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## **Confidence Building Measures in South Asia: Lessons for Iran and the Middle East**

### **Policy memo**

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### **Conceptual Framework of Confidence Building Measures**

Confidence building measures (CBMs) broadly defined, can be any set of unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral actions or procedures that act to reduce military tensions between a set or sets of states, before, during or after actual conflict.<sup>1</sup> Confidence building measures (CBMs) are meant to reduce the element of uncertainty and fright among the parties to a dispute or conflict. CBMs, thus gives confidence that, the opponent(s) are not going to behave unpredictably and in an aggressive manner. Through CBMs, the behaviours of the parties become more predictable and away from suspicions. CBMs are indeed, concurrences meant to give each party assurance that the other is not preparing for surprise military action or pursuing policies associated with such future actions.<sup>2</sup> Although, CBMs does not end the chances of any conflict or war forever, however, these measures provides transitory respite from the looming threat apprehensions and decrease the sense of insecurity, particularly to the weaker side.

### **Chronology of Rivalry and CBMs South Asian**

Ever since their independence, the frosty Indo-Pak relations are the main cause of an

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estranged South Asia. With respect to the CBMs, South Asia, particularly, the Indo-Pak Subcontinent has been atypical. This is because, despite taking a number of CBMs, there have been three major wars and a conflict (Kargil), apart from many minor skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. Over the years, India and Pakistan became nuclear powers, bringing strategic balance in the region, yet there remain the looming threats of conventional military escalations as witnessed in 2001/02, a major military mobilization along international border and LoC.

Unfortunately, the Indo-Pak history is marred with revulsion, mistrust and hostility, thus entire South Asia has been hostage to this rivalry. The cold war between the former super powers seriously influenced the South Asia, where India and Pakistan became their partners, with a clear ideological divide. The unresolved disputes, Kashmir being the most critical of contemporary international relations, further created a rift between two major countries of South Asia. The perpetual Indo-Pak divergences have many implications, which are not local in nature but their prolonged continuance also have global repercussions. The leading inference being that, South Asia could not be integrated as a region, politically as well as economically. The development of antagonistic cultures in both states is visible at the political as well as societal levels. In some cases history is distorted and redrawn in favour of each other's strategic culture. A crucial problem is the covert quasi-alliance that "hawks" on both sides establish by thriving on each other's prejudices.

This is a situation created by the application of action-reaction phenomenon. When one state develops its military component of national power, though not specifically for a particular country, the rival state tends to respond in similar terms. In the case of India and Pakistan, India has always taken lead and prompted Pakistan to engage in an arms race. In the wordings of McWilliams, Wayne C.; Piotrowski, Harry; "Both sides had been fortified with modern weapons purchased mainly from the US. US built jet fighters battled each other- some bearing Pakistani insignia and flown by Pakistani pilots, the others bearing Indian insignia and flown by Indian Pilots."<sup>3</sup>

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Militarization along borders, especially LoC costs both countries heavily, overlooking the social and human resource development. Just to quote, on the disputed Siachen Glacier, world's highest battlefield, Pakistan roughly spends "Rs15 million a day and India spends Rs 50 million a day for maintaining their militaries in that war zone."<sup>4</sup> Unlike EU and ASEAN, the only regional organization, SAARC, has not been able to harmonize the region; politically as well as economically. The major reason behind SAARC's failure is one of the principles of this organization is that, bilateral and contentious issues are not allowed to be discussed at the forum. Indeed, this regional organization is a hostage of regional hegemonic designs of the major regional country.

### **The Era of Optimism in the Indo-Pak CBMs**

The better part has been that, despite nuisance, there have been negotiations and peace talks at the officials, ministerial and even at the level of top leadership to shed away the environment of distrust between key neighbours of South Asia. These talks even continued during the period of extreme tension between both countries as track-2 diplomacy. Since 2003, there have been some very positive and substantive developments between India and Pakistan in almost all spheres; political, economic, security and between the civil society- people-to-people contact. In the history, the Indus Water Treaty-1960, has served as a major CBM, between Pakistan and India, though, in the contemporary situation, there arose many Pakistani concerns over the construction of some dams and diversion of water from Western rivers, exclusively meant for Pakistan.

The nuclear related CBMs were taken in 1988. In this regard, an agreement 'Non-attack of Nuclear Facilities' was signed between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad. The agreement was re-ratified by both countries in January 1992 and being implemented ever since. Through

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this agreement there takes place annual exchange of lists and details about the location of all nuclear-related facilities in each country. The measure further pledges both sides not to attack listed facilities.<sup>5</sup>

In 1991, India and Pakistan re-ratified an agreement<sup>6</sup> signed after the 1972 Simla Accord, which involves a communications hotline between commanders governing troop maneuvers, joint patrols of common borders, and a pledge not to launch pre-emptive attacks.<sup>7</sup> In December 2013, Indo-Pak Director General Military Operations met under same CBM to ease tension over the cross LOC firing.<sup>8</sup> While initiating the Composite Dialogue Process in 1997, India and Pakistan agreed to constitute Joint Working Groups (JWGs) on eight issues. Lahore Agreement-1999 was a reiteration by both sides for better bilateral relations and desire to resolve issues including Kashmir. Despite Kargil Conflict–1999, Agra Summit-2001 was a great success and a major CBM for the regional peace and stability in South Asia. The move forward on the stalled Composite Dialogue process revived during 12<sup>th</sup> SAARC at Islamabad in January 2004, was a major CBM.<sup>9</sup>

This development was a great success as it comes after the major military mobilization between India and Pakistan. Back door diplomacy and CBMs avoided this major military confrontation, which could have been very dangerous in the context of nuclearization of the region.

### **Kashmir Related CBMs**

According to Indian Scholar Kuldip Naya, former Pakistani Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, once said, “We can make the ceasefire line a line of peace and let people come and go between the two Kashmirs. After all, why should they suffer? Let there be some free movement between them. Then one thing can lead to another. After all, simultaneously we hope that there will be exchanges of visits, of officials and non-officials.”<sup>10</sup> Indian Premier AB Vajpayee during his visit to Pakistan (Lahore) said in

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1999, that the problem of Jammu and Kashmir had yet to be settled and that the two sides would continue to have talks until they resolved it. In other words, Vajpayee conceded that it was a dispute, warranting settlement. He did not declare it as an 'integral part of India.'<sup>11</sup> In 2003, Pakistan unilaterally announced a ceasefire along the LoC, which India reciprocated later and it remained effective until 2013. On the demands of Kashmiri masses, there were organized meetings and reunion of divided Kashmiri families across the LoC at five places. In the subsequent step, trade and travel across the LoC was envisaged and in 2005, Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service was inaugurated. This was followed by Poonch-Rawalakot travel in 2006 and truck service to promote intra-Kashmir trade. During 2004-2007, negotiations were held for the resolution of core issue, Kashmir and other issues like Siachen and Sir Creek. There still remains lot of anomalies as far as the smooth visa regime is concern.

### **Could CBMs Resolve Issues**

In South Asia, the need for restoration of trust and practical CBMs cannot be overemphasized. An analysis of South Asian history would reveal that CBMs though have reduced the hostilities under stressed environment, however did not resolve the issues either. Traditionally, there has been public support for the CBMs in Pakistan for a cordial and friendly Indo-Pak relationship. Nonetheless, Indian body-mass (public support) have been found wanting for the promotion of CBMs and good relations between India and Pakistan. Indian media and extremist Hindu nationalist parties have the ownership of creating an atmosphere of hatred among the Indian masses for Pakistan.

Indeed, neither the bilateralism nor adoption of a number of CBMs could resolve the core issues between major South Asia players. These core issues have the potentials to fuel the situation. Indeed, in the renewed peace process, both countries have resorted to a gradual approach, yet remained guarded to talk loudly on the core issue(s). Political analysts feel that peripheral issues of less significance remained the focus of

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discussions, while making promises only on the core issues.

Indeed, over the years, maintaining a status-quo on these issues created many other issues, which have now attained their separate identities and significance. In the presence of unresolved core issues, non-state actors would repeatedly find opportunities for derailing the peace process. As a result, the nuclear rivals would again turn to the mobilization of troops, risking nuclear disaster. Therefore, for a durable peace and stability of the region, there is a need that, regional leaders, especially of India and Pakistan realistically visualizes the future of the region and accepts the ground realities through an optimistic mindset.

Embarking upon the path of promoting trade and commerce, alongside making headway for the durable solution of core political issues and bridging the trust deficit is the best way forward. Therefore, South Asians, must continue talking to each other, remain engaged in negotiations, do not react to sporadic incidents and acts of Non State Actors, take all measures for the promotion of peace and tranquility, initiate more CBMs and develop economic cooperation. This is only possible by giving peace a chance, ending antagonism by bringing concord among the leadership and people of two countries. This process would provide opportunities for enhance economic development and social integration in the South Asia.

Indeed, under the changed environment of interdependence and with pre-eminence of soft power; social constructivism and liberalism in the international politics, there is realization among the South Asian neighbours to shed away the differences and move forward. Nonetheless, there exist traditional mindsets at some quarters and strong influence of the hawks, which derailed the peace process and rendered the CBMs as unproductive. There is a need that international community, UN and major powers should facilitate in the resolution of core issues in South Asia.

### **Lessons for Middle East and Iran**

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### **CBMs: Iran and Middle East**

Like South Asia, Middle Eastern region has been a focus of international community ever since WW-I. The region has its predicaments like; Israel-Palestine problem, Iran-GCC divide, Iranian nuclear programme, instability in Lebanon, foreign invasions, local uprisings, the power play of the major powers and above all, the oil politics; indeed, oil as a *raison d'être* of turmoil in the region. Despite a continuous conflict and a state of violence between Palestinian Authority and Israel, there have been parallel efforts; CBMs for bringing a peace in the region<sup>12</sup> on the terms, acceptable to both sides. Starting from the Camp David Accords-1978, where two framework agreements were reached at, there have been over 19 peace building efforts, indeed, CBMs to bring peace in the region. To name a few peace agreements, Madrid conference 1991 was a major breakthrough. Oslo accords-1993-1995, paved the way for a durable peace in the region. Others include; Hebron protocol-1997, Wye River memorandum-1999, Camp David Summit-2000, Taba Summit-2001, Road map-2003, Agreement on Movement and Access-2005, and Annapolis Conference-2007.

All these agreements and CBMs were aimed at a win-win situation and a state for the Palestinian. Invisible forces and hawks prevailed at the critical stages of the implementation of all these CBMs and pacts, thus creating more splits and causes of violence. However, in the process, some of the Arab countries came very close to Israel, but, Palestinians could not get back to their homeland and majority of them are still languishing either in jails or in refugee camps in other neighbouring countries. United States and European made some of serious efforts for the regional peace. According to writer William B. Quandt, "Sometime in the mid-1970s the term peace process began widely used to describe the American-led efforts to bring about a negotiated peace between Israel and its neighbors. The phrase stuck, and ever since, it has been synonymous with the gradual, step-by-step approach to resolving one of the world's most difficult conflicts. The United States has provided both a sense of

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direction and a mechanism. That, at its best, is what the peace process has been about. At worst, it has been little more than a slogan used to mask the marking of time.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Recent History of Ideological Divide**

The recent history of the region is marred by ideological differences between Iran and GCC states on variety of issue, local uprisings (Arab Spring), oil politics and major powers’ play in the regional geopolitics. In 2013, removal of Egyptian President

Mohamed Morsi and the heightened Islamist-secularist tension has pushed actors toward zero-sum politics.<sup>14</sup> Likely Egyptian President, General Abdul Fattah Al Sissi, visited Moscow with an endorsement from President Vladimir Putin and finalization of an arms deal of \$2 billion (funded by GCC states). President Putin backed General Sissi in the wordings; “I know that you, Mr. Defense Minister, have decided to run for president of Egypt. I wish you luck both from myself personally and from the Russian people.”<sup>15</sup>

According to US National Intelligence Agency, Syrian situation is quite serious and “There is widespread torture and killing by Assad regime on an unprecedented scale unlike anywhere in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Apart from 134,000 deaths, 6.5 million Syrians have been displaced internally and 2.5 million took refuge in the neighbouring countries. Iranian-Saudi differences are traditional, however, Iranian Foreign Minister believes that both countries, “share a common interest in a secure environment, thus, neither one of us will benefit from sectarian divisions, neither one of us will benefit from extremism.”<sup>17</sup>

1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran brought a major change in the regional politics. Iranian Islamists voiced against the monarchs of Middle East, particularly Gulf States for the promotion of their form of Islam. Gulf monarchs took it as a challenge for their survival, thus established Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981. GCC was

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formed to confront their security challenges in the region through collective measures. Saudi military support of Bahrain in 2011-12 was a demonstration of collective security. Based on ideology, GCC states supported Iraq during Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). On its part, Iran established its nexus with Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and those Arab localities following its ideology. Iran fully supported Hezbollah during its 34 days war in 2006, Hamas against Fatah, uprising in Bahrain and Syrian regime against insurgents. Indeed, Iran raised an active and popular voice against monarchs in Middle East and particularly GCC states and they used all measures to counter that.

### **Iranian Nuclear Issue in Perspective**

New Iranian regime under President Hassan Ruhani has agreed to negotiate a deal with P5+1. Initial developments on a likely deal are encouraging and following the visit of IAEA technical experts, Iran has shown its willingness ‘Not to opt for nuclear weapons’.<sup>18</sup> U.S and EU have started easing the sanctions, imposed against Iran, ever since 2005/6. Opportunities of a closer tie between US and Iran are increasing and Israel-Iran relations may witness a positive change in the days to come. The upshot is that, a nuclear Iran could have been a direct threat to Israel. According to a US official, “All our concerns must be met to get an agreement”<sup>19</sup> over Iran’s nuclear programme. The end result should be that, “Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon and that world powers can be confident that Iran’s nuclear program has no military aspect or intent, as Iran maintains.”<sup>20</sup> The deal would reduce the antagonism between Iran and US, some of CBMs are already visible.

The perceptible tilt in US regional policy, a probable US-Iran cooperation has created a thaw in the bilateral relation of former with Saudi Arabia and may be GCC countries. Besides, the NATO and U.S decision of not taking a military action against Syrian regime has further created mistrust between these partners. The Iran-Iraq nexus over enhancement in oil production and its likely international sale may threaten the Saudi monopoly over the oil and leadership of OPEC.

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According to Simon Henderson, a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “The game here is for control of the OPEC cartel. Baghdad and Tehran get on very well together and they are vying against Saudi Arabia, which is the other major power in the Gulf. The energy side of it is that oil and gas is the main component, the main weapon which these countries can use against each other.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Needed CBMs between Iran and GCC**

Doha, Qatar GCC meet-2007 was a welcome step, indeed a leap forward for building confidence between Iran and GCC. GCC decision of not support any military action against Iran by US in the wake of tense relations over Iranian nuclear programme at that time was a good gesture and great CBM. Rather developing antagonism, Iran-GCC needs to have political dialogue and enhance their trade and commerce for a better cooperation in the region. Palestinian issue, bane of peace needs a just resolution based on UN resolution. Avoidance of a conflict – most desired. Syrian conflict is heading for a resolution through talks, let the people’s will to prevail, rather mugging of external forces; both regional and extra regional. Egyptians strife too is in the resolution process. There is a pause in the Arab uprisings, which has the potential of resurfacing, provided sufficient welfare measures for the local masses are not taken.

### **Contemporary Debate on CBMs in South Asia and Middle East-Iran**

South Asian CBMs and problem solving strategy (model) has not been a success. Therefore, a bungled South Asian model cannot be replicated for Middle East & Iran. In fact, Middle Eastern and Iranian issues are more in number & complex in nature than South Asian. United States and some European countries have seriously tried to facilitate and mediate the resolution of Palestinian issue though results were not altogether encouraging. Unlike Middle East and Iran, major powers and international

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community has not been forthcoming to play a facilitating role for resolving the core issues in South Asia. Non-resolution of Kashmir & Palestine disputes resulted into mushrooming of issues in both regions to the extent of overshadowing of core disputes. Geo-strategic & geo-economic dynamics of the region further complicated the resolution of both disputes.

Whereas, more CBMs and trust building measures are needed in South Asia and Middle East, United Nations, US and international community need to make serious efforts for the resolution of decades old issues in both regions; Kashmir in South Asia and Palestine in Middle East. Resolution of the core issues would give way for the resolution of other issues, emerged over the years as offshoots of these issues. Has there been uniform implementation of UN resolution, both regions could have got rid of root causes of the contemporary mushrooming of issues. Until resolution of the issues, there is a need that, active and effective CBMs should be taken to avoid any conflict in both regions. However, for a durable peace in both regions, the international platform, we have in the form of United Nations has to be strengthened, its resolution are to be implemented indiscriminately and right of self determination as enshrined in its Charter has to be given to all those deserve and waiting for since decades.

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