Article

India in South Asia: Interaction with Liberal Peacebuilding Projects

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Abstract

In fragile and conflict-affected States[1] (henceforth FCAS) in South Asia, two distinct forms of international engagement have worked simultaneously—the engagement of India, the regional hegemon, and that of Western states that promote liberal peacebuilding projects. From Norwegian engagement in Sri Lanka to European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) engagement in Myanmar, to the UN-led international engagement in Nepal, liberal peacebuilding, despite its fault lines, has ubiquitous presence in South Asia, a region fraught with different forms of conflict and fragility. The norms, practices and modalities of engagement of India as well as of liberal peacebuilding projects have their distinct specificities in their normative foundations, practices and modalities of engagement. This article contends that the current interaction, though often unacknowledged, is marked by uncertainties, contrasts, instrumental use of norms, lack of coordination and even unexpected overlaps. This article primarily argues that in order for India to play a constructive role in the region, it needs to devise a policy on how it engages with liberal peacebuilding norms and its diffusion in practice through a variety of organisational and institutional networks.

Keywords

South Asia, India, conflict, fragility, liberal peacebuilding

Introduction

Studies on India's engagement in South Asian countries have largely focused on three themes: domestic imperatives, India's bilateral relations with smaller countries in its neighbourhood and Indian responses to American or Chinese engagement in the region (Cohen, 2001; Ganguly, 2012; Hagerty, 1991; Muni, 2003). These works reflect the twin pillars of India's regional policy: primacy of regional hegemony and countering extra-regional influence (Mazumdar, 2012).

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While important, these studies place the primacy on India, its identity as a regional emergent power and its interests in different sectors including trade, natural resources and security in the region. These studies do not appreciate or at worst obscure the interests and engagements of critical actors of liberal peacebuilding in the region, which operate through a dense web of government, quasi-governmental organisations, transnational civil society groups and their normative foundations and practices. This article argues that the conflicts in South Asia are changing the landscape of international engagement in the region, and this shift needs to be acknowledged and factored in Indian foreign policymaking in its neighbourhood. This article is divided into five parts. I start with a brief discussion on fragility and conflict in India's neighbourhood. This is followed by a discussion on origin and evolution of liberal peacebuilding. In the third section, I explore the pervasiveness of liberal peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) in South Asia. In the fourth section, I discuss Indian involvement in conflicts in South Asia. Finally, I discuss the interaction between actors involved in liberal peace-building and India in FCAS in South Asia and discuss its impact.

Context

India's neighbouring states have distinctly been 'fragile' and conflict ridden. Apart from India and Bhutan, all other South Asian states from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh to Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal feature in Fragile State Index in the 'alert' or 'high alert' category, presenting South Asia as a web of 'fragility' (Messner et al., 2016). Academic and policy writings have tended to use the terms of 'weak', 'failing' and 'collapsed' state interchangeably. In practice, they can be seen as a continuum with fragile states at one end and collapsed states at the other (Francois & Sud, 2006). In one of the most authoritative writings on state collapse, Zartman argues that stats collapse when they can no longer perform the functions required for them to pass as states, including positing as sovereign source of authority and identity, commanding institutional strength to preserve and enforce laws as well as promote social cohesion, and act as guarantor of security (Zartman, 1995). Milliken and Krause further distinguish the concepts, attesting that state failure reflects the inability of the state to fulfil its functions of providing security, representation and welfare, while state collapse refers to a complete disintegration of public authority and order (Milliken & Krause, 2002). Thus, state fragility can be seen as a precursor or indicator to possible collapse. Fragile states constitute a heterogeneous group of countries diverse sources of fragility, including conflict (civil war, armed challenge to state authority), political instability and/or extreme vulnerability. Neighbouring states bear a heavy burden of the contagion of state failure, in the form of conflict spill-overs, arms race and transfer, illegal economy, refugee flows, the spread of disease, lowered economic growth and facilitating safe havens for terrorists and drug traffickers (Francois & Sud, 2006; Zartman, 1995). In South Asia, a common variant responsible for fragility is internal conflict and political instability, which has been pervasive in India as well as most of its neighbours. The contagion effects of this have travelled

both ways from India to its neighbours and from the neighbours to India, manifesting in varied forms, such as refugees, 'terrorism', ethnic insurgencies, communist insurgencies, resistance movements, arms transfer and illegal trade, testing India's own state capacity.

State fragility is increasingly seen as a challenge to both international security and global development (Fukuyama, 2004). This is exemplified by the National Security Strategy of the USA in 2002 which stated that 'US is now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones' (The White House, 2002). The US Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Fragile states strategy paper 2005 also reinstated, 'When development and governance fail in a country, the consequences engulf entire regions and leap around the world' (USAID, 2005, p. 7). This has also led to an increase in international responses and interventions to address sources of fragility, including peacebuilding and state-building programmes in FCAS. As 'ungoverned spaces' of fragile states from Afghanistan, Pakistan to Myanmar becomes internationalised, they not only pose domestic challenges to India in the form of spillover effects but also internationalise India's regional domain.

As internal conflicts have persisted globally, the Western liberal powers have prioritised different forms of interventions to tackle conflicts and fragility that include peacekeeping, peacebuilding, mediation and negotiation among others. In this article, I focus on peacekeeping with a regional focus on South Asia. I start with the premise that in a bid to address conflicts in South Asia, the largely Western engagement has brought multiple actors of liberal peacebuilding in South Asia, whose norms and practices are often distinct to India's own engagement in the region. The engagement and influences of these largely Western, party to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) governments, and the networks of non-governmental organisations are packaged in the form of conflict management and peacebuilding/state-building projects, with normative preferences on inclusion, human rights, transitional justice, democracy promotion and through more specific activities such as supporting peace accords, support for elections, governance reforms and development assistance. From the United Nations (UN) Mission in Nepal, Norwegian brokered peace process in Sri Lanka, the US and UN role in stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan, to the European Union (EU) facilitated peace process in Myanmar, liberal peacebuilding is already a highly prominent feature in the South Asian political landscape. As liberal peacebuilding activities shape the political processes in FCAS in the region, Indian foreign policy in its neighbourhood can no longer carry on with status quo but will need to revisit how its policy interacts with those diffused projects of liberal peacebuilding.

Origins and Forms of Liberal Peacebuilding

Liberal peacebuilding is the one of the most dominant form of engagements promoted by Western states in engaging with FCAS, which is in turn delivered through a host of intermediary agencies. While this group of largely Western OECD countries are not a homogenous bloc, there are convergences among most

OECD members on core normative values and policies around engagement in FCAS. This normative core is largely deployed as 'liberal peace'.

Liberal peacebuilding is rooted in the idea of liberal market democracy with distinct elements of rule of law, justice, democracy promotion and free market. It seeks to go beyond ending conflicts through ceasefire or decreasing the prospects of return to violence and seeks to address the structural causes of conflict, promote human security and nurture conditions for a stability and peace (Barnett, Fang & Zürcher, 2014). This expansive remit, when operationalised in practice, includes project activities such as supporting democratic elections, monitoring of disarmament of rebel groups, technical support to security sector reform, drafting peace accords and constitutions, promoting good governance, monitoring and documentation human rights, advocacy on inclusion and power-sharing to name but a few.

Liberal peacebuilding, in some sense, is the successor of peacekeeping missions, which was relatively limited in scope and concerned with of monitoring a ceasefire involving UN military and/or police personnel. With the end of the Cold War, many UN missions have been concerned with peacebuilding, which is expansive involving various actors and broader issues of engagement. This rise in peacebuilding projects has been attributed to a mix of several factors including: decline of ideological tensions that permeated the Cold War; sidestepping of global powers like the USA/Russia from 'non-strategic' regions carving out role for multilateral institutions like the UN; absence of disagreement about the desirability of democracy; and the rise of internal conflicts/civil wars leading to a demand for new multilateral, multifaceted peace operations (Paris, 2004). The distinct place of post-conflict peacebuilding in the wider gamut of conflict management can be located in the report of the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali titled 'An agenda for Peace'. 'This report made a distinction between preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding. It defined peacebuilding as 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (Ghali, 1992).

The report further illustrates the wide array of activities under the realm of peacebuilding, including: 'disarming the previously warring parties…, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation' (Ghali, 1992).

What distinguishes peacebuilding from other forms of bilateral and multilateral engagement is not only its normative underpinnings prioritising democracy, human rights, etc., but the involvement of multiple international constituencies, including states, multilateral, bilateral organisations, private sector and transnational civil society actors, thus blurring boundaries of state and non-state, and private and public sectors. Given the multifaceted nature of peacebuilding operations, in the operationalising of liberal peacebuilding, there is a 'division of labour between the UN and other international agencies' (Paris, 2004, p. 18) wherein tasks have been delegated to NGOs, global and regional financial institutions, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and regional organisations such as NATO,

African Union and EU. This network of actors, interests and identities forming a 'complex networks and contracting arrangements, which interlink state and non-state, and commercial and not-for-profit actors' can be categorised as liberal peacebuilding agents (Goodhand & Walton, 2009, p. 305). Further, in practice, peacebuilding has also been accompanied with debates on state-building. It is also to be noted that while peacebuilding and state-building are distinct concepts, on ground, much of peacebuilding projects include state-building, which prioritises creating and stabilising broader political, economic and security architecture of states with a focus on state institutions (Richmond & Franks, 2009) making peacebuilding all the more intrusive.

   The policy and practice of liberal peacebuilding is not uncontested. Peacebuilding has been criticised for its lack of effectiveness. The standardised model of liberal peacebuilding, despite the differences in the context it operates has led scholars like Mac Ginty to point out that it now resembles 'peace from IKEA, a flat-pack peace made from standardized components' (Mac Ginty, 2008, p. 145). From an economic perspective, Pugh argues that liberal peacebuilding ignores the socio-economic challenges in states undergoing conflict, and its insistence on free market exacerbates wealth imbalances and vulnerability of populations to poverty (Pugh, 2005). Other criticism attributed to liberal peace-building projects include: promoting forms of civil society that fit within liberal-rights framework while marginalising others alternative forms (Kappler & Richmond, 2011), often displacing of older liberal values of welfare which is critical in countries overcoming prolonged period of conflict (Newman, Paris, & Richmond, 2009) and increasing merger of peacebuilding and state-building, which has legitimised externally driven approach with a that focus on larger political, economic and security architecture at the expense of the local aspect of peace (Richmond & Franks, 2009). There are also works which look at liberal peacebuilding's implication on sovereignty, arguing that peacebuilding projects are best characterised by a 'paradox of sovereignty' whereby through state sovereignty is compromised in order to build its capacity to deliver functions of a sovereign state (Zaum, 2003). Despite the criticism, liberal peacebuilding projects are well entrenched in FCAS globally and recent discourses that link fragile states as the source of global insecurity has strengthened the normative core of liberal peacebuilding.

Regionalisation of Conflicts and Liberal Peacebuilding in South Asia

The increase in the scope and range of actors involved in liberal peacebuilding operations has grown hand-in-hand with the increased engagement of regional powers in managing the security of their region. This trend 'regionalisation of security' has risen since the 1990s, wherein even global governance institutions like the UN have delegated competencies to regional organisations for conflict management efforts (Alagappa, 1995). Conversely, this is also due to the growing evidence that few conflict management plans would work unless regional

neighbours and other significant international actors desist from supporting war and begin supporting peace (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Such evidence has also has enhanced the primacy 'regions' not only as clusters and vectors of conflicts but also as sources of their resolution.

In different regions, regional organisations have often taken the lead in conflict management at a regional level. The EU's role in the ethnic conflicts in the Western Balkans, the African Union's ambition and evolving role in regional peace operations offer a few insights into 'regionalisation' of security. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), South Asia's regional organisation, though set up back in 1985 has not been able to evolve as an effective regional forum for conflict management and peacebuilding. Further, the constitution of SAARC prohibits discussion on contentious bilateral issues from its deliberations, which forms a barrier to its role in conflict management. This vacuum of regional organisational leadership has carved a role for regional actors like India. This role has been facilitated and substantiated by other factors. As the largest in size, population, economy, sharing borders with all states barring Afghanistan, and now positioned as an emergent global power, India naturally makes it as a lead actor in managing regional conflicts. Further, given the propensity of conflicts to spill over across borders, security externalities and inter-state ethnic/religious linkages pressures compel India to engage with conflicts in the neighbourhood. Despite contesting India's hegemony, to India's neighbour, it has always been a great power (Cohen, 2001) with substantial influence to shape domestic political settlements. This is more so during period of instability and civil wars when neighbouring states have been extremely divided internally. Having an influence in the region or regional hegemony has also been described as a criterion for global emergence (Rajagopalan & Sahni, 2008), which New Delhi has historically taken seriously. Accordingly, Indian foreign policy has always envisioned South Asia as it natural sphere of influence. This influence increasingly is countered not only by the prominent states that feature in Indian foreign policy discussions like the US and Chinese engagement, as dominant literature cites, but also more pertinently through liberal peacebuilding agents and their normative foundation of democracy promotion, transitional justice and human rights as well as forms of engagements ranging from sanctions, trade concessions, aid, diplomacy and public engagement.

India: A Regional Power

For liberal peacebuilding agents, the engagement with FCAS is guided by distinct policies. For example, USAID has an explicit Fragile State Strategy, and the OECD has its policies and principles on engaging fragile states. India, in contrast, does not have a coherent policy that guide their engagement in fragile states. India is not a party to the OECD and has never explicitly championed for the liberal peacebuilding agenda. The Indian engagement with fragility in the region is guided by its broader foreign policy goals. Some scholars argue that India does not have a coherent, well-articulated neighbourhood policy, leading to ad hoc

decision-making and reliance on bilateral mechanisms instead (Behuria, Pattanaik & Gupta, 2012), which complicates the picture even further. However, India is not the sole country in this category, as scholars have articulated that peacebuilding, as a concept is not developed in policy circles of virtually any rising power (Call & de Coning, 2017).

A brief detour of Indian foreign policy, and the external and internal pressures that determines the scope and limits its options is essential to the understanding of India's regional engagement and how it views alternative sources of engagement in South Asia. Indian foreign policy has journeyed from a relatively idealist framework under the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, to a more realist orientation from mid-1960s to mid-1980s, to economically driven pragmatism starting in the early 1990s (Mukherjee & Malone, 2011). India's foreign policy decisions and options are a manifestation of the diverse worldviews held by India's strategic elites (Cohen, 2013). These worldviews are, however, constrained by developments at four levels, international order, regional pressures, inter-regional developments notably the rise of China as well as domestic challenges, which impact the dynamics of any regional security complex (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Reeling out of colonial rule, the impending decolonisation process, meant that prioritisation of sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality in its foreign policy were rationale as well as normative. Third world solidarity allowed for a positioning India globally as a leader among the developing world. While Nehru articulated Panchsheel-principles of peaceful coexistence, non-alignment and third world solidarity as priorities of Indian foreign policy in the initial phases, the grandeur of his outward looking foreign policy did not prioritise South Asia (Chattopadhyay, 2011). However, India could not abandon regional engagement totally either. From intervention to reinstate King Tribhuwan in Nepal, to the initiation of Indo-Bhutan friendship, Nehru is credited with laying foundations of India's bilateral relationship with its neighbours. What marked Nehru's era was his relative autonomy in shaping foreign policy domestically, as Cohen stresses, 'Jawaharlal Nehru was not only India's chief foreign policy theoretician, he was its dominant and almost sole practitioner for nearly 10 years' (Cohen, 2013, p. 52).

As Indira Gandhi came to power, her foreign policy was underpinned by four goals—enhancing India's security, seeking optimal external economic relations to accelerate modernisation, realising Indian hegemony over the region and amplifying India's voice in third world politics (Kapur, 1987). The 'Indira doctrine' that categorised Indian foreign policy between 1964 and mid-1980s, conversely, saw an overtly interventionist Indian posture reflected in various instances from helping Sri Lankan Prime Minister Srimavo Bandarnaike put down a leftist insurrection, mediation efforts between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil Tigers and the creation of Bangladesh (Mansingh, 2015). India's intervention is largely attributed to a sense of wanting to project India's strength, as well as diverting attention from a brewing domestic economic crisis, as well as her very own personality and leadership style (Jaganathan & Kurtz, 2014).

India's regional engagement mid-1980s to the late 1980s, under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has extreme consequences for the region, especially evident in

Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives. These included: airlifting paratroopers to thwart a coup against the Maldivian President Abdul Gayoom and reinstating him, closing off border points in the Nepal–India border, which is a landlocked Nepal's lifeline to imports in response to Nepal buying arms consignment from China, and signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord paving way for the deployment of the Indian Peacekeeping Force engaged in a war with the Tamil Tigers. This phase marked aggressive Indian role in shaping the political contexts of the South Asian neighbourhood (Raghavan, 2015). Raghavan attributes it to a combination of domestic and international factors. Internally, Rajiv Gandhi had a comfortable majority with the Congress winning the 48.1 per cent of the seats, which allowed him to become more ambitious with foreign policy. Further externally, with Mikhail Gorbachev in power in the USSR and ready to reach out to the USA, Rajiv Gandhi knew Indian foreign policy needed recalibration as well.

Post-1980s, the approach on foreign policy has been comparatively cautious. The change is underpinned by the fact that from 1980s to until 2014, Indian politics has largely been one of coalitions, making uniformity across party lines and ambition in foreign policymaking difficult. This is also reflected in the change to a unipolar global order, the breakdown of Soviet Union and greater role for multilateral institutions like the UN (Paris, 2004). The 1990s marked a new policy orientation in Indian foreign policy focused on economic liberalisation. This focus on economy prioritised three thematic policy areas: re-engagement with major powers, prioritisation of the extended neighbourhoods in Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean, and defining its ties to immediate neighbourhood in the subcontinent (Mohan, 2015). The most remarkable shifts in the post-1990s transformation was the unveiling of the Gujral doctrine, wherein India shed off its demands for reciprocity to unilateral accommodation for improved relations with India's smaller neighbours. Gujral Doctrine of 1996–1998 sought to accommodate the interests and aspirations of the neighbouring states 'admitting that as the larger and more powerful member of the South Asian community, it (India) should travel more than half the distance in accommodating the neighbors' (Muni, 2003, p. 186). However, with the Kargil conflict in 1999, hijacking of Indian Airlines from Kathmandu in 1999, the civil war in Afghanistan from 1996 onwards, cumulatively underscored the crises of unilateralism, as well as effect of regional crises and instability on India.

While there have been debates if the Government led by Narendra Modi has brought new dynamism to the conduct of Indian foreign policy, his approach is essentially pragmatic, and resembles to his predecessors (Hall, 2015). However, with his invitations to the head of governments of all SAARC states in his swearing in ceremony, and his high-level visits among others, the focus on the neighbourhood/region is certainly more visible. The 'Neighbourhood First' approach adopted by India has not only brought the focus on the region but prioritised issues within the region. The policy encompasses four priorities, namely political and diplomatic priority to its immediate neighbours and the Indian Ocean island states, provide neighbours with support, as needed, in the form of resources, equipment, and training, greater connectivity and integration, so as to improve the free flow of goods, people, energy, capital and information and

promote a model of India-led regionalism with which its neighbours are comfortable (Jaishankar, 2016). These priorities under 'Neighbourhood First' policy have also neatly dovetailed into practices such as 'first responder' that reflects the country's growing capability and increasing willingness to lead in responding to regional crises and provide for security in the region (Xavier, 2017).

Like the first responder in crises underscores, assessments on conflict and instability in the neighbourhood will continue to be at the heart of India's regional policy. This regional environment, marred by conflict and fragility has threefold impact to India's foreign policy:

First, domestically, since the 1990s, Indian politics has been one of coalitions between national and regional political parties. Coalitions have made regional parties indispensable. The cross-border ethnic, sociopolitical and economic linkages between Indian states/provinces/regions and other South Asian countries have meant that regional parties are likely to advocate or weigh in issues that impact their region and other South Asian states. This has also meant that provinces/states, which were peripheral to the making of foreign policy decision earlier, have emerged as prominent force in foreign policymaking. This linkage between domestic political coalition related compulsions and the regional policy has often constrained the choices of the federal government in foreign policy preferences (Jha, 1999). The decision to create 'States Division' within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in 2014 to bring a sharper focus on states within the MEA's activities and enhance provincial engagement in India's foreign policy should be viewed in this context (Asthana & Jacob, 2017).

Second, given the pervasive instability and fragility in South Asia, liberal peacebuilding agents will be vested in South Asia to remedy sources of conflicts and help with conflict resolution. The deployment of liberal peacebuilding projects introduces yet another layer of international engagement in the subcontinent. Indian engagement competes not only with the US and Chinese influence in the countries in the region but also with normative and material aspects of liberal peacebuilding, which has continued to mobilise a wide section of population in FCAS in South Asia.

Third, India's policy in dealing with FCAS in the region will be the litmus test to India's global commitments. India's participation and ratification of different forums and conventions have a bearing on its unstable neighbourhood. If India signs or endorses a position on issues like human rights and transitional justice globally, it is likely to be evaluated based on its adherence to human rights at a regional level. The region, thus, limits India's global ambition. There is an Indian anxiety over the implication of subscription to different international norms in limiting its option in the region (Khilnani et al., 2012).

Interaction between Liberal Peacebuilding Actors and India in FCAS in South Asia

While policies in India barely acknowledge the influence and presence of liberal peacebuilding projects in the region, by its very presence in the region, India is already tacitly interacting with liberal peacebuilding. The interaction between

liberal peacebuilding and India's foreign policy in its fragile and conflict-affected countries in its neighbourhood is manifested in five ways:

Contestation: Like discussed earlier, there is a trend of regionalisation of security, with a sense of responsibility being given to regional powers to manage political instabilities of the region. India was supported by the USA to take a more active role in preventing conflict and restoring democracy in Nepal in the aftermath of the 'royal coup' in February 2005 (Vaughn, 2006). In Asia, this is also true for China, which has been called upon to play a crucial role in facilitating negotiations between the military regime and the ethnic armed groups by the international community (Myoe, 2015). This enthusiasm of entrusting regional hegemons with powers to govern regional affairs has, however, rarely been evaluated positively. International partners have also been critical on the practices of engagement regional powers like India. For example, the 'international community' has cited India's lack of interest in cooperating with international actors in the Sri Lankan conflict, in different phases of the Lankan peace process (Destradi, 2010). The critique of norms and forms of regional involvement in the Sri Lankan peace process and its divergences with the liberal peacebuilding model of engagement is summated in the excerpts from the evaluation report on the Norwegian role in Sri Lanka.

> It began as an experiment in liberal peacebuilding and ended as a result of a very different 'Asian model' of 'conflict resolution'. Building on Westphalian notions of sovereignty and non-interference, a strong developmental state, the military crushing of the 'terrorism', and the prevalence of order over dissent or political change, this model may serve as an inspiration for other countries in the region. (Sørbø, Goodhand, Klem, Nissen & Selbervik, 2011, p. 18)

Conversely this trend of critiquing regional ambitions of emergent powers like India has led to regional powers like India to remain suspicious of external conflict management and see it as a challenge to their hegemony in the region.

Policy contrast: As India ascends to emerge as a global leader, there is an increasingly sense of consciousness to be seen as a 'responsible power'. This projection of responsibility ensures that a clear rejection of liberal values is no longer an option. This in turn had led to instances where overtly rejected liberal peace-building norms or projects but has covertly opposed and created obstructions to their furtherance. This manifested in Nepal, where South Asia's only in-country UN mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was established to help with Nepal's peace process. India, though was opposed to the idea of the UN presence in South Asia, it could not appear confrontational and grudgingly gave in to the wishes of Nepali parties (Jha, 2011). But the uneasy relationship between UNMIN and India has been cited as one of the reasons for UNMIN's narrow mandate as well as it departure from engaging in Nepal's political transition. The tipping point to India's displeasure with UNMIN was the question of integration of the Maoists combatants into the Nepal Army, a stable bulwark of Nepal–India relationship. During the peace process, integration of the Maoist army into the Nepal army was a key proposal in the Peace Accord. India feared that allowing UNMIN to lead on the discussions on the future of the two armies would result into a radical restructuring

and eventual weakening of Nepal Army—which would have consequences for India (Adhikari, 2008). Further, the revelation about UNMIN's presence in Nepal's Southern borders adjacent to India, increased India's distrust (Thapa, 2010).

In a slightly different instance, in early 1990s, the Government of Bhutan enacted a royal decree about a single national identity, in turn, expelling more than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese Bhutanese. India's geostrategic and energy needs made India, a silent spectator of the process, instead escorting Bhutanese of Nepalese ethnicity through Indian territory to come to Nepal. But India could not appear to openly side with Bhutan for Nepal or vice versa, and further could not appear confrontational with bodies like UNHCR, who managed the refugee crisis. India, thus, conveniently labelled the problem as a strictly bilateral problem between Nepal and Bhutan, which needed to be resolved bilaterally (Heissler, 1998). The need to appear rational and responsible has led India to follow contradictory policies on different issues with regard to different neighbouring countries.

Normative instrumentalism: There are differences between normative inclinations of India's foreign policy and liberal peacebuilding as well as the methods and processes of engagement between the two. At a normative level, India's stance on sovereignty, human rights and other liberal values have lately been questioned. This resonates with Hurrell's argument that emergent powers have a 'preference for older pluralist norms of sovereignty and non-intervention in the face of dramatic change in the nature of international society- that is characterized by increase in the scope, range and intrusiveness of international rules and ever increasing webs of international institutions and organizations' (Hurrell, 2006, p. 4). However, at a regional level, what is noticeable is not normative differences, but an instrumental mobilization of certain norms to advance their strategic interests.

Let us take, for example, the norms of human rights and democracy, central to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. In 2012 and 2013, India voted in favour of the US-sponsored resolution at the UN Human Rights Council censoring Sri Lanka for human rights violations during the civil war. In 2014, India decided to abstain from voting on the resolution against Sri Lanka citing 'India believes that it is imperative for every country to have the means of addressing human rights violations through robust national mechanisms… It has been India's firm belief that adopting an intrusive approach that undermines national sovereignty and institutions is counterproductive…' (Pattanaik, 2014). While the official articulation for abstaining the 2014 resolution was that it had, unlike the past resolutions, called for the UNHCR to probe crimes committed during the war, analysts point to changes in India's domestic and external environment. Kumar mentions that in the past resolutions, the Congress government voted for the resolution fearing a backlash its regional coalition partner in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which was vested in the issue of Tamils in Sri Lanka. With the DMK–Congress alliance breaking in 2013, the Congress was not vested in the resolution. Further the abstention could also renew the Indo-Sri Lanka relations, which had been curtailed by the Sri Lanka getting closer to China (Kumar, 2014).

At a global level, despite generously contributing to UN Democracy Fund, India has stayed away from an aggressive liberal prophecy of democracy promotion, good governance, which form the normative core of liberal peacebuilding. However, in the region, India has strategically invoked democracy when it has suited. In 2015, Nepal promulgated its new constitution, which was contested as exclusionary by different ethnic groups. Demanding a revision, in the immediate aftermath of the promulgation of the constitution, violence unleashed in different parts of the country, the fiercest in the Southern plains of Nepal that shares borders with India, home to Madhesis with cultural and ethnic ties to India. A consortium of Madhesi parties agitated with key demands, including, a proportional and inclusive representation in state institution, delineation of constituencies based on population, changes to federal demarcation of boundaries and citizenship provisions in the Constitution. Madhesis also resorted to the blockade of the border, which is landlocked Nepal's lifeline for essential supplies. Though the Madhesi agitation was cited as a legitimate struggle for equal presentation and representation, the Indian complicity in the border blockade and Indian call at the Universal Periodic review of the UNHRC for Nepal 'consolidate the constitution building and democratization process by accommodating all sections of Nepal to enable broad-based ownership and participation' (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2015), further aggravated the divisions between Madhesis and the other groups in Nepal. This contrasts sharply with the reversal of Indian policy in Myanmar, which shifted from supporting the democracy movement to engaging with the military in the early 1990s. This was despite Myanmar's junta's appalling record on human rights and democracy and in the early 1990s years when the junta refused to transfer power to the National League for Democracy (NLD) despite a landslide victory in the election. This ambivalence to democracy was in response to China upping the stakes with investments, trade and strategic engagement in Myanmar. Elsewhere, like in Afghanistan, democracy does not seem to be on Indian priority, while in the Maldives, India has continues to state that it supports stability, development and democracy, and expressed concerns about the country's first democratically elected and pro-India leader Mohamed Nasheed after his removal from office (Kumar, 2016). Thus, 'emphasis was and has been more on the pragmatic dimensions of India's "real" interests where democracy was promoted and supported if it suited such interests' (Muni, 2011, p. 125). However, the instrumental use of norms is not limited to India. In fact, the selective use of international legal instruments for different types of intervention, including sanctions, peacekeeping, and/or military interventions, by Western states and institutions like the UN, in response to humanitarian crises and human rights violations is among 'the most contentious and politicized issues in international politics' (Binder, 2017, p. 2).

Unexpected overlaps: Traditionally, unlike the proponents of liberal peace-building, Indian foreign policy has not engaged in issues of rule of law, security sector reform, transitional justice and human rights. However, in certain issues, Indian strategies has overlapped and seamlessly integrated to the norms and forms of liberal peacebuilding. Whether out of it domestic compulsions or due to global commitments, India has played an integral role in facilitating peace accords in the

region. India's facilitation of dialogue between the democratic parties and the Maoist rebels ultimately leading to the reinstatement of democracy and the end of the civil war in Nepal (Destradi, 2012). Further, on the issue of inclusion and state restructuring, when liberal Western powers were backtracking on their commitment to support ethnic groups and forums, India, as discussed earlier, backed the Madhesi groups. It went far enough to state that it has only 'noted' of the promulgation of Nepal's new constitution on ground of exclusionary provisions, while other countries welcomed the promulgation (*MyRepublica*, 2015). Similarly, in Afghanistan, there have been calls for increased aid and support from the international community, amid dangers of Afghanistan backsliding on the gains in security and development, especially since the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) combat operations have been disbanded. India, in this context, has stepped up it engagement on reconstruction and infrastructure building in Afghanistan. Despite expansive extra-regional involvement and regional competition, India has refrained from supporting elements of security and conflict management including peacebuilding, human rights, governance reform-related programme (Destradi, 2014) instead of focusing on developmental programmes, with a specific focus on infrastructure. This focus has been visible in India's support in building institutional capacity in Afghanistan through trainings to professionals in various departments of Afghanistan government, focusing on strengthening its nascent public transport system as well as undertaking infrastructural projects that are critical to Afghanistan's recovery (Pant, 2010). Further, the large infrastructural projects undertaken by India from construction of the Parliament building, transmission lines, dams, to scholarship programmes extend from Kandahar to Herat, some of the most unstable areas in Afghanistan (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2016). This enhanced cooperation comes at a time, when the differences between the West and Kabul are aggravating the prevailing uncertainty over conflict-recovery in Afghanistan (Chandra, 2010). India's focus on infrastructure and capital heavy sectors in Afghanistan is also reflective of the wider debate on aid priorities of emergent donors, which argues that while emergent donors like China and India prioritise infrastructure and investment (Chin & Quadir, 2012; Sato, Shiga, Kobayashi & Kondon, 2011), the more established Western donors are focusing on inclusive development through 'soft' approaches 'technical assistance'.

Uncertainty: With areas of overlaps, normative differences, some outright rejections and a policy vacuum, a form of uncertainty with regard to India's engagement on conflict management in the region has emerged. This uncertainty has surfaced in two forms: contradictory practices in different times in similar situations and contexts and differences in practices in similar situation in different countries. The shifting goal posts of Indian priorities have surfaced in Sri Lanka and Nepal where different political forces have been abetted and varied priorities have been supported in different phases of the conflict and the peace process. The glaring difference of India engagement in different South Asian states is most visible on issues of Indian support to different regimes. In Afghanistan, when the Taliban took over most of Afghanistan in 1996, India supported the Northern Alliance (NA), along with other regional actors like Iran and Russia (Fair, 2011).

Discussing the Indian treatment of the contradiction of anti-state groups in Nepal and Bhutan, Rabindra Mishra, writes:

> India's attitude to Bhutan's anti-establishment groups has remained diametrically opposite to its attitude toward Nepal's anti-establishment groups. While Nepal's anti-establishment politics has succeeded only with covert or overt Indian support, any sign of political activities on Indian soil that might be harmful to Bhutan, whose foreign and defense policies are guided by Delhi under the 1949 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two countries, have been immediately quashed. (Mishra, 2004, p. 363)

A cross-cutting feature that binds each of the five manifestations of interaction between Indian foreign policy and liberal peacebuilding is ambivalence. Indian foreign policy has barely started recognising liberal peacebuilding as key variable of international engagement in the region. The proponents of liberal peacebuilding and Indian engagement have not prioritised coming together to work in the region.

Impact

India is well positioned to work more visibly with liberal peacebuilding agents in the region. The 'Neighbourhood First' approach provides tangible stimuli to engage with liberal peacebuilding in the region more robustly. However, it is currently inhibited by Indian foreign policy's ambivalence towards discussions on peace-building as well as fragility and conflicts in the region more systematically. A recognition of 'peacebuilding'-related interventions in the neighbourhood as a form of international engagement is a starting point. The lack of coordination and dialogue on the issue needs to be addressed for two reasons: First, in FCAS in South Asia, the engagement of regions like India and China, and how they interact with liberal peacebuilding agents is a key factor that determines its political settlement. As Indian involvement in post-conflict settings in the region is likely to increase in scale and scope, it will be able to engage better in the region by articulating its priorities in fragile contexts. The impact of the sheer lack of coordination between the two modes of engagement with no clear agreement on what sort of political settlement is to be endorsed leads them to complicate the process.

Second, the interactions between liberal peacebuilding agents/projects vis-á-vis Indian engagement also impacts both the Indian engagement and liberal peacebuilding projects in the region. Liberal peacebuilding agents, their projects and strategies have changed on the face of regional powers and domestic contexts, and consequently, regional powers will also need to increasingly adapt to working with liberal peacebuilding agents. In conflict settings in South Asia, Indian opinion on different aspects of the peace process is invoked by liberal peacebuilding agents. This is a testament to the increasing realisation of the primacy of India's influence in the region by liberal peacebuilding agents. India, will accordingly, need to acknowledge and calibrate their foreign policies with the considerations of the expansive scope of liberal peacebuilding agents in FCAS. This also includes interaction with governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, transnational civil society and NGOs, which might not always have been in the Indian foreign policy calculus.

A coordinated interaction with liberal peacebuilding agents could be strategic for India in various ways. First, working with Western states and agencies on conflict management in South Asia might help bridge India's trust deficit with the West (Mohan, 2005). Second, it will help draw experiences, lessons and patterns that can to be deployed for conflict resolution efforts in India's domestic conflicts. Third, it will be India's stepping-stone for preparing India to dealing with global governance architecture, on conflict management and beyond. This is critical as Indian engagement in the world, with states and non-state entities, in bilateral and multilateral forums, are increasingly getting scrutinised at home and abroad.

In discussing how emerging powers, like India, would deal with liberal peacebuilding, Richmond and Tellidis write that emerging powers could either be 'status quoist', that is, they find their place within the liberal peace system with added value, or be 'critical states', that is, raise significant ethical, ideological, materials and influence challenges (2014). For now, India has largely been neither, largely staying in the opposition benches with vetoes on some issues but proposing no alternative for a sustainable roadmap to conflict resolution.

There will be new avenues and challenges as the Indian engagement with peacebuilding progresses. However, the first stepping-stone is recognition—an acknowledgement of normative core, material content, expansive scope and reach of liberal peacebuilding projects, which has the potential to impact India's engagement in the region. Given India's aspiration to shape international system, its failure to foresee, acknowledge and adapt Indian foreign policy in relation to the norms and practices of liberal peacebuilding is likely to detrimental to its security and economic interests in the region.

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Note

1. I use the term fragile and conflict affected to describe states which have been marked as fragile, failed or collapsed, and countries undergoing intra-state conflicts. The terminologies have been discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

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