasized regionalism as the most appropriate way to relate to current changes in world order, but at the same time nationalist suspicions linger on as nationalist and fundamentalist movements gain strength. It is, however, both a strength and a weakness that SAARC contains all the South Asian states. It is a weakness, because the conflicts in the region will continue to paralyse SAARC for some time to come, confining its scope to non-controversial and marginal issues such as tourism and meteorology. It is a strength, however, precisely because controversial problems can be handled within one organization, providing at least a framework for regional conflict management.

Put differently, the regional organization coincides with the regional security complex and can therefore be seen as an embryo to a security community. Conflict resolution, however, is so far not considered a task for SAARC. There have therefore been several cases of unilateral and bilateral intervention, the most traumatic after the emergence of Bangladesh being the IPKF mission (Indian Peace Keeping Forces) in northern Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990. This is a controversial episode in the history of South Asian conflicts. It can be compared to the Dayton agreement in the sense that it was imposed by as strong external hand against the predominant mood of large parts of the population, sinhalas as well as tamils (who initially were more positive though). This exemplifies what has been called 'the Indian model of conflict resolution': a relatively generous reform programme unilaterally decided and with the purpose of marginalizing the militants (Perera, 2000:82). It may have worked in Punjab, but it misfired in Sri Lanka. This in spite of the fact that the political formula was basically sound. Political changes in both countries undermined the arrangement (Muni, 1993).

Prospects

Recent events in the region do not feed our optimism. The Simla summit between India and Pakistan came to nothing, and the Tamil Tigers gave a blow to the recovering tourist industry of Sri Lanka through the attack on the Colombo airport.

Obviously, South Asia has a long way to go before a regional approach to conflict resolution can be adopted. Regional cooperation in the economic field, or development regionalism, is (similar to the issue of security regionalism) at best embryonic. The economic rationale is not overwhelming, but has to be created (Adiseshiah, 1987). The slow process of economic convergence has at least started. In the field of resource management, there is, due to the shared river systems, strong interdependencies (environmental security complexes) which so far have been a source of conflict rather than cooperation. They may also, however, be turned into imperatives for regional cooperation, as shown by the agreement between India and Bangladesh on the sharing of Ganga waters. This treaty may change the political climate between the two neighbours and pave the way for a broader regional agreement (including Bhutan and Nepal).
The reason to search for regional solutions is that bilateral suspicions make any other solution fragile. The overall trend in the region is towards occasionally crisis-ridden muddling-through

democracies, where the threats from intra-state heterogeneity are more problematic than inter-state conflicts. However, to an increasing degree, internal and external issues become interweaved, reinforcing the arguments for development and security regionalism, but unfortunately not necessarily the political will to implement them.

Governance vs government in academic research

"Forget about power coming from the barrel of a gun or even a barrel of money. The communications revolution is changing who calls the shots" says Asiaweek (June 1-8, 2001) in a cover story of power in Asia focused on 50 successful communicators). It is getting increasingly hard for national bodies to control what the subjects think.

The logic of networking goes against the traditional from of organizing research by national institutions with their hierarchical organization and centralized allocation of research funds according to nationally established goals. The most extreme form of this organization was the 'academies of science' in the communist countries (still very much the pattern in China). The emerging model of research - consistent with the network logic can be summarized in the concept of governance, 'the orchestration of resources, actors and organizations, linked together towards various goals' (Benner). South Asia still has some way to go before this model of resarch is established. Centralized academic bodies play a major role in research, including censorship of unwanted information, and political authorities have a great influence over research collaboration.

A recent debate in India centered on the Indian Council of Historic Research where power has shifted from the political left to BJP, with the consequence that research on the freedom movement was censored for being negative to the role of the Hindu fundamentalists/nationalists (se Hettne, Sydasienbulletinen). Similar problems later appeared in the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). Currently there is also a debate in India on the organization of international conferences which for security reasons need to ask permission from a number of political authorities. This does not facilitate academic collaboration. Particularly unforunate is the fact that the neighbours in the region are treated with special suspicion (*The Hindu*, July 15, 2001). At the same time Pakistan has made it more easy for academicians to participate in international

conferences. What is said here refers to the situation before September 11, 2001. The effects of this event on the region remains to be seen.

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