Report of NUST GTTN-IISS Panel Discussion on Evolving Regional Geo-Strategic Trends
1. Foreword

December of 2014 witnessed National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) Global Think Tank Network (GTTN) arrange a panel discussion with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, at NUST Main Campus, Islamabad, under the title, “Evolving Regional Geo-strategic trends in the Region.” The panel consisted of experts from GTTN and IISS. The panellists were posed the question: Would emerging geo-strategic trends in South Asia and Afghanistan enhance or disrupt regional stability and security?

The moot question led to a detailed, interactive, and open discussion amongst the panellists and the audience – which itself comprised senior policy makers, military strategists, academics, researchers, and students – that led to the examination and clarification of the general direction of continuously developing geo-strategic trends in the region.

These trends, it was pointed out, had a dual existence in the region’s geopolitics. In the first place, they appeared as causes of the actions of various regionally active national, sub-national, and supra-national players. They, then, became effects of these actions and served as future building blocks in the geo-political calculations of various states in the region. This generative causal chain ceaselessly impacted inter-state relations in the region and compelled policy makers and analysts to keep abreast of latest changes in the direction of these trends. The tendency of these trends was primarily negative.

2. The Discussion

2.1. Multiple Effects of Information Explosion

Information revolution had sharpened regional contradictions at the same time that it had led to a multiplication of opportunities for greater understanding of issues in the region. As the world had become more complex in the wake of increased technology-based interconnectedness and interdependence in a globalized world, an unrestrained information explosion was taking place on a planetary scale that had upturned relations amongst nations and peoples alike. Paradoxically, the result of this unprecedented access to information was not a heightened state of awareness and better and improved decision-making but rather the state of being mis- and ill-informed about others, whether nations, cultures, or human beings.

This state of misinformation particularly applied to the way countries dealt with each other in peace and war. Competing national narratives inhibited the growth of consensus in and between nations and increased the danger of mutual misperception. Another danger was the chronic misunderstanding regarding the nature and origins of global, regional, and local problems and, therefore, flawed responses to these myriad problems. For instance, one of the effects of this phenomenon was the misattribution of the causes of terrorism, which was, in fact, caused principally by the perpetration of injustice and the denial of people’s fundamental rights.

The lexicon of international relations was inspired by the demands of the pursuit and accumulation of power in the world. For instance, the real-world connotation of the term, “super-power”, were not only interesting but also disturbing. It connoted a state that could bring an overwhelming destructive power to bear on its relations with the world because it had the concentrated and ever-increasing capabilities to destroy the world, as it existed, many times over.

The regional situation remained worrisome due to a multitude of factors which involved, among others, the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, the unresolved issue of Kashmir, India’s regional ambitions, mixed responses by countries and their peoples to the active regional presence of the US, the rise of China, and the prospect of the emergence of a Eurasian economic union in which there could be a robust Sino-Russian cooperation complemented by active participation of different states in Eurasia.
In this regard, it was important to distinguish between convergent and divergent interests as these two species of interest had the potential to effect new alliances and partnerships as well as promote greater understanding or create situations in which differences could snowball into conflict.

In addition, the shock effects from global flashpoints like Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Ukraine also made themselves felt in South Asia because of its crossroads-like nature. The geopolitics of gas and oil pipelines, together with the emergence of post-Cold War regional groupings like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were also bound to affect the bigger geostrategic environment within which South Asian developments would be contextualized.

A complex world with its equally complex problems required well-intentioned, well-considered, well-grounded, and well-prepared solutions. But designing these solutions meant one took an objective stock of the global state of affairs.

2.2. Threats to Regional Stability and Security

This meant looking, from a Tolstoyan global panoptic, at how the global role of the US had undergone change recently. In this respect, diminution of the global security role of the US was an important geopolitical feature of the contemporary world. This diminution did not make the US incapable of playing a unique role in enforcing international security but compelled it to be selective in doing so for a number of reasons. One of these reasons was the emergence of new poles of power. The other could be the American desire to share global security burdens with allies or other responsible powers. To be fair, one could say that this phenomenon was not new and that US policy had fluctuated between greater and reduced engagement in the past too. The multiplicity of crises that had occupied the attention of top global policy makers recently had made focusing on any one given issue something of a challenge. This had resulted in a push away from the strategic approach and a focus on tactics in terms of tackling the prevalent transnational threats.

Two amongst these threats, namely, transnational terrorism and global cybersecurity, were of particular concern to the questions of stability and security. Contrary to the expectations of global policy makers, global jihadist terrorism did not fizzle out after the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011. In fact, the reverse took place. The phenomenon that emerged was the dispersed and fragmented terrorism, bound by the common thread of jihadist ideology and the remarkable ability to attach itself to any number of multiple but essentially local grievances.

The impact of terrorism on the security and economy of the developed countries was not very severe and serious as these countries commanded greater resources and capacity to counter threats. But the situation was diametrically different in the developing world. There had been an inexorable rise in the level of casualties in about a dozen countries located in a swathe of territory starting from Nigeria in West Africa moving up and through North Africa across the Arabian Peninsula and reaching as far as South Asia. This was amply demonstrated by the recent and ongoing developments in Iraq which could be characterised as the “industrialization of terrorism” with conventional warfare, insurgency, terrorism, and organized crime all brought together in a unique toxic mix with uncertain consequences. Combined with this toxic hybrid, there could be seen the worrying phenomenon of economic, social, and institutional degradation implacably breeding violence to the extent that it seemed as if global development was actually reversing itself with potentially disturbing effects. Related to this trend was that of global urbanisation which could lead to conditions in which, according to theorists like David Killcullen, major security problems could be posed by littoral megacities proving increasingly difficult to police, where formal institutions of government would be replaced by informal arrangements figuring various non-state groups. Some of this could be seen to have already happened in Pakistan as well.

Transnational terrorism was inextricably tied up with the issue of global cybersecurity. The overriding characteristic of the new cyber-age was the virtually non-existent barriers to entry. As a result, a growing number of state and non-state actors were engaged in this domain. This had led to a proliferation of illegal literature that could aid and instruct in the commission of crimes of various sorts. Terrorist and non-state groups singularly adept at leveraging benefits of global communications systems were using these to promote their agendas proselytising and shaping the battle space through
the shaping of narratives. This had already become an issue in defining global security architecture and perceptions. State actors of various kinds were also involved in cyber-exploitation, mainly information collection and espionage, which could tend towards operations with effects similar to those achieved in kinetic environments.

There was also growing militarisation of cyberspace coupled with increasing levels of state espionage conducted through cyber means with a dangerous potential to generate unintended escalation, particularly in cases where nuclear powers were involved. These powers would not be in favour of a wait-and-see policy in such situations, especially if their information systems and situational awareness were to be disrupted. There was an urgent need to seriously start working for developing international standards and norms of conduct in cyberspace to reduce the potential for unwarranted actions by state and non-state actors in cyberspace that could impair global and regional security environment. The fact that countries could unfairly target blame at their competitors for putative cybercrimes also needed to be considered and dealt with.

While transnational terrorism was a persistent threat, the domestic situation of Afghanistan was central to any meaningful discussion of regional stability and security. For this reason, it required a correct and objective assessment.

2.3. The Afghan Factor

Stability and security in the region were largely dependent on peace and normalcy returning to Afghanistan but it seemed unlikely for the foreseeable future. Four interrelated factors were identified to be responsible for preventing return to normalcy in Afghanistan. These were: the violation of Afghanistan's Misaq-e-Milli (national social contract); the incongruent Afghan constitution; full-blown effects of the global war on terror (GWOT); and narcotics.

Afghanistan, it was argued, had always been a tribal society. For almost two hundred years, the basis of normalcy and stability of this society was its Misaq-e-Milli wherein all ethnic power groups agreed to live together in a loose tribal confederation held together by the pivot provided by the Durrani monarchy that skilfully maintained a delicate balance of power by playing the role of a neutral arbitrator and conciliator through the artful juggling of tribal politics and occasional military action. Soviet intervention and infiltration in the key apparatuses of the Afghan state – the army, intelligence organizations, and bureaucracy – preceding and following the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 destroyed this basis of stable order in the country. Since then, Afghans had lived without a binding force fighting each other and different occupying forces for the last 35 years with no end to conflict in sight. For a brief period it seemed that the pre-9/11 Taliban could provide the new pivot but such hopes came to an end when they fell foul of global powers.

The second factor that made the return of normalcy to Afghanistan unlikely was the incongruent national constitution of Afghanistan virtually imposed on the country post-US-NATO invasion. It completely ignored the socio-political realities of Afghanistan. Basically the handiwork of the Euro-American mentality, the new constitution grafted a US-style presidential system that concentrated executive and military powers in the office of an all-powerful president onto a unitary state-style structure where the president could appoint governors as provincial administrators. This went against the grain of the Afghan political temperament resulting in the unpopularity of the constitution amongst the masses and resistance to it from some important political elements.

This failure could also be evidently seen in the recent power-sharing arrangement between the president and the CEO, which was a typically Afghan measure but an unconstitutional and ad-hoc one from the standpoint of the Afghan constitution. It was only the military muscle provided by the foreign troops and foreign-funded Afghan security force that was sustaining this unsustainable socio-political dispensation. Pakistan's advice to its allies not to include the recognition of the constitution as a precondition for peace talks with Afghan insurgents fell on deaf ears and was misconstrued as its support for the insurgency in Afghanistan.

The global war on terror was the third factor at work against normalcy in Afghanistan and the region at large. It unwisely lumped together global terrorism and local insurgency, which, for all practical purposes, were two distinct phenomena. This gave both an opportunity to derive strength from each
other. The strategy of global war on terror failed to distinguish other terror situations such as Sri Lanka, Palestine, Bosnia and Chechnya. Pakistan’s advice to its allies, which was also disregarded, to rechristen this war as the war on global terror would have led to a focus on global terror groups with open agenda and global reach and defeating them through intelligence-based operations which tended to be more successful against such groups. The local militants with localized political agendas could then be tackled with a carrot-and-stick policy based on a combination of selective military operations and the offer of negotiations.

This led to a missed opportunity in 2003 when it was felt that Afghan Taliban were sufficiently weakened to be amenable to reconciliation and become part of the government in return for three ministries, namely, religious affairs, education, and interior. Global war on terror had, therefore, proved to be a failure in so far as Afghanistan was concerned. The withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan would leave the country open to insurgency. Afghan tribal politics would throw up a live-and-let-live arrangement, already visible in certain areas, with the Afghan security forces at the same time that the presence of the remaining foreign troops in select bases scattered around the country would continue to attract jihadist elements around the world.

The menace of narcotics was the fourth factor of instability and lack of security in Afghanistan. Spread over 38,000 acres in 2005, the current area under poppy cultivation was said to be 300,000, some said, even 500,000 acres, in Afghanistan. The international market value of Afghan narcotics was said to be USD 60 billion of which USD 8 billion were estimated to filter back into the region. This had given the international narco-mafia a powerful interest in continued conflict on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was even conjectured that the conflict situations in FATA and Balochistan were in fact intended to pin Pakistani security forces down in an attempt to divert focus and resources away from anti-narcotic operations. In the meantime, it seemed unlikely that the global community would show a long-term commitment and source about USD 30-40 billion in the next 10 years required to convert Afghanistan back to a normal agriculture economy. It was underscored that one million refugees, the fallout of massive narcotics cultivation in Afghanistan and the presence of anti-Pakistan militants in Afghanistan provided rationale for Pakistan’s legitimate and active interest in Afghanistan which had to be recognised and conceded by all.

However, there had been indications that Afghan security forces were beginning to perform their role of fighting insurgents and denying them new territory as well as preventing the fall of key populated areas cleared back in 2010-2011. Afghan forces had also repelled insurgent attempts to capture Kabul. The security provided by Afghan security forces during the elections in 2014 ensured relatively peaceful voting than would have been the case in absence of the cover given by security forces.

The Afghan security forces had also reached the planned level of 350,000 troops. Bilateral Security Agreement between the US and Afghanistan also meant that there were clear security guarantees given by the Washington to Kabul. The US would continue to perform two sustainable but specific and narrow tasks after the drawdown. Firstly, training and assisting the Afghan forces; and secondly, targeted counter-terrorism operations against Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. NATO was also committed to replacing the ISAF with the Resolute Support Mission,1 aimed at training and advising Afghan security forces through help in improving and strengthening the overall security architecture of Afghan security that included support to interior and defence ministries, Afghan special forces, intelligence, and the three arms of the Afghan armed forces.

Moreover, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations had been harmed by myths like that of “strategic depth” that had circulated without any check for the longest period of time in the region and beyond with regard to the Pakistani position toward Afghanistan. This had never been an avowed or tacit component of Pakistan’s strategic and foreign policy paradigm and it was, therefore, utterly preposterous to refer to it to explain Pakistan’s response to the situation in Afghanistan now or before. Pakistan’s only interest in Afghanistan was peace and to see it established in that country in line with the wishes of Afghan...

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1- International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) concluded its operation on the 28th of December, 2014 after thirteen years and was replaced with Resolute Support Mission under which 12,500 troops will be dedicated to building the overall effectiveness of Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) with contributions from 28 NATO allies and 14 partner countries.
people and government. Pakistan did not require any “strategic depth” because Pakistan’s own geostrategic position was an asset and required the policymakers to use it to the country’s advantage. However, there was no need to overplay the strategic importance of Pakistan’s location.

2.4. India’s Domestic Challenges and Its Role in Regional Stability

Moreover, India had a critical role to play in regional stability and security. It was argued that its current role in regional stability and security was tied in with the domestic mandate and challenges of PM Modi, his perspective on relations with Pakistan, and his perspective on the region. Three elements were important in so far as PM Modi’s domestic mandate and challenges were concerned.

Firstly, the current government in New Delhi was Modi’s government more than it was BJP’s. This distinction was considered crucial. The personality of the Indian Prime Minister was more influential than the ruling party to which he belonged. This was evidenced by the presidential-style election campaign Modi had run in the world’s largest parliamentary democracy. A strong top-down policy approach was evident in New Delhi, which was not seen in the previous government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The stalwarts of that previous government seemed to have been marginalized in the current Indian government.

Secondly, Modi’s landslide election victory meant political stability in the centre for the next four and a half years but still it did not ensure legislative activism. One reason for this could be BJP majority in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, the Lok Sabha, and the lack thereof in the upper house, the Rajya Sabha, which was critical for the enactment of legislation. The other reason could be the fact that BJP was only at the helm in 11 out of India’s 29 states which essentially meant that BJP had political power shortfalls in the Indian federal system where the states, not the centre, enjoyed decision-making and implementation powers over law and order, police, land policy, etc.

Thirdly, Modi’s top priority was India’s political and economic transformation but this could be delayed for two to three years due to India’s slow economic growth that became the slowest at less than 5 percent last year in a decade. Even if the economic growth increased again which it was expected to do in the next 2-3 years, India’s economic transformation would still require major institutional reforms which could not be implemented unless BJP had a majority in the Rajya Sabha.

These domestic elements had implications for regional stability and security. A secure, stable, and peaceful neighbourhood was required for the fulfilment of Modi’s principal objective of India’s transformation powered through high economic growth and increased foreign investment. It was pointed out that the importance of a peaceful neighbourhood for PM Modi was evident in his invitation to SAARC heads of states to his inaugural ceremony, his immediate foreign visits after assuming office, and in his desire to develop peaceful relations with countries in the region.

2.5. The Geo-strategic Impact of India-Pakistan Relations

India’s relationship with Pakistan was crucial for a peaceful neighbourhood. It was recognised that peaceful and normal India-Pakistan relationship would not only enhance bilateral but also regional security. Although bilateral relations were tense at the time Modi became the PM, there was a clear attempt by Modi to change India’s existing policy towards Pakistan aimed at reaching out to it. This policy did lead to the setting up of the meeting of foreign secretaries, which was then cancelled by India on the basis that the Pakistani High Commissioner had met the Kashmiri Hurriyat leadership. This constituted a setback in India-Pakistan relations. Similarly, palpable coldness between Indian and Pakistani PMs at the recent SAARC Summit was also no secret and was an embodiment of troubled bilateral relations.

There was a need for the resumption of talks between India and Pakistan. But it had to be understood that official-level talks between India and Pakistan

2- All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) is a Muslim political alliance formed in 1993 to advocate and achieve the right of self-determination for Kashmir under the UN Security Council Resolution 47.
were only means to an end rather than the end in itself. The useful way to start talk between India and Pakistan could be to work towards an effective ceasefire on the Line of Control (LOC) in the disputed Kashmir region as well as on the working boundary. PM Modi had far fewer constraints for India’s foreign policymaking than the previous Congress-led government and had the scope to make substantive tactical changes amidst strategic continuity. It was said that PM Modi, partly because of his personality and style, seemed set to taking a more pragmatic view of India’s neighbourhood with a precarious regional security environment. But the key fact was that bold foreign policy approaches in the neighbourhood for New Delhi had to await India’s own domestic economic stabilisation and growth which remained the primary focus of PM Modi.

The obverse of the strapping pragmatism of PM Modi was also true in so far as South Asia and India-Pakistan relations were concerned. There was no particular reason for optimism if one looked at South Asia and Middle East. The interplay between the long-standing interests of the US, the resurgence of Russia, the rise of China, and the emergence of India could have unintended and unforeseen consequences. It was cautioned that India-Pakistan relations would have to contend with growing uncertainty in the region in ways that could not be possibly predicted.

Only 15 years ago, Palestine-Israel conflict and India-Pakistan differences over Kashmir were two traditional problems in the West and South Asia that occupied regional and global players but different factors had contributed to create a geopolitical situation in the region in which it seemed as if a veritable Pandora’s box had been opened that could generate any number of crises to the detriment of regional peace and security.

As mentioned earlier, the failure to identify root causes of problems like terrorism largely contributed to their smouldering continuation and periodic explosion. Confronted with multidimensional poverty, chronic hunger and disease of pandemic proportions, India-Pakistan rivalry existed as a sorry reminder of the fact that both countries had failed to settle their problems, which ate into their ability to improve the lot of their peoples decisively and comprehensively.

PM Modi’s pragmatic optimism that led to his invitation to the Pakistani PM to attend his inauguration was a welcome sign. It was accepted by PM Nawaz Sharif even though he had had to face domestic criticism for his reciprocal gesture but the overall response to his presence in Delhi was nothing short of a calculated rebuff that only embarrassed the Pakistani PM.

India’s cancellation of the talks between foreign secretaries simply because Pakistan had contacted APHC leadership ahead of the talks was strange and unprecedented. It was a standard and normal practice for different levels of Pakistani leadership to have contacts with APHC. The Indian refusal to talk to Pakistan using APHC as a pretext was an effort to redefine the Kashmir issue more in line with its way of looking at the problem. This could partly be due to the spillover into the sphere of foreign relations, especially where Pakistan was concerned, of a dangerous disregard for status-quo that PM Modi had shown in domestic Indian politics.

Using corrosive diplomacy in the service of revisionist designs had not worked in the past in 2001 and 2008 and was not likely to work in future either. Moreover, there was policy dissonance in PM Modi’s attitude toward Pakistan. While he emphasised regionalism and connectivity, his attitude revealed exclusionary tendencies with regard to Pakistan. It would have been better, therefore, had there been a genuine effort on both sides to try to build something in the way of an architecture of peace which did not exist in any form and manner between India and Pakistan. Even, the alleged violation of ceasefire along LOC were neither here nor there as there was no formal ceasefire agreement on the LOC between the two countries.

Different points of contact between India and Pakistan in the form of much vaunted hotlines between different levels and offices on both sides were more ceremonial than effective in nature. There was a need to register that the balance between India and Pakistan was precarious and it was never a wise thing to tempt fate in a situation marked by uncertainty.

2.6. The Implications of Sino-Russian Engagement with the Region
The conflict in Afghanistan and India-Pakistan relations were also sure to be affected by the geostrategic effects of the fall in the price of oil which could immediately affect Iran and Russia and limit their space for strategic manoeuvring. Aggravation of troubles in Xinjiang could create serious consequences made worse by India's misplaced foreign policy assertiveness.

Sino-Russian convergence evidenced by long-term massive energy deals – totalling approximately USD 700 billion in oil and gas for the next 30 years – between the two countries and the recognition of Pakistan by Russia as part of a new global consensus of responsible forces with a positive role to play in Afghanistan could point to a future in which China, Russia, and Pakistan were more harmoniously aligned in terms of shared interests and policy responses to regional crises and development plans.

Moscow’s rationale to improve bilateral ties with Pakistan could be based on its appreciation of the key role that Pakistan plays in the regional strategy of the US and the possible leverage Moscow could get if it could enable Islamabad through defence cooperation and other initiatives to become relatively less prone to US pressure. This could also quite naturally lead to the improvement of Pakistan's position in the South Asian strategic calculus. Sergey Shoigu’s visit to Pakistan in November 2014 – the first by a Russian Defence Minister in 45 years – was, therefore, a landmark event in regional geopolitics. This could possibly roil those forces which would like to see a diminished role for Pakistan in the region rather than its enlargement and its legitimation through strong cooperation with China and Russia.

The role of China in South Asia and Afghanistan was also bound to increase significantly. The state of its relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India would have important consequences for stability in the region. It was still early to say what definitive form this engagement would take. But China needed to: avoid creating strategic uneasiness in the US and confrontational relations with it; avoid middle-income trap through the resolution of its internal developmental contradictions to maintain upward trajectory of growth based on the diversification of its development strategy; and avert distraction of state focus on development and dissipation of society’s energies from democratization of its polity. Also important was if China would transcend its current case-by-case mode of engagement with South Asia which could be explained by the fact that it did not face a sense of urgency towards the region and could afford to take time in developing a more consolidated South Asia policy. China’s relations with Afghanistan were, however, more coherent and based on the resource requirements of China’s domestic growth which had led to good relations with Afghanistan with further improvement expected under the new Afghan President. China’s relationship with India looked set to stay on the course of building complementarities incrementally while remaining cognizant of the potential for conflict.

2.7. Systemic Limitations to Regional Stability and Security

Equally important for the stability and security in the region was systemic and structural melding of the political and the personal, of the social and the individual, of the public and the private. The region had experienced a massive political awakening, not as explosive as witnessed earlier in the Middle East and North Africa but equally far-reaching, of the formerly disenfranchised segments of populace in South Asia. This mass groundswell was remarkable for the prominent role played in it by huge youth populations based on their leveraging of ICTs-based connectivity domestically and regionally to form ever-expanding networks of activism and protest. This entry into political arena of the previously excluded sections of regional publics had led to a sudden plebeianisation of national politics in the region – evident in the elections in Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan – wherein increasingly lumpen elements, not conversant with the art and ethics of political discourse, had entered the sphere of political participation.

Allied to this broadening of participation, and flourishing because of it, was the narrowing of the spectrum of political choice that had made it easy for populism to strengthen its hold over public consciousness, thereby increasing the risk of irresponsible management of regional domestic and inter-state relations.

The fact that there was only a limited room for expansion in the world system was central to the question of the emergence of any power in the
existing inter-state system. In absence of any steady-state limits to new-power emergence, instability, either in the immediate neighbourhood of such powers or other regions of their interaction, was bound to be a direct outcome of their rise.

Historical experience – post-Second World War development of the former West Germany, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore – showed that conflict-torn countries did not enjoy sustained commitment of world powers for reconstruction in the absence of antagonistic hegemonic challengers. Therefore, Afghanistan would keep waiting for a comprehensive foreign-funded national reconstruction for some time to come. Displacement from content to perception in the realm of politics also caused considerable national and regional instability by delaying the moment of construction of a positive reality because all focus was on building a positive perception.

In so far as stability and security in South Asia and Afghanistan were concerned, a lot also depended upon the turn the foreign and strategic policies of the US took. Zbigniew Brzezinski in his 2012 book, Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power, had presented a “balance-sheet of American power” that consisted of six strengths, namely, “overall economic strength, innovative potential, demographic dynamics [promoting a high degree of social mobility], reactive mobilization [ability to square up to crises and challenges successfully at societal and state levels], geographic base, and democratic appeal” and six countervailing weaknesses, namely, “national debt, flawed financial system, widening social inequality decaying infrastructure, public ignorance, and gridlocked politics.”

Whether America played a beneficial role globally or not depended upon the question whether it was America’s strengths or weaknesses that came to dominate the agenda of America’s foreign and strategic policies. This was going to determine to a significant extent the possibility of success for, say, the people speaking Chinese, Urdu or Hindi, and Korean to talk peace amongst themselves, quite like the English-speaking Anglo-Saxon civilization that had, since 1914 at least, consistently talked peace to itself.

3. Conclusion

The panel discussion identified major geostrategic trends and drivers in South Asia and Afghanistan as well as their potential for promoting peace or conflict, fostering stability or instability, or leading to greater or diminished security in the region. Using the Dator Method\(^3\), the following table, envisioning four scenarios for South Asia, extrapolates current trends and possibilities to show four different futures for the development of the region. It is up to the global and regional policy makers to decide what kind of South Asia would exist twenty years hence.

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\(^3\) The method was developed by Prof. Jim Dator, the pioneering US Future Studies expert.
## Four Scenarios for South Asia

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<th>Scenarios</th>
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<td><strong>Continued Growth</strong></td>
<td>Continued high economic growth; significant increases in regional trade; high-speed technology-led development; 99 percent of those aged 15 and above use smartphones; mass cultural improvement in people’s lives; Increased living standards; regional GDP per capita hits a high of USD 15,000; power accumulation is still a major state-level concern but it does not lead to conflict and war between states or closed domestic societies.</td>
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<td><strong>Collapse</strong></td>
<td>Population explosion; unplanned urbanization; irreversible environmental degradation; extremist populism controls state apparatuses; unregulated and unmanaged external and internal contradictions and pressures provoke war that leads to statelessness in the region; undefeated terrorism becomes the ruling authority; zero regional connectivity and return of medieval spatial boundaries; large-scale societal breakdown; widespread disease, hunger and poverty; severe debt-growth-defence imbalance; GDP shrinkage and regional GDP per capita falls below USD 500; desertification of fertile river deltas plus cyclical famines in the region.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Steady State</strong></td>
<td>Regional understanding takes place to create conscious complementarities and limits to growth with a sense of inter-generational justice and equity; downward development of status-quo is arrested.</td>
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<td><strong>Transformation</strong></td>
<td>Establishment of South Asian Economic Union; Afghanistan's reconstruction is undertaken in ten years by funds indigenous to the region; Bank of South Asia becomes the biggest non-interest-based developing world financial institution; the region has world’s most open multimodal and integrated land-, sea-, and air-based corridors; South Asia becomes high human development region with the lowest incidence of crime in the world; India and Pakistan become the breadbaskets of Asia; South Asia houses 10 of the world’s top 30 universities; 100 per cent tertiary enrolment in the region.</td>
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