

## PARADOXES OF GLOBALIZATION: GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL, WEST AND SOUTH ASIA

Dr. Talat Farooq\*

### Abstract

*In a globalized world, events beyond individual territories are affecting states and societies because of a closer integration of domestic and external factors and softening of borders. This paper argues that contradictory processes of integration and fragmentation that emerge from modern globalization can affect regional geopolitics at great lengths. Outlining the overlapping complexities in selected key states of Central, West and South Asia, this paper aims to examine the impact of certain global trends on contemporary regional geopolitical challenges.*

**Key Words:** *Globalization, Integration, Fragmentation, Sovereignty, Non-state Actors, Blurring Borders, Domestic and External Factors*

### Introduction

Human history is a story of wars and peace, shifting territories, regional and global realignments and the balance of power as well as diverse political and economic ideologies. However, the speed of the contemporary globalization process is unprecedented as it derives its momentum from rapid technological advancements. Marked by a gradual erosion of state sovereignty and an overlap of the domestic and foreign policy spheres, the process is, commonly perceived as a manifestation of shared business interests and economic developments.

Globalization is neither monolithic nor homogenous. Globalization has been defined, within the discourse of capitalist liberal ideology, as a complex nexus of economic, social, cultural and political processes,<sup>1</sup> in which “the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements

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\* Dr. Talat Farooq is a Visiting Faculty at QAU and Foreign Service Academy, Islamabad. Previously she was Research Associate at the School of Government and Society, Birmingham University, UK. She is the author of *Pakistan's Strategic Choices in the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> M. D. Litonjua, “The Socio-Political Construction of Globalization,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* 34, no 2 (2008); 253-278.

recedes and people become increasingly aware that they are receding”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, globalization is an integrative process emerging from not only economic interdependence but also shared values and cultural interactions that transcend borders and facilitate societal contact. Conversely, the fragmentary aspect of globalization is also evident in weakened physical and ideological borders and the rise of non-state actors (NSAs) that challenge the nation-state.

Traditionally national governments have been responsible for their citizens’ socio-economic welfare and security. The post-Cold War era is marked by a progressively integrated global economy and a re-conceptualization of international security. The definition has expanded to include not only conventional military threats but also food security, human rights, terrorism, disease and environmental concerns – issues that do not recognize state boundaries.

Although complex interdependence is an integrative force, globalization is also the driving force behind post-Cold War disintegration. This is evident from the dissolution of states, ethnic strife, rise of ultra-nationalism, increasing disparity between wealth and poverty, organized crime, terrorism, asymmetric warfare, privatized military firms and the fear of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). These problems are far reaching because of technological advancement that has changed the modes of transportation, communication, and dissemination of ideas.

The diffused nature of transnational threats has contributed towards the changing character of warfare where the state employs conventional and unconventional military strategies to respond to terrorism seen as a conduit for achieving political ends. However, it is not only the violent NSAs that influence government responses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies and transnational corporations are equally influential in this domain. Governments often work with NGOs for service delivery, development assistance and humanitarian relief efforts in war-torn and under-developed regions. The private sector also plays a crucial role in the management and settlement of armed conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, according to Milne, Inter-Governmental Organizations offer a platform for interactions between sovereign members and can serve as a platform for conflict settlement. Furthermore, he argues that in times of crisis, news media can influence public opinion by interviewing so-called experts who interpret a foreign policy problem in a certain manner which may in turn spawn bias in public perception of the crisis at

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<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rainer Bauman and Frank A. Stengel, “Globalization and Foreign Policy Analysis: Neglect of or Successful Adaptation to Changing Political Practices?,” [www.academia.edu/442379/](http://www.academia.edu/442379/).

hand.<sup>4</sup> Social media is yet another increasingly powerful tool that can mould public perceptions and policy prescriptions.

In short, the impact of globalization is evident in various fields of politics, security, economics and cultural interactions. Since the 1990s, conflicts in Central, West and South Asia have been influenced by the divisive and unifying patterns of globalization that continue to shape regional geopolitics in the contemporary international system.

Globalization is a multidimensional phenomenon. It is, therefore, important to point out at the outset, that it is beyond the scope of this article to cover all its facets. The writing instead aims to focus on some of the effects of globalization such as weakening of borders and diminishing sovereignty, in order to evaluate its inherent paradox of integration and disintegration that blurs the distinction between domestic and foreign domains. By doing so, the paper will attempt to explain the extent to which these contradictory global trends are influencing regional geopolitics in some of the key countries of Central, West and South Asia.

This study draws upon qualitative research since a complex social phenomenon like globalization is context-dependent. Accordingly, qualitative analyses allow a deeper understanding of underlying reasons and drivers. Deriving primarily from secondary sources, this research has benefitted from relevant books, academic articles, conference papers and newspaper reports that provide an insight into informed academic debates and analyses of diverse narratives. It is equally important to state here that this paper does not employ any theory as an analytical or interpretive tool.

The paper is divided into two sections; the first discusses the concept of globalization in the light of selected academic arguments. It is by no means an extensive or comprehensive literature review because of space constraint. The second section is further distributed into sub-sections specifically examining how weakened borders and diminishing state sovereignty influence the geopolitics of some of the key states in Central, West and South Asia. Subsequently, the conclusion briefly wraps-up the main arguments and themes of the paper.

## Paradoxical Trends of Globalization

Different people perceive globalization differently. Sociologist Roland Robertson defines it as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.”<sup>5</sup> According to Held and McGrew, there are three main schools of thought regarding globalization:

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<sup>4</sup> David Milne, America’s “Intellectual’ Diplomacy,” *International Affairs* 86, no.1 (2010): 49-68.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 8.

- 1) The “hyper-globalists” have a positive perception of globalization as a modern economic phenomenon that leads to economic growth and spread of democracy emerging from shared economic interests, softened borders and diminished state sovereignty.
- 2) The “sceptics” argue that economic globalization is in fact only a new title for an old phenomenon; economic interdependence, they argue, is not unprecedented in history and it is not “global” per se because not all countries are benefitting from it economically.
- 3) Finally, the “transformationalists” synthesize the foregoing two approaches, arguing that globalization is not only about economics; it is also the driving force behind the reshaping of politics and culture.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas Friedman is an optimist when it comes to globalization; however, he appears to endorse the first half of the “sceptics” argument that globalization is not a new phenomenon. In his book, *The world is flat*, he divides the process of globalization into three distinct periods:

- 1) The time-period from 1492 to 1800 comprises the first phase, when the New World and the Old World began trading with each other.
- 2) The second era lasts from 1800 to 2000, when multinational companies began to drive the global market.
- 3) The third phase of globalization is still unfolding; it is different from the rest in view of rapid technological developments and the fact that not only states and multinational corporations, but also common people can directly participate in political, financial and societal processes through social media and internet-based opportunities.

Friedman believes that the modern processes of globalization are levelling the competitive playing field between established industrial markets, emerging individual entrepreneurs and that more and more countries- big or small- are becoming part of a complex, transnational global supply chain.<sup>7</sup>

This may be true as one sees people in different parts of the world using mobile phones and computers with access to social media as a

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<sup>6</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Global Transformations: Politics Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); Lauren Movius, “Cultural Globalization and Challenges to traditional Communication Theories,” *Journal of Media and Communication* 2, no.1 (2010): 6-18.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005), 211-245.

conduit for raising social and political issues and finding financial opportunities. The magnitude of advancement in modern information, transportation and weapon technology is unprecedented in world history. Yet, as the “sceptics” correctly point out, few of the global economic processes are truly global because “the quality of life for many” has not improved and they continue to live “in abject poverty.”<sup>8</sup>

Critics of globalization point out that in view of the unending greed of multinational corporations, the developing world is vulnerable to economic exploitation and poverty.<sup>9</sup> In fact, some perceive globalization as a new form of colonization.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, however, economic inequality has also affected the developed world; by outsourcing jobs to cost-effective labour in poorer regions, globalization has given rise to receding economic opportunity in advanced countries. Consequently, this discontent has recently found expression in Brexit and the electoral victory of Donald Trump in 2016.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the process of globalization has expanded the previously militarist concept of international security to include issues that do not recognize state boundaries—such as human security, human rights, disease, environment, terrorism, mass migrations and displacement. Revolution in information technology has reduced geographical distances and softened political boundaries to facilitate movement with the potential to reshape local political, cultural and social institutions.<sup>12</sup>

For instance, global politics encompasses the international humanitarian law. As non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and multilateral institutions highlight human rights abuses through a vigilant media, public opinion reacts by pressurizing governments to protect the victims. NGOs can have a direct influence over policy by providing information and lobbying, or they can have an indirect influence by setting

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<sup>8</sup> “Globalization: Threat or Opportunity?,” IMF *Issue Brief* 2002, [www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200](http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200)

<sup>9</sup> Joyce Osland, “The Pros and Cons of Globalization,” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12 (June 2003): 137-154; George Sorenson, *The Transformation of the State: Beyond the Myth of Retreat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 46-47.

<sup>10</sup> Nagesh Rao, “Neo-colonialism or Globalization?: Post-colonial Theory and the Demands of Political Economy,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 1, no. 2 (2000): 165-184.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Holland and Emily Stephenson, “Trump, now President, Pledges to put America First in Nationalist Speech,” *Reuters*, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-inauguration-idUSKBN154010](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-inauguration-idUSKBN154010).

<sup>12</sup> John Pilger, *The New Rulers of the World* (London: Verso, 2002), 1-5.

agendas and generating norms.<sup>13</sup> Privatized military firms like the Blackwater, whose activities received publicity in Iraq in 2007, represent the most controversial example.<sup>14</sup>

Transnational organizations can help governments in addressing issues of terrorism, organized crime, environment, WMDs, peacekeeping or conflict settlement – problems that cannot be resolved unilaterally. Foreign ministries thus often engage and cooperate with NGOs and other private groups. Moreover, a proliferation of independent news channels and social media can shape public opinion and foreign policy choices.<sup>15</sup> The integrative dimension of globalization manifests itself in multilateralism at the inter-state, supranational and non-governmental levels.

Global politics sometimes challenges state sovereignty by intervening in domestic affairs. For instance, transitional crises in the post-Cold war era compelled the UN Security Council to compromise on the principle of non-interference by allowing the US and NATO military interventions in civil wars to prevent human rights abuses. Since the 9/11 attacks, the legal concept of self-defence has been manipulated to justify great power military and non-military interventions in weaker states. Great power military interventions have put the traditional norm of state sovereignty and territorial integrity under increasing pressure.<sup>16</sup> Drone attacks and cross-border pursuit of transnational militants continue to reshape notions of sovereignty, territorial integrity and international laws.

The contemporary amorphous nature of the security threat to state authority involves violent NSAs who resort to terrorism to achieve political goals, with civilians as the primary target of mass killings, kidnapping and rape. Integrative global trends including electronic financial systems and ever-increasing mobility assist them in functioning as transnational and cross-border networks that can carry out coordinated attacks and disseminate their ideology through multiple modes of

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines," *International Organization* 52, no.3 (1998): 613-644; Brian Lai and Dan Slater, "Institutions of the offensive: Domestic Sources of Dispute Initiation in Authoritarian Regimes, 1950-1992", *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no.1 (2006):113-126.

<sup>14</sup> Peter W. Singer, The Dark Truth about Blackwater, *Brookings* (2 October 2007), [www.brookings.edu/articles/the\\_dark\\_truth\\_about\\_blackwater](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/the_dark_truth_about_blackwater).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Williams, "Who is making UK Foreign Policy?," *International Affairs* 80, no.5 (2004):909-929; Carol C. Adelman, "The Privatization of Foreign Aid", *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2003): 9-14; Lawrence Davidson, Privatizing Foreign Policy, *Middle East policy* 13, no.2 (2006): 134-147.

<sup>16</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, "The End of the Old Order?," *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 219-243.

communication.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, global trends that contribute to integration are also used to foment chaos.

The state response to global insurgency and asymmetrical warfare has expanded to include the tools of media and cyber operations among others; intelligence gathering and sharing as the first line of defence often blurs the boundaries between domestic and external spheres. There are arguments that Multi-national Corporations (MNCs), growth of interdependent trade and global financial flows are challenging the nation state.<sup>18</sup> If domestic and foreign arenas have intermingled so closely that states cannot exercise full control over physical and ideational borders then threats can emerge from more powerful states as well as violent non-state actors.

Others have argued that globalization has strengthened, rather than weakened, the importance of the nation state. National policies remain feasible and the nation state plays a fundamental role in creating and sustaining international regulations to govern the economy. Krasner argues that challenges to state authority are nothing new and that "the conventional norms of sovereignty have always been challenged. The politics of many weaker states have been persistently penetrated, and stronger nations have not been immune to external influence." He does not perceive modern global trends in binary terms, arguing that "the reach of the state has increased in some areas but contracted in others. Rulers have recognized that their effective control is bound to rise simply by walking away from issues they cannot resolve."<sup>19</sup>

This concise review of the discourse on globalization is not exhaustive; however, it gives us a taste of how the concept of globalization is both multifaceted as well as contested. Accordingly, the following sections will attempt to highlight certain contradictory aspects of globalization with special focus on some of the key countries of Central, West and South Asia.

## **Globalization and Geopolitics in Central, West and South Asia**

Great power military interventions, global capitalist interests and an expanded concept of international security have combined to weaken or soften state borders that enable non-state actors to challenge state authority in Central, West and South Asia. Caught in a vicious cycle, these

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<sup>17</sup> Rob Johnson, "The Changing Character of War," *The Rusi Journal* 162, no.1(2017): 6-12.

<sup>18</sup> Richard.N.Haass and Robert .E. Litan, "Globalization and its Discourses: Navigating the Dangers of a Tangled World," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. (1998): 2-6.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, "Think Again Sovereignty," *Foreign Policy* (2001): 21-29.

two factors - weak borders and diminishing state authority feed on each other and reinforce the integration of domestic and foreign policies.

### Central Asia

The geography of Central Asia has immense geopolitical attraction. Located at the junction of different regions, it has vast oil and gas resources that attract great and regional power interests.<sup>20</sup> In the post-Soviet era, Russia remains the regional hegemon and its economic situation has a direct impact on Central Asia. Standish points out "in addition to being an important trading partner and investor in Central Asia, Russia is also a major destination for labour migrants from the region whose remittance flows have shrunk due to Russia's own economic slowdown. The economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russia have also adversely affected the Central Asian states, resulting in a financial crisis".<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, in the post-9/11 world, not only economic interdependence but also transnational security threats continue to shape regional geopolitics. Thus, what happens in Central Asia can have spillover effects in not only Russia, western China and Afghanistan but also in West Asia. Terrorist attacks carried out by Uzbek and Kyrgyz Islamic State (IS) operatives in Istanbul in 2017 demonstrate that IS recruits from Central Asia are abandoning their own nation states to fight in Syria and Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the geopolitical landscape of West Asia, within a globalized world, can have consequences far beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq. Hence, one of the main concerns of policy-makers in Central Asia is the prospect of Central Asian fighters in Iraq and Syria returning home. Similarly, the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan where the Taliban surge, expansion and the presence of the IS fighters in the north has increased the risk of violence spill-over into Central Asia.

Since late 2017, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have shown willingness to get actively involved in regional engagement with a focus on Afghanistan. Kazakhstan is the first Central Asian state to secure a non-permanent seat in the United National Security Council. In January 2018, it led a delegation of UNSC members to Kabul and reiterated its support for the Central Asian efforts to restore peace and stability. The effort was duly- supported by the US. However, a few days after the departure of the

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<sup>20</sup> Jan H. Kalicki, "Caspian Energy at the Crossroads," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no.5 (2001): 120-134.

<sup>21</sup> Reid Standish, "Central Asia's Autocrats Welcome the Age of Trump," *Foreign Policy* (2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/central-asias-autocrats-welcome-the-age-of-trump-russia-syria-isis/>.

<sup>22</sup> Dana Abizaid, "Why ISIS Recruits from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan," *National Interest* (16 January 2017), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-isis-recruits-uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-19067>.



UNSC delegation, Kabul was rocked by a devastating Taliban attack “as a rebuttal to those who claimed progress”.<sup>23</sup> It was a stark reminder of the role of non-state actors in any potential conflict settlement within and between states in Afghanistan. Thus, the presence of foreign forces and the unresolved conflict in Afghanistan is bound to perpetuate the influence of fragmentary geopolitics of Central Asia.

Interestingly, the persistent chaos in the Middle East that is rife with extremism has increased the significance of Central Asia on the geopolitical stage as a mediator trying to broker peace in the region. For instance, Kazakhstan played a positive role in normalizing Russia-Turkey relations after Turkey downed a Russian jet in 2015.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provides a platform for Central Asian states to help settle disputes between member states. To strengthen its position as a conflict resolver, however, Central Asia needs to overcome its own problems of economic instability, corruption and the absence of a power-transfer mechanism.<sup>25</sup>

The inter-state relations between many Central Asian Republics are relatively conflictual due to unresolved territorial and water-sharing claims, as well as rivalries between leaders. Domestically, there is a need for improved governance and curtailment of institutionalized corruption.<sup>26</sup> The failure of Central Asian governments to make political and economic reforms could lead to greater jihadist-inspired conflict in the region.

Great power interests also directly affect Central Asia. The bilateral relations of Central Asian countries with the US, the domestic and external factors do come together to play an important part within the context of the changed nature of international security. These factors have usually been limited to energy security and non-proliferation as well as the dismal human rights record. Post-9/11, the region became a U.S. ally and Western troops were deployed in several Central Asian countries. During the U.S. ‘War on Terror,’ regional governments welcomed the enhanced American role, seeing it as a way to improve their standing with a superpower and using the guise of counterterrorism to neutralize political opponents. However, counter-terror efforts faced a blow by the U.S. concerns over

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<sup>23</sup> Catherine Putz, “Central Asian States Step up Afghan Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat* (23 January 2018), <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/central-asian-states-step-up-afghan-diplomacy/>.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Putz, “What’s Kazakhstan’s Role in Calming Russia-Turkey Tensions?,” *The Diplomat* (1 December 2015), <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/whats-kazakhstan-role-in-calming-russia-turkey-tensions/>.

<sup>25</sup> Galiya Ibragimova, “Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities in 2016,” *Russia Direct* (30 December 2016), <http://www.russia-direct.org>.

<sup>26</sup> Niklas Swanstrom and Par Nyren, “China’s March West: Pitfalls and Challenges in Greater Central Asia,” *Policy Brief* 195, ISDP, 10 January, 2017, <http://isdpeu/publications>.

corruption and human rights abuses. For instance, U.S. relations with Uzbekistan soured after the Andijan massacre of 2005, when Uzbek security forces killed un-armed protestors.<sup>27</sup>

Having said, Central Asia is of great economic and strategic interest to the US, Russia and China. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are part of the group of countries surrounding the Caspian Sea and contain some of the largest gas and oil reserves in the world. The construction of multiple pipelines can facilitate smooth transportation of oil and gas to regional and international markets. Regional countries like Pakistan and India have also a stake in stabilizing Afghanistan for security and economic reasons. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, also known as the 'peace pipeline project' is enough to fulfil the energy needs of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India for the next three decades. However, the desire of connecting regions economically has remained undermined continuously by the security situation in Afghanistan since the end of the Cold War. The U.S. war on terror has further added to the Afghan imbroglio since 9/11 and Afghanistan, that neighbours Central and South Asia, has been in the throes of fragmentation.

Globalization is nonetheless providing another opportunity for integration and connectivity in terms of economic interdependence as embodied in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Central Asia is centrally located within the Silk Road Economic Belt, which will potentially connect China to markets in Europe through trade and transportation corridors. BRI is happening at a time when the traditional regional hegemon, Russia's "Eurasian Economic Union so far has not offered an economic alternative to China's BRI."<sup>28</sup>

Khorgos is at the junction of a key transportation corridor in Kazakhstan for trains to travel from China via Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea, Russia and Germany. The success of China's vision for the region depends on an enabling environment of stability and this presents the key foreign policy challenge for both Beijing and Central Asian capitals. Moreover, while BRI presents a picture of regional connectivity and trade growth, it also brings out questions of erosion of sovereignty and domestic business security. According to an expert, "the 'China threat' (is) serving as a staple of public discourse on security and the future of the country."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Reid Standish, "Central Asia's Autocrats Welcome the Age of Trump."

<sup>28</sup> Kemal Kirişçi and Philippe Le Corre, "The New Geopolitics of Central Asia: China vies for influence in Russia's backyard," *Brookings*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/02/the-new-geopolitics-of-central-asia-china-vies-for-influence-in-russias-backyard/>.

<sup>29</sup> Nargis Kessinova, "China's Silk Road and Kazakhstan's Bright Path: Linking Dreams of Prosperity," *PONARS Eurasia*, October 2, 2017, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/china%E2%80%99s-silk-road-and-kazakhstan%E2%80%99s-bright-path-linking-dreams-prosperity>.

Thus, domestic factors are overlapping with global trends having the potential to affect geopolitical outcomes.

While Central Asia can look forward to geopolitical and geo-economic changes in reaching out to China there is no such connectivity project in the offing for West Asia where fragmentation has been at play since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011.

## West Asia

With the rise of transnational terror groups, proxy wars have had devastating consequences for the Middle East, fuelling perennial sectarian tensions, reflected in the Saudi-Iran competition in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, for influence in the Middle East. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq was the catalyst in this regard. It also created the pre-conditions for the rise of radical Sunni groups like Al Qaeda in Iraq and IS that would later target Syria as well.<sup>30</sup>

Although, Iraqi forces with support from the US have cleared Mosul from IS fighters, a 2017 report warns that “the war against the Islamic State has led to the extreme fragmentation of armed actors controlling territory, hindering post-IS stability (and) governance.”<sup>31</sup> Members of IS are already scattered wide in the world, especially Afghanistan. This reflects the scattered nature of globalization where failed states, unlike prosperous interdependent developed countries, have become more chaotic because of weak borders.

Arguably, in the age of modern globalization, events inside one country can influence another more intensely than before and the Syrian conflict is an apt example. The territorial implications of the Sykes-Picot secret deal of 1916 between France and Britain—along with other indigenous issues—continue to plague the West Asian geopolitics. The 2011 Arab uprisings, known as the Arab Spring, motivated pro-democracy activists in Syria to protest the Assad regime. The integrative force of globalization was evident during the Arab Spring when social media was used to form online networks to organize activists. Although, social media did not cause the event, it was vital in disseminating information to the outside world. It served not as “a rallying cry” but as “a megaphone”.<sup>32</sup>

The Syrian conflict is a glaring example of how events happening in one part of the globalized world can directly affect social and political scenarios elsewhere. The civil war, which started as a domestic tension

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<sup>30</sup> Jason Hanna, “This is how ISIS was really founded,” *CNN*, 13 August 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com>.

<sup>31</sup> Iraq 2018 Scenarios: Planning after Mosul,” *IRIS Report*, <http://www.iris.france.org>.

<sup>32</sup> Aday Sean et al, “Blogs and Bullets II: Media And Conflict after the Arab Spring,” *Peaceworks: United States Institute for Peace*, 10 July 2012, <https://usip.org>.

between the state and society in 2011, quickly became a proxy war between Syria, Russia and Iran on one side and the US-Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the other. The conflict has thus, turned Syria into a global breeding ground for extremism. The country has direct links with the ongoing sectarian conflict in neighbouring Iraq as weakened borders continue to challenge state sovereignty. The Kurd problem illustrates the complexity. Two parallel struggles to counter the ISIS are taking place simultaneously—one is led by Ankara and the other by the Syrian faction of the PKK, which is supported by the U.S. These developments have links with the domestic conflict between Ankara and the Turkish Kurds occupying the Turkish side of the border with Syria. Turkey perceives this consolidation of Kurdish forces close to its border as a national security threat. Ankara is openly unhappy with Washington's policy of supporting Syrian Kurdish militants against IS and has militarily intervened in Syria in 2018. This has serious geopolitical implications and "could lead Turkey to break away or be pushed out of NATO".<sup>33</sup>

Adding to the complexities, the Russian intervention in 2015 in support of the Syrian regime has not only helped entrench the Bashar-ul-Assad government but also the Iranian proxy Hezbollah inside the Syrian territory; this in turn has escalated tensions between Tel Aviv and Tehran.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the 2011 domestic tensions in Syria rapidly entwined with foreign agendas as regional and great powers intervened militarily in disregard of state sovereignty and territorial integrity. An unrelenting electronic news outlets and social media continue to keep the issue alive.

Instability and violence in West Asia (and parts of Africa) have prompted a global crisis in the form of refugees creating severe political and economic challenges for the European Union, which are partially responsible for Brexit. The refugee problem is the most apt example of the forces of fragmentation that globalization has unleashed. The resulting tensions, according to Walt, have provided grist for European populist political leaders who have promised to defend "traditional values" against the onslaught of aliens.<sup>35</sup>

In keeping with global trends, West Asian conflicts highlight the shifting of responsibility from the state to NGOs and private groups. In conflict zones like Syria, where state control has loosened and political authority has disintegrated, non-governmental and private entities are

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<sup>33</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "The New Geopolitics of Turkey, Syria, and the West," *Brookings*, 14 February 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog>.

<sup>34</sup> Dror Michman and Yael Mizrai-Arnaud, "Iran and Israel face off in Syria," *Brookings*, 13 February 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog>.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Lerche, "The Conflicts of Globalization," *International Journal for Peace Studies* 3, no.1 (1998): 47-66; Stephen M Walt, "The Collapse of Liberal World Order," *Foreign Policy* 26 June 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com>.

active as relief, health and information providers. At the same time, violent non-state actors use public services as a weapon of war.

As the West and Central Asia face their geopolitical challenges, the emerging geopolitical scenario in South Asia is reflective of shifting regional and global alignments. The ongoing asymmetrical conflict in Afghanistan since 9/11 has set in motion the disruptive elements of globalization in South Asia. At the same time, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers a huge opportunity for regional integration.

### **South Asia**

In South Asia, the role of Pakistan remains paramount within the context of the topic at hand. Pakistan has a major role to play in the scenario as it copes with the intertwining domestic and external factors that affect its bilateral relations with regional and great powers. Pakistan's domestic security has direct links with not only Afghanistan but also Iran. Issues of cross-border terrorism have soured relations with both the countries. Growing Indian soft power gains in Afghanistan continue to be a matter of intense concern for Pakistani security managers who perceive this situation as strategic encirclement of Pakistan.

In this regard, the already porous Durand Line has facilitated the movement of militants on both sides and affected not only Pakistan-Afghanistan relations but also Islamabad's ties with Washington. Thus, unlike Europe, the softened borders in this area since the 1980s have ushered in fragmentation rather than economic integration. Moreover, weak ideological borders aided by information technology have allowed militants to challenge Pakistan's sovereignty, recruit fighters and disrupt domestic stability, with implications for Pakistan's foreign policy. Similarly, US drone attacks inside Pakistan's tribal region targeting the militants have spawned questions of sovereignty in the changing geopolitical environment. Furthermore, a porous border and the rise of violent NSAs have raised the question of any possible militant access to Pakistan's nuclear assets. While the US and Western anxiety is mostly exaggerated, it has nonetheless put Pakistan under pressure.

Militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan have regularly used electronic media to disseminate jihadist ideology, creating confusion and even sympathy for the militant cause in the public; though this situation has gradually changed in the face of indiscriminate violent attacks on Pakistan's military and civilian assets. Islamabad has done much to crack down on militant groups especially since the launch of a full-fledged military operation in Pakistan's insurgency-infested tribal region, in mid-2014.

Denying the existence of organised terrorist camps on its territory, Islamabad points out that insurgents move throughout the country, among the Afghan refugee population of 1.5 million, inside Pakistan. They have roots and links across the border in Afghanistan. For the U.S. however, the

political debate centres round the question of whether the Pakistani crackdown against the Afghan Taliban is comprehensive.

As US-Pakistan relations become more brittle under the Trump administration, Islamabad is warming up to Moscow to manage its deteriorating relations with the US that has traditionally been a lucrative source of military aid. According to the US academic Daniel Markey, Russia by improving its relations with Pakistan, aims to blunt the threat of IS militants in Afghanistan and U.S. influence in the region.<sup>36</sup> Russian anxieties over the long-term presence of the US in Afghanistan may be well founded. Tellingly, a Russian honorary consul was stationed in Pakistan's KP province in early 2018; KP Afghanistan's Nangarhar province that also serves as an ISIS stronghold.<sup>37</sup> That being said, the emerging geopolitical realities in South Asia are likely to be shaped by Pakistan's long-time ally, China rather than the US.

China's influence is on the rise from Nepal and Maldives to Sri Lanka. Colombo has handed over Hambantota port to Beijing after signing a 99-year lease as part of a \$1.1-billion deal. Beijing and Male have signed a free trade deal last year; on the other hand, left-alliance government was elected in Nepal in December 2017 that is more favourably inclined towards Beijing than the one it has replaced.<sup>38</sup>

While the working of the multilateral South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has become dysfunctional due to the rivalry between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, the SCO, a broader alliance against common security threats, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) that aims to facilitate regional infrastructure improvement under BRI, are promising prospects for South Asian geopolitics.<sup>39</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in particular has the potential to provide a forum for shared economic interests and dialogue for India and Pakistan.

Pakistan's strategic location, at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz in the Indian Ocean, enables it to assert its geopolitical role in the region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a network of roads and railways spanning 3,000-km, laid with oil and gas pipelines from Pakistan's Gwadar (Pakistan) to Kashgar (China) further reinforces this physical location advantage. CPEC can serve as an integrative force for

<sup>36</sup> Richard Armitage, Samuel Berger and Daniel Markey, *US Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, CFR Report No.65, <https://www.cfr.org/report>.

<sup>37</sup> Kathy Gannon, "Shifting Alliances as Pakistan Manages Relationship with US," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> M. K. Bhadrakumar, "Nepal, Maldives Poised to Move out of Indian Orbit," *Asia Times*, December 9 2017, <http://www.asiatimes.com/>.

<sup>39</sup> Hong Yu, "Motivation Behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no.105 (2017) : 353-368.

economic uplift and is likely to soften borders between China and Pakistan, physically, economically and culturally. In addition, a surge in economic activity can help open up space for a nexus between the pre-existing and new security threats of militancy. Especially in Balochistan as more Chinese entrepreneurs arrive in Pakistan to set up businesses in big cities as well as in comparatively unsafe areas.

In the wake of the quick change in the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean, India fears that CPEC has the potential to change regional geopolitics. As it provides China a shorter and safer access to the Indian Ocean that is the energy lifeline for the world's major economies. With its various maritime chokepoints, the Indian Ocean is a major element in influencing geopolitical outcomes.

To curtail China's advancement and to disallow any strategic or economic advantage to Pakistan, New Delhi is making efforts to disrupt progress on the projects involving the CPEC. Any unholy alliance between disruptive forces is bound to receive support from anti-Pakistan elements within the Indian establishment.<sup>40</sup> As the corridor becomes operational and trade goods are ferried to and from China across the far-flung areas of Balochistan, domestic and foreign policy elements will further interlock and affect geopolitics in South Asia where India's neighbours are increasingly willing to reach out to Beijing.<sup>41</sup>

According to a SIPRI report, despite the fact that one of the OBOR corridors involves India, New Delhi views CPEC as challenging its geopolitical aspirations of regional hegemony<sup>42</sup> forcing it to plan and develop an energy corridor involving Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran's Chabahar port.<sup>43</sup> Simultaneously, the growing US-India economic and military ties underscore the American foreign policy objective of building India as a counterweight to China. Since the security interests of US and India appear to converge in the Indian Ocean region and South China Sea. Whether or not India will become a tool for the U.S. foreign policy is a debatable issue.

Exemplifying the fragmentary and integrative processes of globalization, CPEC thus presents an opportunity for economic interdependence, while simultaneously bringing out regional and international hostilities into focus in South Asia.

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<sup>40</sup> Talat Farooq, "Security for CPEC," *The News*, June 18, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Latha Jishnu, "Losing Friends and Making Foes," *Dawn*, 29 January 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in *First Global Report on Why India Fears CPEC*, Samaa TV, February 6, 2017, [www.samaatv.news](http://www.samaatv.news).

<sup>43</sup> "India's Chabahar Port Plan is to Counter China's Plan to Develop Gwadar Port," *The Economic Times*, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

## **Conclusion**

Globalization is a complex milieu of economic, social, political, cultural and technological processes. It has expanded the militarist concept of international security to include societies and cultures. This in turn has facilitated great power interventions and increased the influence of NGOs, multilateral institutions and private groups on state policies, thus eroding sovereignty and challenging the territorial integrity of nation-states. Globalization connects the world via news channels and social media by allowing a greater focus on events, crises, developments etc. from around the globe.

At the same time, these technical facilitates also contribute to the rise of forces of destruction and chaos as manifested in terrorism, organized global crimes and internecine conflicts. On the other hand, economic projects like BRI have the potential for regional and global connectivity through softened physical and cultural borders and voluntary surrender of a portion of state sovereignty. Yet, such connectivity-oriented ventures may also have security implications. Globalization thus carries within itself the seeds of both integration and fragmentation. These contradictory trends are shaping geopolitical environments in Central, East and West Asia as their increasingly entwined domestic and foreign policies are becoming more and more difficult to separate.



