

Dilara Choudhury

MAJOR POWERS' INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

South Asia, since the liquidation of the British Empire in 1947, has been an area of intense diplomatic activity and conflicting alignments. The three major powers—the United States, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and the three regional powers—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been engaged in shifting and sometimes, conflicting patterns of interrelationship. South Asia, as Professor Norman D. Palmer describes, may be called the heart of the Third World and “a pivotal area in contemporary international relations. It is today one of the world's greatest laboratories of political, economic and social change”.¹

South Asia has one of the largest population concentration in the entire world—nearly one billion people. South Asia's size and population, its military and scientific establishments and its geographic position between the oil rich Persian Gulf and dynamic economies of East Asia give the area great geo-political importance.² By virtue of its location, population, “combination of actual weakness and potential strength and efforts at nation-

1. Norman D. Palmer, *South Asia and United States' Policy*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966, p. 1
2. See “South Asia and U. S. Foreign Policy”, Bureau of Public Affairs, U. S. Department of State, Washington D. C.: An address by Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary of State Political Affairs on 12, December 1984.

building".³ 'South Asia is an important example of shifting struggle for influence. South Asian Subcontinent has been an area of active diplomatic competition among the three great powers. Both the Soviet Union and the United States have spent billions of dollars in the economic development of the Subcontinent. The Chinese have also begun in recent years modest but important aid programme for Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition to heavy economic assistance, vast quantities of military supplies have flowed into the Subcontinent. India has received the largest quantity of Soviet military supplies as compared to any other non-communist country. Pakistan, on the other hand, received huge American military aid, particularly since the Afghan crisis in the 1980s. China has also contributed significant military aid to Pakistan and modestly to Bangladesh.

The roles of the three major powers in the Subcontinent have been highly significant and important though the area is not of direct importance for the security of either the USA or the USSR. China, of course, is the central strategic factor in the area. Both India and Pakistan have common border with China and Bangladesh is located in an area that "China perceives as its national cultural domain, an area in which it will eventually play a dominating role".⁴

What have been roles of the three major powers in South Asia ? Are they responsible for the arms race in the area ? How far regional conflicts and tensions have been aggravated by the policies of the major powers ? Have the regional powers sought to take advantage of tensions among the major powers such as the Cold War between Washington and Moscow or the Sino-Soviet rivalry in Asia ?

3. William J. Barnds, *India, Pakistan and the Great Powers*, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 3

4. G. W. Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Major Powers : Politics of a Divided Sub-continent* (New York : The Free Press, 1975), pp. 1-2

These and similar questions will be attempted in the present article. The article will examine and analyze the roles of the USSR, the USA and the PRC in South Asia. The roles of the three major powers will be examined in two parts: in the 1970's and in the 1980's.

Regional Tensions And Conflicts

The most unfortunate and ugly aspect of South Asian regional system is the corrosive quarrels and constant tensions between India and Pakistan. Indo-Pakistani bad rivalry led the two countries to pursue their foreign policy objectives in diametrically opposite directions. Thus in the mid-1950s when Pakistan in search of her security, entered into a number of military pacts and alliances with the United States, India in her anxiety for defence and security turned towards Moscow. The result has been New Delhi's quasi-alliance relationship with Moscow as evidenced in the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship and an on-going military supply relationship. Similarly, the Sino-Pakistan closer ties since the early 1960s can be traced to the continued tension and suspicion between India and Pakistan. Though the Sino-Pakistan relationship is based on a number of solid factors, the origin of the closer tie between China and Pakistan lies in the 1962 border war between India and China. The relationship between India and Pakistan having been what it was almost continuously since 1947, the developing conflict between India and China in 1962 was readily welcome in Pakistan inasmuch as it exposed an "unfriendly neighbour" to new risks and hazards. The Sino-Indian conflicts of 1962 induced Pakistan to look towards China on the age-old myth: 'the enemy's enemy is my friend'. Pakistan and India, if they acted together, would be able to make very valuable contributions to the maintaining of international peace and stability in South Asia. But from what might have been a position of positive and constructive beneficence

for the human race, they have been pushed into one that threatens the peace and prosperity of the whole South Asia and constitutes a grave menace to international security.

The three major powers are, at least, partially responsible for the regional conflicts and tensions in the Sub-continent. They have been unable to avoid indirect involvement in the regional conflicts. Out-side influences and factors have further complicated an already tense situation in the area. The patterns of alignment in South Asia have always been greatly complicated by regional tension in the area. There have been interrelations between regional conflicts and global policies of the three major powers. The current tacit strategic alignment between India and the Soviet Union, on the one hand and Pakistan, the United States, and China, on the other is partially the product of continued tension and suspicion between India and Pakistan. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the major powers as the active agents and India and Pakistan as passive spectators in the events of the past three decades in the area. On the other hand, India and Pakistan are perhaps prime examples of how countries that are actually weak can by virtue of skilful leadership, exploit great-power rivalries to their benefit.⁵

The long-standing rivalry between Pakistan and India is now further complicated by a growing nuclear component. Nuclear component has become a part of the India-Pakistan rivalry, even though Pakistan's financial, material and scientific resources are significantly less than India's. After India's 1974 nuclear blast, Pakistan accelerated its efforts to acquire a nuclear option. Since the late 1970s Pakistan apparently has concentrated on uranium enrichment as its main route to an atomic bomb capability as opposed to India which used plutonium from a research reactor for its fissionable material.⁶ The United States adopted forceful mea-

5. William J. Barnds. *op cit.*, p. 7

6. Birchard P. Cronin, *The United States, Pakistan and the Soviet Threat to Southern Asia*. Washington, D. C. : U. S. Congressional (Research) Service, The Library of Congress, (September 1985), pp 28-29.

asures to stop nuclear proliferation in South Asia. The US policies toward India and Pakistan are directed to prevent the introduction of new nuclear explosive capabilities into the Sub-continent. Similarly, China has strongly refuted allegations that it has ever helped Pakistan in her nuclear activities. The Soviet Union has not been accused of giving any help to India in her nuclear programme though the Soviet Union is the largest supplier of India's military capabilities. Both the Super Powers and China are genuinely concerned over the possibility that both India and Pakistan are pursuing programmes that could lead to the development of nuclear weapons.

Emergence of a new Non-aligned country in the Sub-continent, Bangladesh, should prove to be a stabilizing factor in the regional conflicts and tensions. Bangladesh maintains good neighbourly and cordial relations with India and Pakistan. It is also encouraging to find that Bangladesh's initiatives to form a regional grouping in South Asia with the objectives of promoting regional cooperation and peace have finally been realized in the form of SAARC.

The formation of the SAARC is regarded as a watershed in the regional cooperation and peace in South Asia. The lengthy process of negotiations among the seven nations of South Asia culminated at Dhaka in December 1985. The initial sounding out for regional cooperation was made by late President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh in 1977. Then the process of establishing a regional cooperation organization was discussed at a series of meetings at both technical and political levels of different tiers. It was at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi in August 1983, that the concept of SAARC was officially accepted with the objectives of regional economic growth, social programme and cultural development. The summit meeting of seven heads of state and government held at Dhaka in December 1985 marked the formal launching of the SAARC.

It is hoped that the SAARC would reduce regional tensions and suspicions by developing closer ties and cooperations among the

neighbours. The three major powers have also welcomed the emergence of the SAARC. It should reduce the arms race between India and Pakistan that had led to three unfortunate wars in the Sub-continent and to a major border war between India and China in 1962.

The Post-1971 Balance of Power in South Asia

Whenever there have been an armed conflict in the area, patterns of relationship underwent changes. In the 1960s, the Sino-Indian border war had great impact on the pattern of relationship in South Asia. The United States downgraded its special ties with Pakistan, which had begun in the mid-1950s, when Washington rushed US arms to India to face new threats from China. Pakistan was bitter over the new US policy toward the South Asian Sub-continent, Pakistan began to cultivate its relations with her two communist neighbours, the Soviet Union and China. The result were Sino-Pakistan closer links which have lasted till today and a short period of normal relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union (1963-70). India continued to enjoy special relationship with Moscow, and better ties with Washington while her relations with Peking remained frozen for lang.

The great events of 1971 culminating in the dismemberment of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh also had great impacts on the pattern of relationship in South Asia. A new balance of power emerged in 1971 as a result of the Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh. The break-up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh were, no doubt, mainly due to internal socio-economic and political developments in undivided Pakistan, yet it can not be denied that the great events of 1971 were interrelated with a number of outside influences and factors such as the strained Indo-Pakistan relationship, the Sino-Soviet rivalry in Asia, the global competition between the two Super Powers. The Bangladesh crisis of 1971 was a part of a wider conflict involving the five most

populous countries in the world—China, the Soviet Union, the United States, India and Pakistan. As *New York Times* pointed out that the Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh “was not merely a regional conflict between the two countries—there was a power

The most important fact of South Asian politics after the disintegration of Pakistan was the emergence of India as a major power in its own right. India had always been more important, bigger and more stable country in the region. But the dismemberment of Pakistan made India the dominating power in South Asia. The major powers had to concede India's new status in the region,

struggle between China and the Soviet Union and a strategic struggle between Moscow and Washington”⁷.

It was, therefore, quite natural that the 1971 great events would give rise to a new balance of power in south Asia. The most important fact of South Asian politics after the disintegration of Pakistan was the emergence of India as a major power in its own right. India had always been more important, bigger and more stable country in the region. But the dismemberment of Pakistan made India the dominating power in South Asia. The major powers had also to concede to India's new status in the region. The Soviet Union was quick to recognize India's dominating role. The United States had to give up its policy of maintaining “parity” between India and Pakistan. China, however, continued to maintain its special links with Pakistan but was anxious to normalize relations with India and to begin links with the new nation of the Sub-continent, Bangladesh. Let us now review the policies of the three major powers, USA, USSR and PRC to the three nations of the Sub-continent, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

7. J. Reston, “Who Won in India?”, *The New York Times*, 17 December, 1971.

The Soviet Union and the Post-1971 Sub-continent

Indo-Soviet Friendship Warmed up

The Soviet Union had scored a big diplomatic gain in South Asia as a result of her role in the independence of Bangladesh. After the 1971 war, Indian Prime Minister late Mrs. Gandhi thanked the Soviet Union for the diplomatic and political support India received from Moscow but she was reported to have said, "We are unable to display gratitude in any tangible sense for anything"⁸. Yet the Indo-Soviet friendship got new impetus in the new order in South Asia. Soviet hopes were centred in India and India was also appreciative of the Soviet role during the liberation of Bangladesh. The Soviet Union had always special ties with India. They were reinforced during the 1971 crisis. No other foreign power is more respected or has a more important say in India's major problems than the Soviet Union. It would be, however, a mistake to conclude that India would be "lost" to Soviet influence. India was not likely to give up her independent role or policy of Non-alignment as a price for the Soviet political and diplomatic support in the 1971 crisis. As *Christian Science Monitor* wrote: "At this hour of greatest triumph, India was not likely to dance to strings pulled by Moscow. Instead Indians appeared to think more of their national pride, their history, their sense of destiny as a great nation than of the dictates of other powers, whether friendly or critical"⁹. Most Indians regard their country as an autonomous center of powers and they would like to treat Indo-Soviet friendship as "a coalition of two-equals".

The Indo-Soviet special relationship is based on a number of solid factors. India needs Soviet military and economic assistance for the pursuit of her national interests in world politics while the Soviet Union gains tremendously in the Third World

8. *New York Times*, 17 February, 1972.

9. "How Much Influence did Russia Gain?", *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 December, 1971.

politics because of India's cooperation and help. It is a mutually beneficial alliance. India and Soviet Union have certain common foreign policy objectives---both desire to curb the growing influence of China in Asian affairs; both wish to prevent Pakistani arms build-up with the help of outside forces. The main reason for powerful Soviet leverage in India is the Soviet large-scale military supplies to New Delhi. India's huge military build-up and its superiority in the region are mainly due to the continued Soviet military supplies to India.

In 1969, the Soviet leader Brezhnev introduced a new security plan for Asia known as "Asian Collective Security System." It was mainly a product of the growing Sino-Soviet rivalry in Asia. The plan was described as a defensive measure to safeguard the independence of Asian countries against "imperialist aggression and neo-Colonialism".¹⁰ According to Brezhnev, the proposed Asian Security plan was based on principles such as "renunciation of the use of force in relations between states, respect for the sovereignty and inviolability of borders, non-interference in internal affairs and economic and other cooperation on the basis of full equality and mutual advantage."¹¹ Most of the Non-aligned Asian countries including India and Pakistan were, however, not inclined to join a security system introduced by a Superpower. India declared that she did not believe in the nation of big power as the guardian of security for India or its neighbours.

In the new favourable balance of power in South Asia, the Soviet Union sought to revive the idea of Asian Collective Security System. The Soviets tried to pass off the 1971 treaty of friendship between India and the Soviet Union and the India-Bangladesh treaty of 1972 as preliminary steps toward establishment of an Asian Collective Security System. A *Radio Peace and Progress* commentary on March 23, 1972 suggested that both Bangladesh

10. *Izvestia*, 29 May, 1969.

11. *Pravda*, 21 March, 1972.

and Pakistan should enter into agreements with the Soviets on the model of the Indo-Soviet treaty of 1971. Brezhnev made a significant visit to India in November 1973; in his speech to the Indian Parliament, Brezhnev spoke about the virtues of his Security plan for Asia: "The opportunity has arrived and the present situation in Asia has created prerequisites (for the plan) Asia can and must become a continent of peace."¹² Mrs. Gandhi, however, did not change India's stand on military pact: India refused to endorse Brezhnev's Security Plan for Asia. India and the Soviet Union, however, signed new agreements for economic cooperation. In the previous year, i.e. 1972, India and the Soviet Union had agreed to set up a commission on economic, scientific and technical cooperation in accordance with Article 6 of the 1971 Friendship Treaty. Under the 1972 agreement, each country was expected to take into account the needs of the other's economy when formulating national plans. The proposed commission's task was to supervise the implementation and operation of joint ventures. During Brezhnev's visit to India in November, 1973, India and the Soviet Union signed a fifteen-year economic agreement under which the Soviet Union was expected to give assistance to India's need in steel, coal mining, oil-exploration and power generation. Brezhnev's visit to India in 1973 opened new vistas of Indo-Soviet economic cooperation. Mrs Gandhi strengthened economic ties but paid no price in political concessions.

During Brezhnev's visit, the Soviet help to build up India's defence system came up as in the past. India was reported to have expressed interest in Soviet Mig-23 interceptors, fighter-bombers, mobile SAM-6 anti-aircraft missiles and assistance in plans for new naval vessels. Indian the then Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, had already gave a long shopping list of Soviet weapons when he visited Moscow in July 1973.

12. *The New York Times*, 29 November, 1973.

The Indo-Soviet friendship had already a history of one and half decade but in the post-1971 Sub-continent, Indo-Soviet collaboration in military, political, diplomatic and economic spheres became more prominent. India's needs for the Soviet support in various spheres were greater as her relations with the USA were strained on Bangladesh war and her ties with China, which remained frozen since 1972, were further worsened during the war on Bangladesh. The Joint Communiqué, issued at the end of Indian Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh's visit to Moscow in September 1974 expressed "satisfaction at the strengthening of Indo-Soviet friendship."¹³ The exchange of these friendly visits between the two countries demonstrated extensive mutual understanding between the Soviet Union and India on major international problems. Continued Soviet military shipments as well as the Soviet prompt acceptance of India's claim of benign intentions in exploding a nuclear test in 1974 and integration of Sikkim reflected still growing Indo-Soviet collaboration.¹⁴

Another illustration of growing friendship between India and the Soviet Union was demonstrated by New Delhi's attitude toward the presence of foreign naval forces in the Indian Ocean. While India opposed the increasing American presence in the Indian Ocean, her attitude to the Soviet presence in the Ocean was not that adverse. India seemed to endorse Soviet contention that she is almost a littoral state in the area : that the Soviet Union sought no naval parity with the Americans in the Pacific or the Atlantic.

The Soviet Attitude Toward "New" Pakistan

Pakistanis were unhappy with the Soviet role in the disintegration of Pakistan. Pakistan's President Z. A. Bhutto was critical of the

13. *The Statesman*, 11 September, 1974.

14. See *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Major Powers*, op. cit pp 22-26 and pp. 46

Soviet policy toward the Sub-continent since the Taskent declaration of 1966. But geography did not allow Bhutto to ignore the Soviet Union. So when he came to power in Pakistan after 1971 crisis, he had to go to Moscow to normalize relations with the Soviet Union which is not only a Superpower but also a close neighbour of Pakistan. Bhutto was already facing political unrest and tensions in provinces of the smaller Pakistan—in North West Frontier and Baluchistan. While in Moscow, Bhutto was reported to have been subject of both blackmail and blandishment. The blackmail consisted of warning him that if he did not give up his anti-Soviet stand, Pakistan might well have to face the further fragmentation. The Russians told him "if the history were to repeat itself, we would again take the same position (as in Bangladesh crisis) because we are convinced that it was correct".¹⁵ The Soviet support for "Pakhtoonistan", an independent state for the Pathans of the North West Frontier Province dated from the open support of Khrushchev and Bulganin during their visit to Afghanistan in 1955. Similarly Soviet authors and publicists had often spoken of "Greater Baluchistan". Bhutto was not unaware of the Soviet attitude towards the two restless provinces of the smaller Pakistan.

The blandishments offered to Bhutto seemed to be based on the argument that the best guarantee for "new" Pakistan, as for other smaller countries of the region was to look to Moscow: only if Pakistan followed the Indians and signed a treaty of friendship, warned the stern Soviet leader, Brezhnev, could its territorial integrity be preserved. The Joint Communique issued on March 18, 1972 at the end of Bhutto's visit contained no cheerful words for the worried Pakistani President. The Soviet Union, however, resumed economic aid in 1973 with construction of a steel mill at Karachi and Bhutto claimed in an April 1973 *Foreign Affairs* article: "I am glad to say that there has recently been a mental improvement in our

15. *Pravda*, 18 March, 1972.

relations with the Soviet Union." The Soviet-Pakistan relations in the 1970s could, at best, be described as correct but not cordial.

Attitude Toward Bangladesh

Among the major powers the Soviet Union was the first to recognize Bangladesh. The Soviet Union greeted the emergence of Bangladesh with enthusiasm. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on his return from detention in Pakistan, declared: "While Bangladesh believes in the policy of friendship to all and malice toward none, she has special reasons to be grateful to the Soviet Union which had protested to the Pakistan authorities against the genocide of the Bengalis. We remember the Indian and Soviet roles. I made my first visit to India, next I will visit the Soviet Union."¹⁶

Mujib paid a friendly visit to the Soviet Union in March 1972 where he was warmly greeted by the Soviet leaders. He had cordial and frank discussions with the Soviet leaders, on bilateral as well as on major international issues. There was broad agreement between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union on most of the international issues.

The Soviet Union began "an economic-cultural relationship" with Bangladesh in 1972-73. The Soviet aid to Bangladesh for the fiscal year 1972-73 was about \$ 137 million, nearly 11 per cent of Bangladesh's total foreign aid for that year. As part of its aid, the Soviet Union financed a much publicized salvage operation at the sea-ports of Chittagong and Chalna. There were minor misgivings in some quarters in Bangladesh that the salvage operations at the sea-ports had given the Soviet navy an opportunity to extend its influence in the waters surrounding the Sub-continent. But as soon as the salvage operations were over, the Soviet navy left gracefully without asking for any political or strategic price for its help.

16. Sheikh Mujib's interview with *Tass* and *Radio Moscow* on 23 February, 1972, published in *The Bangladesh Observer*, 24 February, 1972.

The Soviet Union seemed to be contented with the overall policy and programme of Bangladesh which genuinely appreciated the Soviet friendly attitude. The early phase of Soviet-Bangladesh relations in the 1970's were smooth and cordial. The Soviet Union was happy with India-Bangladesh treaty based on the model of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1972. On the domestic front, Moscow seemed to be pleased when Sheikh Mujib aligned with pro-Moscow faction of NAP and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) on September 3, 1973.

The Soviet influence and role in the new balance of power in the post-1971 Sub-continent were definitely brighter than in the preceding two decades. The situation, however, began to change towards the end of the decade following changes of Government in Bangladesh and India; the changing pattern of alignment and re-alignment had already begun which took dramatic turns when, in December 1979, the Soviet Union made military intervention in Afghanistan.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan led the United States to a major involvement in the Sub-continent through Pakistan which will be discussed in our review of the role of the USA in the area. The immediate consequence of the US involvement through Pakistan has been strengthening of the Indo-Soviet military cooperation and increase of tensions in Soviet-Pakistan relations.

The Indo-Soviet Friendship Continues in the 1980s

Indo-Soviet mutuality of interest is based on some common views on the strategic situation in South Asia. The prospect of Pakistan developing into a credible military power through a comprehensive security arrangement with the United States is apparently seen in Moscow as akin to the emergence of another Turkey on the Soviet Union's southern borders. Obviously, New Delhi also does not relish such a possibility. So when the United States began to arm Pakistan on a large scale, both Moscow and New Delhi had a common perception of the strategic situation in

the region. India, strategically located between countries which are not politically close to Moscow, hold a crucial status for the Soviets as a sympathetic ear on the Sub-continent.¹⁷ Moscow reinforced its special relationship with New Delhi at a time when India felt threatened by Pakistan's acquisition of modern weapons including F-16 fighters from the United States. So, another phase of the Indo-Soviet friendship in the context of the US major involvement in the area was quite natural.

Late Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev made a significant visit to India in December 1980. India's needs for Soviet weapons obviously came up for discussion during Brezhnev's visit. Moscow offered highly advanced weapons, including some still in testing stage at almost giveaway prices (the weapon types were not made public during the visit). Moscow also agreed to accept payment in Indian rupees.

The Indo-Soviet security ties were further discussed during the subsequent visit to India by Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, the then Soviet Defence Minister in March 1982. The C-in-C of the Soviet Air

Indo-Soviet mutuality of interest is based on some common views on the strategic situation in South Asia. The prospect of Pakistan developing into a credible military power through a comprehensive security arrangement with the United States is apparently seen in Moscow as akin to the emergence of another Turkey on the Soviet Union's southern borders. Obviously, New Delhi also does not relish such a possibility.

Force and C-in-C of the Soviet Navy also came to India with Ustinov. The Soviet delegation was reported to have assured India that the Soviet Union could be relied upon to meet all of India's

17. *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 December, 1980 and 2 January, 1981.

military procurement needs for the foreseeable future. The MIG-27 aircraft and T-82 tank figured in discussions. Mrs. Indira Gandhi also paid an official visit to the Soviet Union in September 1982 in less than two months of her visit to the United States. Mrs. Gandhi was eager to assure the Soviet leadership that India's relations with the Soviet Union would remain close. She told Brezhnev, "You have stood by us in our moments of difficulties. I am sure that in your own problems you have found understanding from India even when our political philosophies and systems differ and our views may vary."¹⁸ Mrs. Gandhi, tacitly and tactfully, calmed any fears Soviet leaders may have had about India's improved ties with the US "we want to ensure that our friendship retains its strength and relevance in the years to come. We must give no sustenance to those who try to weaken it."¹⁹ The Soviet Union, on its part, has been equally sincere in its high regard for the Indo-Soviet friendship.

During another trip to India by Marshal Ustinov on March 5, 1984 it was announced that the Soviet Union would supply India with advanced aircraft, more powerful weapons for the Army and the latest electronic sensing equipment for the Navy. It was also understood that Marshal Ustinov had offered India help with production of some of the equipment supplied under the agreement. Ustinov gave pledge to meet, with a greater sense of urgency, India's requests for more powerful and sophisticated Soviet weapons. India saw in the Soviet pledge an implied commitment of unrestricted access to the next generation of Soviet armament, including those on Moscow's drawing boards.²⁰ Indo-Soviet military ties in the 1980s are satisfactory response from India to the newly agreed Pakistan-USA security arrangement.

India's new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi visited the Soviet Union from May 21-26, 1985, his first official foreign visit as Prime

18. *Ibid.*, 1 October, 1982.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 22 March, 1984.

Minister. He had lengthy and friendly discussion with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The traditional bonds of friendship between the two countries were reaffirmed including their security ties. With reference to the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, Rajiv Gandhi said that "it has played a very major role in Indo-Soviet relations" and added that "economic cultural and other relations are much stronger and we see the future brighter".²¹

Soviet Attitude towards Pakistan in the 1980s

The Soviet Union has attempted to curb Pakistan's support for the Afghan resistance by means of a two-track policy. On the one hand, the Soviet have courted Pakistan with inducements such as the massive Karachi steel complex which was recently dedicated amidst profession of Soviet-Pakistani friendship. On the other hand, the Soviet and their Afghan allies have kept up a steady pattern of cross border reconnaissance overflights and sporadic, limited attacks on refugee camps and villages on the Pakistani side of the border. While many of these incidents could be linked to fighting in nearby parts of Afghanistan other are almost certainly deliberate signals to Pakistan.²²

Soviet threats appeared to reach a higher pitch during Pakistan President Zia's attendance at Chernenko's funeral in March 1985 when the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev warned Zia in extremely blunt terms about Pakistan's role in the Afghanistan situation. The Soviets also took a very hard line following press reports that 12 Soviet soldiers and 11 Afghan soldiers were killed in a prison camp near Peshawar where they were being held. The Soviet News Agency *Tass* labelled the incident as a "heinous crime" and warned that Pakistan should draw proper conclusions about the consequences of such crimes. *Tass* added that Pakistan's role

21. *Keesling's Contemporary Archives*, September, 1985, p. 33857.

22. Richard P. Cronin, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18

and policies did not serve "the genuine national interests of Pakistan specially in the long run"²³ As long as the situation in Afghanistan is not peacefully resolved and as long as Pakistan continues its present policy, Pakistan-Soviet relations are bound to be highly tense.

Bangladesh-Soviet Union Relations in the 1980s

Soviet-Bangladesh relations are at much lower profile than Moscow's relations with either India or Pakistan. Similarly, Bangladesh's ties with the United States and China are much more wider and intimate than her relations with the Soviet Union. The relationship is correct but neither intimate nor wide. The Soviet-Bangladesh relations suffered a setback in 1983 when President Ershad expelled fourteen Soviet diplomats on the ground that they had allegedly tried to overthrow his regime in Bangladesh. But the unhappy incident was resolved in no time. Bangladesh and the Soviet Union signed a one-year barter trade protocol in Dhaka on April 28, 1985. A team of Soviet Foreign Ministry officials arrived in Dhaka for a five-day visit on August 20, 1985 to discuss ways of strengthening bilateral relations. Since Sheikh Mujib's visit to the Soviet Union in 1972, no Bangladeshi President or Prime Minister visited the Soviet Union. Nor any top-ranking Soviet leader came to Bangladesh. Bangladesh, however, maintains judiciously balanced and largely favourable diplomatic relations with Moscow.

The United States and the post-1971 Sub-continent

The U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Rogers, called the "tragic events on the Indian Sub-continent one of the major disappointments for the United States' foreign policy in 1971."²⁴ The US policy and role during the liberation movement for Bangladesh was a source

23. *Ibid.*, p. 19

24. *International Herald Tribune*, 24 December, 1971

of great dismay to the suffering humanity in Bangladesh and was greatly resented in India. It was also criticized by the liberals in the United States. President Nixon's "tilt towards Pakistan" policy during the Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh made the Indo-USA relations worst for some time. It is, however, not entirely correct that the United States was opposed to the national aspirations of seventy-five million Bangladeshis. The US policy during the crisis was interlinked with the strategic global triangular politics among the USA, the USSR, and the PRC. The United States was not opposed to the Bangladeshi national movement itself, but it could not approve the Soviet and Indian roles during the crisis. As President Nixon told subsequently, "We have never been hostile to Bengali aspirations. We have no intention of ignoring these 70 million people."²⁵

In South Asia, the United States was genuinely interested in the maintenance of the balance of power between India and Pakistan which, she considered, was the safest guarantee for regional peace and security in the Sub-continent. It was also concerned about the power balance among the three major powers—China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The events of 1971 had altered the regional balance. There could no longer be parity between India and a smaller Pakistan. A new balance of power conducive to regional stability and the global balance of power had to be formulated. The new US policy toward South Asia was geared to these objectives. The United States was ready to adjust to the new arrangement brought about by the events of 1971.

The United States has always sought India's friendship. Even at those times when the United States seemed to favour Pakistan as in 1954 or in 1971, it did not overlook the Indians. President Nixon also tried to patch up relations with Mrs. Gandhi when she visited the United States before the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. In

25. President Nixon's Report to the United States Congress, 9, February 1972.

the post-1971 era, some American scholars and writers like John P. Lewis suggested that the United States should recognize "Indian leadership" in the post 1971 era, but the US Government seemed to accept no such notion of Indian "hegemony" or "leadership" which would not be acceptable to smaller nations of the Sub-continent. The US Government, on the contrary, accepted the realities in the Sub-continent.

In his 1973 Foreign Policy Report, President Nixon said that United States respected India "as a major country; we are prepared to treat India in accordance with its new stature and responsibilities, on the basis of reciprocity". On Pakistan, Nixon reaffirmed "our concern for the well-being and security of the people of Pakistan". Turning to Bangladesh, the American President expressed "interest in Bangladesh's genuine non-alignment".

In the political and diplomatic spheres, South Asia in the 1970s constituted a "low priority" area for the United States as contrasted to the Soviet Union and China. But it would be wrong to assume that the United States would write off the sub-continent for domination by any other major power. The generous American economic aid was needed for India's development projects while in Bangladesh the US aid was vital for the survival of the new nation. Pakistan got the assurance that the United States would regard any new threat to Pakistan's integrity as disruptive to the progress toward peace and stability in South Asia; the US Government announced on March 14, 1973, resumption of some military shipments to Pakistan amid Indian protest. But the US-Pakistan relations in the early 1970s were, at best, normal but not intimate or special as in 1954-60 or in 1969-71.

It took time to mend the "fracture" in the Indo-USA relationship caused in 1971. It was not until the Carter Administration came to power in late 1970s that the Indo-USA relationship was normalized. But during Carter Administration, the US-Pakistan relationship reached lowest point when President Carter stopped all

military and economic aid to Pakistan on the ground of Pakistan's alleged nuclear activities.

The process of rapprochement between Bangladesh and the United States was rather quick. The most important factor in the growth of relationship between Bangladesh and USA was the realization that U.S. economic aid was vitally needed for the reconstruction of Bangladesh's economy. In May 1972, less than two months after US recognition, a bilateral agreement was signed under which USA made available \$ 90 million. By the end of 1973, the United States had given \$ 347 million, amounting to over 27 per cent of Bangladesh's total external aid and the largest single contributor. In 1974, Sheikh Mujib had a cordial meeting with President Ford. Once the diplomatic relationship was established, the US-Bangladesh relations have always been cordial and free from strains and stresses. But the relationship has not been anything special or of any strategic significance.

Major US Involvement In South Asia (1981-87)

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 had profound impacts on the balance of power in South Asia. The United States, which had followed a low profile policy toward the region since 1971, overnight changed its policy and began to plan a major involvement in the area through its former ally, Pakistan. President Carter felt that the Soviets had threatened US vital interests by sending 80,000 Soviet troops into Afghanistan. Carter viewed Afghanistan as a watershed in the East-West relations. The Afghan situation, according to the Carter Administration, had elevated the status of Gulf region to that of Western Europe, Japan, and South Korea,—“areas where Washington is prepared to risk a conflict to contain Soviet influence”.²⁶ This being the case, one of the few immediate

26. For details, see Shirin Tahir-Kheli, *The United States and Pakistan: The Evolution of an Influence Relationship*, (New York: Praeger 1982) Chapter 4.

moves open to Washington was to revive its military relationship with Pakistan. The Soviet military action in Afghanistan in December 1979 heightened long-standing American concerns about Moscow's intentions toward South Asia and the Persian Gulf. It thrust Pakistan into the role of "frontline state". Pakistan's status as an emerging leader of the Non-aligned Movement and Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference also made it an obvious partner in the American effort to rally Third World opinion against the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

It was only in April 1979 that the Carter Administration had stopped all US aid, economic and military, on the ground that Pakistan was allegedly building a nuclear plant capable of producing material suitable for nuclear weapons. It was a delicate task for President Carter to propose military aid for Pakistan. But there was hardly any alternative option for Carter. Carter's National Security Adviser, Dr. Brzezinski dashed to Islamabad with the US offer of military aid. Pakistan, much to Washington's surprise, gave cool reception to US overtures. It was reticent at first and thereafter reluctant to get involved with the aid offer of \$ 400 million, of which only 200 million was for military aid. When Pakistani President Zia described the offer as "peanuts", the US response was one of "shocked incomprehension".²⁷

The whole situation was, however, changed with the change of Administration in the United States. The Republicans under President Reagan came to power. Pakistanis have always felt that they get a fairer deal from the Republicans than from the Democrats.

After President Reagan's Administration took office in January 1981, negotiations began on US economic and military aid to Pakistan. Foreign Adviser Agha Shahi visited Washington in

27. *Ibid.*, p. 100

April 1981 and had lengthy discussion with the US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig. The US Under Secretary of State, James Buckley visited Pakistan in June 1981. Finally, the US—Pakistan negotiations culminated in a September 1981 agreement on a six-year (1981-87), \$3.2 billion programme of US economic and military assistance to Pakistan. The most significant aspect of the new US military aid to Pakistan was the offer of selling 40 F-16 fighters. This would have great impact to the balance of power in the Sub-continent between India and Pakistan. The rationale for the 1981 aid package was remarkably similar to that articulated in 1954. James Buckley stated that the thrust of Reagan Administration's policy "is to recognize that arms transfer, properly considered and employed, represent an indispensable instrument of American policy that both complements and supplements the role of our own forces",²⁸ Pakistan expressed satisfaction with the aid offer. Agha Shahi told "the Carter Administration's offer had not been commensurate to what we considered to the magnitude of the threat". Pakistan believed in the Reagan Administration's determination to give strong support to Pakistan's independence".²⁹ Both sides insisted that the new military aid programme had no *quid pro quo*. It was not a formal treaty; Pakistan was not required to give any military base or any other facilities. Pakistan could continue as a Non-aligned and as an Islamic-bloc country. During the past five and half years, the US Pakistan security relationship has deepened steadily. US aid averaging more than \$ 600 million per year has materially improved the fighting capability of Pakistan's defence forces, contributed to the country's economic growth and helped bridge a major hard currency deficit. The United States has also played a significant role in promoting badly

28. *Ibid*, p. 104

29. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, September 1981, p. 31074

needed credits from the International Monetary Fund and development loans from the World Bank.³⁰

On its part, Pakistan has maintained a strong stance against the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan despite considerable verbal pressure from the Soviet Union and frequent shelling and air attacks across the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. Backed by the United States, China, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, "Pakistan has played a key role in providing a heaven for the the Afghan refugees and a channel for aid to the Afghan resistance."³¹

The six-year old US aid programme for Pakistan will expire in 1987. The next six-year aid package has already been worked out between the two Governments. The post-1987 package would comprise \$ 2.28 billion in economic and \$ 1.74 billion in military aid. The annual level of economic assistance will be \$ 380 million while military aid comprised exclusively of foreign military sales at an annual level of \$ 290 million, is provided on credit at 5 per cent interest with seven years for repayment and five years grace.

The aid is expected to be utilized for continuing modernisation of Pakistan's armed forces which began with the previous assistance programme. On the top of Pakistan's post-1987 military shopping list would be an airborne radar and surveillance system as well as ground to air missiles and up-to-date armour. Islamabad has shown interest in an airborne warning and control system to improve advance warning capability of its air force. Updating armour technology is also a priority.

India was obviously upset by this new security arrangement between its traditional rival, Pakistan and the United States. The then Indian External Affairs Minister, Narasimha Rao stated that the Indian Government has informed the United States of its

30. Richard P. Cronin, *op. cit.*, pp 2-4

31. *Ibid*, p. 4

"grave concern" at American moves to supply Pakistan with large quantities of arms including 40 F-16 fighters. Such supplies, according to Rao, had resulted in a setback to the process of normalisation within the Sub-continent.³² The US Government indicated that Washington was cognizant of Indian sensitivities. Washington believed that its military assistance to Pakistan was not directed at India. The United States maintained the view that the proposed aid programme would not upset the balance of power in the Sub-continent. Buckley told the US Congress in 1981, "The programme is so modest that it is bound to disappoint those commentators who expressed fears that our proposed sale to Pakistan will spark an arms race in the Sub-continent. Those fears simply do not stand up to analysis...India will emerge six years from now with even greater edge over the Pakistanis, notwithstanding the addition of 40 F-16s to the latter's inventory",³³ India was, however, not satisfied with the U.S. analysis of the situation. The new security arrangement between the USA and Pakistan was bound to make India look to Moscow for larger and new supplies of Russian arms for India. The latest trends in the Indo-Soviet relations in the context of the US major involvement in the Sub-continent deserve great attention in any study of involvement by major powers in the Sub-continent.

While the United States gave substantial military aid to Pakistan in the 1980s, Washington did not neglect its ties with New Delhi. The Reagan Administration sought to restore the warmth to the Indo-US relations which had been missing since 1971. The opportunities came when Mrs. Indira Gandhi paid an official visit to the United States in July-August 1982. A long-standing disagreement between India and the United States involving the supply of nuclear fuel to India was resolved during Mrs. Gandhi's visit. A number of agreements to improve scientific, economic and

32. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, September, 1981, p. 31074.

33. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 September, 1981, pp 19-20.

cultural cooperation between the two countries were also signed during her visit. Since Mrs. Gandhi's 1982 visit to the United States, there has been a gradual improvement in the Indo-USA relations with the focus on economic and technical cooperation.

The security arrangement between the U.S.A and Pakistan was bound to make India look to Moscow for larger and new supplies of Russian arms for India. The latest trends in the Indo-Soviet relations in the context of the US major involvement in the Sub-continent deserve great attention in any study of involvement by major powers in the Sub-continent.

This process accelerated when the Reagan Administration conducted a policy review after Vice-President George Bush had gone to India in May 1984. That policy review resulted in a White House decision to improve US technical ties with India. An agreement was signed on May 17, 1985 for the export of high technology from USA to India.

Then India's new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi went to the United States in June 1985 when the arrangement for technical cooperation was further developed. In an address to a joint session of both Houses of Congress, Mr. Gandhi stated that there "is immense scope for the application of modern technology to solve many of our crucial problems",³⁴ and he acknowledged the US potential role in this matter of technological cooperation.

It is difficult to predict the extent to which the US desire to strengthen technological ties with India will mesh and offset the negative elements in the Indo-US relationship. There is an unprecedented new tenor in US-Indian relations. But unless the

34. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, September 1985 p. 33857.

US reduces its support for Pakistan, the contours of US-Indian relations are likely to remain circumscribed.³⁵

USA and Bangladesh

The United States' role in economic development of Bangladesh continued to grow in the 1980s. The relationship between the two countries showed steady signs of friendly cooperation and understanding. President Ziaur Rahman and President H.M. Ershad visited the United States in the decade and were warmly received by the American President Carter and President Reagan respectively. There were assurances of the US continued help and assistance for development projects in Bangladesh. Unlike US relations with India or Pakistan, the US-Bangladesh relationship has no complicating factor. The only issue that arose was the question of US restrictions on the export of Bangladesh ready-made garments in 1985, but thanks to the goodwill on both the sides, the matter was resolved at least temporarily to the satisfaction of both sides. An investment treaty has been signed between the two countries on March 2, 1986 which now awaits the approval of the US Senate. The treaty is expected to encourage and protect American investment in Bangladesh for its commitment to adopt economic policies to promote growth in Bangladesh.³⁶

China and the New Order in South Asia

China, like the United States, suffered a setback in South Asia in 1971. The year 1971 was a successful year for China's diplomacy elsewhere. The new Sino-American relationship had enhanced China's prestige and importance; many countries were willing to open diplomatic relations with Peking. China also entered into the United Nations, just on the eve of the war on Bangladesh. By contrast, South Asia was the sore point in

35. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 June, 1985.

36. *Bangladesh Observer*, 2 June, 1986

China's diplomacy in 1971. The new order that emerged on the South Asian Sub-continent after the Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh was a disappointing one for China.³⁷ China wanted sincerely, to prevent the disintegration of its South Asian ally, Pakistan. China was worried over the diplomatic success of the Soviet Union and the military success of India over Pakistan.

But China, like the United States, was not opposed to national aspirations of Bangladeshis. When the civil war broke out in Pakistan in March 1971, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai tried to make a political settlement of the crisis so that outside forces and influences could not prevail. But China's effort for a political settlement was not successful. The consequent Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh was a source of great disappointment for China; she could neither support Pakistan fully nor could she oppose a popular uprising against a military regime. China was caught in a great dilemma.

The new order in South Asia was unfavourable for China's diplomacy in Asia. Her two unfriendly neighbours, the Soviet Union and India were gainers in the 1971 crisis as they had supported the successful liberation of Bangladesh, but it would be a mistake to think that China would relinquish her hold in an area so close to her as South Asia. The Sino-Indian diplomatic relationship which had been suspended since the border war between the two countries in 1962 was expected to resumed in 1970-71, but the 1971, Indo-Pakistan war had again worsened the relations between the two great Asian countries. The diplomatic relations between China and India were resumed in April 1975.

Sino-Pakistan friendship survived the crisis of 1971. China continued to support "new" Pakistan economically, diplomatically

37. For details, see G. W. Choudhury, *China in World Affairs: The Foreign Policy of the P R C. Since 1970*, Chapter 9. (Boulder, Colorado, 1982).

and militarily. Bhutto paid a visit to China in 1972 and both countries reaffirmed their special and friendly relations. China reiterated "firm support" to the Pakistan Government and people in their just-struggle to preserve their state sovereignty and territorial integrity against outside aggression. China also expressed its support for Pakistan in the Nixon-Chou Shanghai Communique of February 27, 1972. On his part, Bhutto after his visit to Moscow in March 1972 declared. Pakistan would never be a party to any conspiracy against China. The military Cooperation between the two countries was dramatized in 1973 by exchange of visits by Army Chief of Staff of Pakistan and of China. By 1973 China's military aid to Pakistan, according to some sources, equated the sum of US arms provided to Pakistan during the period 1954-1965. China's close and friendly relationship with Pakistan is an example of the consistency and reliability of China's diplomacy. It also illustrated China's policy of peaceful coexistence with countries that have differing social and political systems.

As already pointed out, the frozen Sino-Indian relationship received further setbacks in 1971 as a result of the Indo-Pakistan war on Bangladesh. But because of the great changes in Asian

A relaxation of tensions between China and India is highly desirable for peace and stability in South Asia. The sooner the two Asian giants normalize their relations the better for peace and progress in the region.

international order (relations) in the 1970s, both China and India seemed to be moving toward a rapprochement. During the short tenure of the non-Congress Government in India under Morarji Desai (1977-79) there were hopes for an improvement in the Sino-Indian relationship. India's then Foreign Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee paid a visit to Peking but the timing of the visit was

unfortunate; during Vajpayee's stay in China, the Sino-Vietnam armed conflict broke out and Vajpayee cut short his stay in China. There was again a new setback in the process of normalisation of relations between the largest Asian countries. The Sino-Indian relationship, like many other international relations, is linked with outside factors and influences. India attaches greater importance to her special relations with Moscow which does not favour a revival of the Sino-Indian closer ties of the pre-1960s. Similarly the Sino-Pakistan closer ties is a complicating factor in the Sino-Indian relations because India strongly dislikes China's continued flow of arms to Pakistan. A relaxation of tensions between China and India is highly desirable for peace and stability in South Asia. The sooner the two Asian giants normalize their relations, the better for peace and progress in the region.

China's role in the liberation war of Bangladesh was unfortunate and it caused initial misunderstanding and lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries for a period (1972-75). But once the diplomatic relationship was established in 1975, the Sino-Bangladesh ties grew both in depth and warmth. China gladly contributed to Bangladesh's needs for external economic aid. China has also given military supplies to Bangladesh for the development of her defence. The leaders of the two countries have exchanged friendly visits. A number of agreements, cultural, commercial and economic, have already been signed between the two countries. A steady and closer relationship was already established before the end of the decade, the 1970s.

China and the Subcontinent in the 1980s

"Entente cordial" continues : The Sino-Pakistan relationship in 1980s :

The Sino-Pakistan special relationship has entered into the third decade. The factors which brought the two countries together are still valid. Pakistan attaches great importance to China's

consistent diplomatic and security support. When Pakistan felt threatened by the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, China assured Pakistan of its full support and assistance if Pakistan would become victim of the Afghan crisis. The then Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua came to Pakistan in January 1980 to assure Pakistan of Chinese support in case of any aggression from any quarter. Huang Hua had significant talks with Pakistan President Zia and other top Pakistani leaders about the situation in South Asia in the context of the Soviet military actions in Afghanistan.

President Zia also went to China in May 1980 for his most important discussions with any foreign country since the Afghanistan crisis. Zia met China's top leaders including senior statesman Deng, Premier Hua and other civil and military officials. There were significant talks regarding Pakistan's security and defence requirements. After his China visit, President Zia told the press that the Sino-Pakistan "ties are so deep and solid that they do not have to be qualified or need any further elaboration". He added "China is the only country in Pakistan's experience which has stuck to its principles and whose policies are above any selfish interests."³⁸

During a recent visit of Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo to China, leaders of both countries reiterated their special relationship describing each other as "a model neighbour" and vowed to continue it for 1000 years.³⁹ Both countries are genuinely grateful to each other for debts owed and realize that there has been a mutually beneficial relationship which should be continued.

Economic relations and transfer of technology are two main areas of the present-day Sino-Pakistan cooperation. With the

38. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16, May 1980

39. *Ibid*, 12, December 1984.

renewal of the US arms supplies, Pakistan is no longer so desperately dependent on the Chinese military aid. Pakistan does not, however, want to close its Chinese source because it is most reliable and cheaper. During the past two decades China supplied Pakistan with small arms, armoured vehicles and tanks as well as Shenyang F5 and F6 fighter aircraft. China also provided economic and technological assistance for setting up Pakistan's heavy mechanical complex, heavy foundry and forge and the heavy equipment overhaul factory at Taxila, all of which contribute to the local defence industry. Chinese cooperation is acknowledged in the manufacture of anti-aircraft rockets as well as the facility for maintenance and refitting of fighter aircraft.

Both China and Pakistan attach great importance to the strategic Karakoram Highway built as a joint venture, linking Xinjiang province with Pakistani controlled sections of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The all-weather road following the ancient Silk Route can be used for military traffic and as such it has strategic significance to both the countries.

While Pakistan has received valuable economic, technical and military aid from China, Peking also received important diplomatic and political support from Islamabad at various international forums and gatherings, particularly at a time when China was out of the United Nations and had no diplomatic contacts with many countries. The special Sino-Pakistan relationship "is a steady and reliable friendship, based on shared concerns and sustained by history as well as prospect of being there in the hour of need".⁴⁰

40. *Ibid.*

The Sino-Indian Relationship : The Process of Normalisation of Relations Continues in the 1980s

Relations between India and China improved during the first part of the 1980s. After a year-long deadlock in the Sino-Indian diplomacy, China on June 21, 1980 took a fresh initiative and offered to settle the longstanding border dispute on the basis of the present line of actual control. The Chinese package deal was announced by China's top leader Deng Xiaoping in an interview with *Vikrant*, an Indian defence Journal. Deng's proposals were not very different from what Zhou Enlai proposed to Nehru in 1962 it suggested that the Chinese accept India's claim in the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border in return for India's acceptance of China's *de facto* possession of Aksai Chin in the western sector. India was also reportedly sounded out on these lines in 1979 during the visit of the then Indian External Affairs Minister, Vajpayee. But the significance of Deng's offer was that it was made public for the first time since the 1962 border conflict (war). Moreover, Deng made a substantive departure from the Chinese stand on Kashmir by declaring it to be "a bilateral problem" between India and Pakistan. Untill then, China backed Pakistani demand for "self-determination" in Kashmir.

Deng's offer was the revival of the process of normalization between the two countries. China also announced in 1980 that it would allow border trader between India and Tibet which stopped in 1962. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua paid a goodwill visit to India in June 1981 when it was agreed that the two countries should hold discussions on their long-standing border dispute. In pursuance of these developments, six rounds of talks were held between the two countries between 1982 and 1986, alternatively in Peking and New Delhi. In a report to the Sixth National People's Congress, the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang stated that China was eager to improve relations with India even if the boundary dispute was not settled immediately. He added that the

dispute could "without doubts be settled through consultations in the spirit of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation"⁴¹

No breakthrough has yet been achieved in the Sino-Indian border negotiations. But the relations between the two countries are now less tense. A trade agreement between India and China was signed on August 15, 1984 which included provisions to confer on each other "most-favoured-nation" status. The volume of trade is expected to rise from the 1983-84 figure of \$ 60,000,000 to \$ 1000 million in the near future. There have been more exchange of visits, both official and non-official, between the two countries. The Sino-Indian relationship, as already pointed out, is interlinked with India's special relationship with the Soviet Union as well as with China's special links with Pakistan. Unless there is real improvement in the Sino-Soviet and the Indo-Pakistan relations, prospects for a real rapprochement between China and India are not very bright.

China and Bangladesh in the 1980s

There has been steady growth of the Sino-Bangladesh relationship in the 1980s without complicating the South Asian politics. The two countries have shown respect and understanding of each other. There is also agreement between the two countries on most of the contemporary international issues. The Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang paid a friendly visit to Bangladesh in June 1981. Zhao assured Bangladesh of China's continuing economic and military cooperation. President Ershad, since his coming to power in 1982, made two goodwill visits to China — the second one in July 1985. The Chinese President Li Xiannian made a return goodwill visit to Bangladesh in February 1986. These friendly visits by the top leaders of the two countries have deepened the already good neighbourly relation between Dhaka and Beijing.

41. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, September, 1985, p. 33857

A Sino-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission has been set up in 1984 and its first meeting took place in September 1984, envisioning expanded trade and economic ties between the two countries. An agreement on economic and technical co-operation was signed on July 6, 1985 under which China agreed to supply funds for the construction of a bridge "Friendship Bridge" across the river Buriganga in Dhaka.

China is happy to have a second friendly country in the Sub-continent and Bangladesh is equally delighted to have closer ties with the largest Asian country, the PRC

Conclusion

Our survey of the roles of the three major powers, the USA, the USSR and the PRC in the South Asian Sub-continent brings out the fact that the major powers have been indirectly involved in the regional conflicts and tensions. They have helped arms race between India and Pakistan which fought three regional wars since 1947. The regional powers have also sought to exploit the big powers' rivalry such as the Sino-Soviet conflict and the strategic and global competition between USA and USSR. As we have stated, there have been interrelation between global policies of the major powers and regional tensions and conflicts in the area. Let us hope that with the formation of SAARC, regional tensions and conflicts will be reduced and that a new era of regional cooperation and peace prevail so that the major powers may continue to provide economic and technical aid rather than military supplies. The major powers have contributed in economic and technical spheres and the larger is their roles in these spheres, the better for the people of the Sub-continent.