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DISARMAMENT IN SOUTH ASIA : ISSUES AND IMPEDIMENTS

I. Introduction

People largely agree today that the period of cold war is over. Happy notes on the evolving pattern of international relations have marked the beginning of the nineties. Confrontation between the two superpowers and their respective blocs that dominated the post-World War II era has given way to an unprecedented degree of cooperation. With Gorbachev in Kremlin and fall of East European communist regimes one after another, the East-West military threat perception that defined the framework of the hierarchical global order of the past four-plus decades has given way to unprecedented degree of international understanding. The 'new order' is presumed to be one in which military options are to make room for political accommodation and dialogue, a change under which negotiations and cooperation are to prevail over conflict and tension. Realistic indications of progress towards disarmament including practical measures for reduction of both conventional and nuclear weapons are around. And as the UN Secretary General says in his Report on the work of the Organization, "measures of disarmament, a long-sought goal of the international community, have finally moved into the realm of the possible."¹

As nations tend to leapfrog each other in getting out of the long nightmare of cold war and self-destructive arms spending, question is

1. Javier Perez De Cuellar, *Report of the Secretary General on the Work of the Organization*, UN 1990, p. 21.

raised in this paper as to whether the dramatic changes of recent months will, in a trickle down process, bring about positive effects on the South Asian political scenario. Can there be any prospect of progress towards reduction of arms spending in this region which has for long been bedeviled by mutual mistrust, endemic tensions and occasional hostilities? What is the comparative status of this region in terms of global arms race? What are issues that contribute to continued arms spending in this region despite its massive poverty, widespread illiteracy and acute underdevelopment? What are the impediments in the process of disarmament in South Asia? What, above all, are the options before the region in this context, particularly in the backdrop of the evolving world order? These are some of the questions raised in this paper.

The main argument here is that in the context of South Asia, disarmament continues to be rather an impossible task to achieve. The region is spending much more than it can afford on arms and defense. Issues of essentially regional origin inherent in the respective process of nation-building, particularly the distorted process of politico-economic development on the one hand, and peculiarities in the regional configuration on the other, account for the regional arms race. Diverging security conception leading to mutual threat perception of the states also contribute. Substantial disarmament in the region is likely to remain a far cry, while concrete measures for confidence-building along with sustained progress in nation-building efforts may be helpful. In the context of global trend towards multi-lateralism the validity of regional cooperation in South Asia as a catalyst needs to be specifically underscored. The rest of the paper is devoted to the development of this theme.

II. Arms Race in South Asia : An Under-stressed Problem

Debate and deliberations on disarmament often tend to understress the fact that arms spending or arms race is never an exclusive horizon of the developed states. Developing states of the so-called Third

World have in recent years witnessed increased militarization. Alongside increasing pauperization of the vast majority of the peoples military spending in these countries have been incessantly growing at geometric scale. The Third World indeed accounts for nearly a quarter of the global military spending.² More importantly, the rate of growth of arms expenditures in these countries in recent years has been much higher than that of their developed counterparts.³ Some of the developing countries have also become exporters of arms, and their share in world arms market, which had risen from 2 percent in 1973 to 11 percent in 1983 has been growing further.⁴

Economic and social weight of military expenditures are easy to illustrate, and a lot of studies are available to show their striking dimensions, particularly implications for the developing countries like those in South Asia. Suffice it to mention here that the annual Third World military spending will be nearly a quarter of the annual external outstanding debt of the developing countries and about four times that of South Asian countries. According to the well-referred Brandt Commission Report self-sufficiency for the Third World could have been achieved by the current year if only 0.5 percent of the global arms spending was saved. The countries of South Asia, mainly India and Pakistan, have a fleet of over 1200 combat aircrafts, each of which is worth seventy-five 100-bed hospitals.

Some South Asian scholars reject the idea that arms race in South Asia is of any substantial concern.⁵ The main reason for such a view is that with nearly one-fifth of the world's population,

2. *Disarmament and Development : Some Practical Suggestions to Bypass the Present Deadlock*, UNIDIR, Report no. 88/13, New York, p. 12.
3. See for details, Iftekhazzaman, "The Chimera of Disarmament in South Asia", *South Asia Journal*, (New Delhi, vol. 2, no. 4), p. 396.
4. *Disarmament and Development*, *op. cit.*
5. See for example, K. Subrahmanyam, "Regional Stability and Security in South Asia", *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi, May 1984), p. 101.

South Asia accounts for only about one percent of the global arms spending. Since South Asia lies between regions that are perennially volatile and militarized, it is also presumed that the countries of the region have reasons to justify their expenditure on defense.

The problem arises when one attempts an understanding of the objective realities abiding in the region. South Asia is the home of world's largest concentration of poverty; it produces little more than one percent of global GDP; the region is faced with a severe threat of demographic explosion; it is chronically vulnerable to various forms of natural disasters and environmental degradation; and millions here are deprived of proper shelter, clothing, education, medicine and nutrition.

Taking South Asia's share in global population as an argument for military spending conceals other important factors like share in global poverty, underdevelopment and human suffering. According to the *World Development Report 1990*, of the World Bank, nearly half of the world's poor live in this region. All the South Asian countries are low income countries with a per capita income range of US\$ 170 to 400 only.⁶ With the exception of Sri Lanka, life expectancy at birth stands at around fifty years. The per capita calorie supply for an average South Asian citizen ranges between 1927 and 2400. Debt service ratio as percentage of GNP is upto 4.7 percent and as percentage of export earnings is upto 23.5 percent. In a region of widespread illiteracy, disease and homelessness, the share of central government expenditure on these and similar items stands much below that of defense. In 1986, the latest year for which data for international comparisons were available, Bangladesh spent 0.6 percent of its annual budget for housing and social welfare, Pakistan and India spent 1 and 2.1 percent respectively on health and 3.2 and 2.1 percent respectively on education. In contrast, Bangladesh's defense spending was 11.2 percent, India's

6. Data mentioned in this part, unless otherwise mentioned are from the appended table.

18.4, Nepal's 6.2, Pakistan's 33.9 and Sri Lanka's 8 percent. An average Bangladeshi paid US\$ 2.6 in 1988 for defense, an Indian paid 10.83, a Nepali 2.82, a Pakistani 23.84 and a Sri Lankan paid 17.34, which stood for 1.5, 3.18, 1.55, 6.81 and 4.1 percent of their respective per capita GNP.

In 1988 these five South Asian countries spent \$ 11,988.9 million on defense which was roughly 15 percent of their combined outstanding external public debt of \$ 78,196 million. More importantly, the rate of growth of South Asia's defense spending in recent years has been one of the highest in the world. South Asia's share in global arms spending rose from 0.9 percent in 1973 to 1.1 percent in 1983. In 1980-83, the latest period for which comparable data were available, South Asia's defense spending grew at a real rate of 9.5 percent, compared to 2.1 percent for all developing countries and 3.8 percent for the whole world.

South Asia has one of the world's largest concentration of standing armed forces with 2,103,100 men-in-arms in 1987, of which 1,269,000 were Indian and 680,600 were Pakistanis who rank as the world's fourth and thirteenth largest in terms of standing armies. In terms of naval and air forces too, the region ranks at the forefront with India possessing world's sixth largest navy and eighth largest air force. The enormous strength of conventional forces and equipments apart, two of the most volatile nuclear-threshold powers are in South Asia. And according to reliable estimates India and Pakistan have already gained the capability to mobilize tens of nuclear warheads within a few weeks' notice.⁷

The exact estimate of South Asian defense machine is not possible. It is well-known, however, that it is currently the largest producer of armaments in the Third World. South Asia is also the second largest weapons importing region of the Third World. Globally, India is the third and Pakistan is the eighth largest weapon-

7. *The Shangbad*, (Dhaka, 18 October, 1988).

importing country.⁸ In terms of expenditure on military R&D, India is the seventh largest country in the world.⁹ All these show the extent of militarization and the rising trend thereof in South Asia. We now turn towards examination of the factors that are attributable to this disproportionate arms race in the region.

III. Factors Behind South Asian Arms Race

Extra-regional Inputs : Its very usual to link arms race at regional levels with the involvement of external powers, particularly superpowers. The subject of superpower involvement in case of South Asia has been elaborately researched.¹⁰ Suffice it to note here that as a part of their global competition, the two superpowers focused on South Asia since the early days of the cold war era. The Sino-Soviet conflict, like its corollary, Sino-Indian conflict also worked. No less important were the regional divisiveness and disarray which contributed to the superpowers' success in fitting the countries of the region in their respective global strategic frame.

External power interest and involvement in South Asia over the years have undergone notable changes, but the polarization has always been conspicuous. In the fifties, the main concern of the US was to draft South Asian states, particularly Pakistan, in a bid to contain communism in and around the region. This was primarily an anti-Soviet move and naturally provoked Soviet response which befriended India. In the early sixties, there was a 'collusion' between US and Soviet Union to support India

8. *SIPRI Yearbook 1987*, (Stockholm, 1988), pp. 218-9.

9. *Ibid.*

10. See for details, Bhabani Sengupta and Amit Gupta, "Changing Patterns of Conflicts in South Asia", in Bhabani Sengupta (ed.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, (New Delhi, 1986), pp. 247-69; Leo E. Rose and Satish Kumar, "South Asia", in Warner G. Feld and Gavin Boyd, (eds.) *Comparative Regional Systems*, (Pergamon, USA, 1910); S.D. Muni, "South Asia", in Mohammed Ayoob, (ed.) *Conflict and Intervention in the Third World*, (London, 1980); Shelton U. Kodikara, *Strategic Factors in Inter-state Relations in South Asia*, (New Delhi, 1984).

against China. In the late sixties, the Soviet Union attempted to draft both India and Pakistan into a collective security system directed against China. In the early seventies there was again a collusion, this time between the US and China, in favour of Pakistan.¹¹ In the eighties there was once again a US-Soviet collusion for balance in favour of India. In any case, during the period of cold war the broad polarization along Washington-Beijing-Islamabad versus Moscow-New Delhi axes has remained valid providing the patronage in the costly arms race.

More recently, in conformity with the apparent disinterest of the superpowers to get embroiled in regional conflicts in various parts of the Third World, there is clearly more incentive on the part of the regional powers to play increasingly active role, as manifested so prominently by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Thus various Third World regions are exposed to a free-for-all game which in the South Asian context is likely to favour the two largest, India and Pakistan. Combined with age-old confrontation, this, as will be elaborated below, is poised to lead to further intensification of rivalries between the two.

Extra-regional Implications of National Interests and Aspirations : Extra-regional implications of national interests and aspirations of the two main rivals have been perennial factors in regional arms race. India perceives itself as a power whose influence transcend the regional perimeters. The Indian ruling elite has always nourished a concept that India was destined to play a major role in global affairs—a role that was commensurate with its size, geopolitical location, historical experience and power potential.¹²

11. Shelton U. Kodikara, *op. cit.*

12. See for detailed discussion, S.D. Muni, *op. cit.*, K. Subrahmanyam, "India's Pre-eminence", *World Focus*, no 71-72, November-December 1985; and Ifteharuzzaman, "The India Doctrine : Relevance for Bangladesh", in M.G. Kabir and Shawkat Hassan, (eds.) *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy*, (BSIS, Dhaka, 1989).

Rightly or not, this vision of Indian global role is a source of threat for its neighbours. While the smaller ones could do little but be in discomfort, Pakistan has been attempting to strive for a parity. The two-nation theory as the ideological basis for the creation of Pakistan and India was viewed to imply that after independence, the two states would not only have juridical equality, but also equality in terms of power.¹³ Thus, the Indian urge for a global role and Pakistan's crave for parity contributed not merely to extra-regional powers' involvement in South Asia, but also fueled the continued arms race including procurement of all sorts of sophisticated weaponry by the two along with their nuclear aspirations.

Regional Dynamics of Conflicts : On a closer focus, against the sweeping global political changes, South Asia remains one of the very few regions of the world where people have yet to gain any reasonable grounds for positivism in the status of inter-state relations. To the extent that East-West confrontation has in the past exacerbated regional conflicts in South Asia, the recent global changes may be viewed to contribute to some refreshing trends in the overall political context. But, it would be simplistic to hastily presume that improvement of inter-state relations in South Asia has been greatly facilitated. South Asian regional problems and conflicts have their own dynamics and most, if not all, of these are created within the region, by its history, its geo-politics, its economics and ecology. The troubles of the region of South Asia, its endemic tensions, mutual mistrusts and occasional hostilities are essentially the products of the contradiction of India's security perception with that of the rest of the countries. India's neighbours perceive threats to their security coming from India which for its part considers its neighbours as an integral part of its own security.

To be sure, an unusually disparate pre-eminence rendered to India in the South Asian regional configuration by facts of geogra-

13. S.D. Muni, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

phy, demography, economics and ecology is something about which neither India nor its neighbours can do much but accept.¹⁴ The Indian pre-eminence in South Asia is hardly a problem for neighbours; problem arises when pre-eminence is used as the justification for predominance. The past few years saw intensified Indian quest for regional predominance. Indian military build-up in various phases in past four decades has essentially been a function of the perceived dictates of the need for regional supremacy. India of course partly justifies its arms build up by its perceived compulsions out of Pakistan's acquisition of advanced weapons and concern over growing security links between Pakistan and US CENTCOM forces.

With or without the bogey of a threat from Pakistan—which but for its nuclear card constitutes hardly any match—Indian military build-up in the Indian Ocean region has been monstrous.¹⁵ One notable dimension of the Indian quest for regional military predominance in recent times has been its two pronged approach to the superpowers. On the one hand, New Delhi's collaboration with the Soviet Union in the field of production of weapons was significantly strengthened, and on the other hand, India went for considerable degree of fresh openings with the West. Thus while India continued expanding its import of Western technology, Moscow's role as India's pre-eminent partner in defense build-up has been carefully preserved. The exercise has therefore, been essentially

14. The disparate power configuration is discussed in further detail in Iftekharruzzaman, *op. cit.*
15. Particularly notable in recent years were the increase in Indian naval forces which are now reportedly equipped with a nuclear submarine. In mid-1987 a second aircraft carrier was obtained from Britain and two diesel-electric submarines were under construction as were four Corvettes. An Indian built frigate was completed and two minesweepers, a guided-missile destroyer and two diesel-electric submarines were obtained. In April of 1988, Tu-142M Bear F Maritime reconnaissance and ASN aircrafts were acquired. The army received some of its Swedish howitzers while modernization of armoured vehicles progressed.

to chart ways of balancing both which India has been doing most successfully to attain the military superiority over its counterparts.

In any event, what is significant in our context is that Indian expansion of its military power, particularly naval strength in the Indian Ocean zone has significantly enough, coincided with the on-going process of superpower detente. The level of Indian military power and its projection causes concern to its neighbours and has destabilising implications for the region.

India as an Interventionist Regional Power : The Indian thrust for regional dominance is clearly drawn from New Delhi's defense and security perception which is essentially inherited from that of British India, a continental security strategy. Contrary to the realities of post-colonial period, this old conception of Indian defense and security strategy has been regarded in India as a pride heritage of the Indian colonial past.¹⁶ Nehruvian vision of India was a "closer union", a confederation of independent states with common defense and economic possibility.¹⁷ A unity of South Asian defense and strategic unity as perceived in India in one or other modification,¹⁸ has rendered the smaller states of the region virtually buffer status.

India's interest in territorial inviolability of her small neighbours in the region has come to be known as the Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine. The essential theme of the doctrine is that South Asia is to be regarded as an Indian backyard. The critical factor is a combination of the comprehensive power potential of the country with a great-power-psyche nourished by Indian political elites and politico-strategic thinkers. The reference point

16. See for example, K.M. Pannikar, *Problems of Indian Defence*, Bombay, 1960, p. 23.

17. Quoted in S.D. Muni, "South Asia", in Mohammad Ayoob (ed.), *Conflict and Intervention in South Asia*, (London) 1980, p. 48.

18. Pran Chopra, for example, builds his concept of 'SAARC Route to Security' on the same premise. See his "From Mistrust to Cooperation", in Pran Chopra, *et. al. Future of South Asia*, (Macmillan, Dhaka) 1986, pp. 13-17.

for India in relation to its international posture is clearly the type of role assumed by great powers. India under such perception is to be viewed as a dominant country in the region just as the US, Soviet Union and China in their respective areas.¹⁹

It is more than coincidental that the doctrine appeared in renewed prominence in Indian writings at the height of Indian involvement in the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. The doctrine, it is claimed, is a product of a series of conversations between the incumbent and opposition political forces so that it reflects an Indian national consensus.²⁰ Operationally the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987 accompanying the controversial Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) operations in Sri Lanka and the Maldives operation of November 1988 have been viewed to be real life test cases for the India Doctrine.²¹ Indeed, the doctrine provided the conceptual *raison d'être* for Indian military moves in Sri Lanka and Maldives. Thanks to its role in these two neighbouring states India has emerged as an interventionist regional power. New Delhi has confidently manifested that it would not have any hesitation in physically intervening in internal developments of a South Asian state if such intervention is regarded as within India's means and promoting Indian national interests.²²

Confrontation, not cooperation: Thus, independent of the global trend, the second half of the past decade—the concluding part of the Cold War period—has witnessed steep deterioration in inter-state relations in South Asia. Problems are enormous and well-

19. K. Subrahmanyam, *op. cit.*

20. Bhabani Sengupta, "The India Doctrine", *India Today*, 31 August 1983.

21. For details on the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the Maldives intervention see, Iftekharuzzaman and Humayun Kabir, "The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord: An Assessment", *Biiss Journal*, vol. 8, no. 4, and Iftekharuzzaman, "Maldives: Small, Beautiful and Vulnerable", *Dhaka Courier*, 11-17 November, 1988.

22. Bhabani Sengupta, "Maldives Confirms India's lead Role in South Asia", *Dhaka Courier*, 18-23 November 1988.

known, and the most complicated ones among these basically Indo-centric issues are perennial in nature.

Hopes on the possibilities of an Indo-Pakistan rapprochement proved to be short-lived long before the fall of the Bhutto Government in Pakistan. In keeping with past experiences, correlation between the degree of domestic political instability of the two with the level of mutual tension have worked once again, and in recent months their relations have sharply deteriorated. War on words have transformed into trading of fires at the borders. Both have now fragile domestic political situation and neither can afford to be too friendly to each other. Little substantive progress has been achieved between Bangladesh and India over major issues of dispute including water-sharing, maritime boundary and insurgency problem which define Dhaka's endemic vulnerability. Dispute on trade and transit between Kathmandu and New Delhi have been resolved, but as the problems are understood to have deeper roots there are reasons to suspect that the peace may be little more than cosmetic. Nearly three years of Indian military presence in Sri Lanka has ended, while the basic issues relating to, and left behind by, the intervention remain far from resolved. With lingering disunity between the militant Tamil Tigers and the groups that collaborated with the Indian forces, the prospect of peace is not given a good chance. It may indeed be not too easy for India to disengage from the problems even if it wanted to, so long as it has entrapped itself too closely.

South Asia, in a word, is troubled by an over-assertive Indian posture towards its neighbours as a part of its design to ensure itself as the regional superpower which is the source of threats to the rest. New Delhi's policy of striving for influence by pressure rather than gaining cooperation through understanding has contributed to continued estrangement in South Asian relations. Progress in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was frozen

since the postponement of its fifth summit largely due to controversies over Indian policies and actions to throw its weights around.

The Summit was subsequently held in Male during 19-21 November. Problems in inter-state relations that caused the paralyzing delay in holding the summit of course persist with similar, if not greater complexity. Moreover, back home in respective agenda of their own the summiters had priorities of more pressing and immediate nature. The minority coalition government in India was faced with mounting domestic political challenges. An ever-increasing upsurge of communalism combined with regional tensions and other centrifugal pressures have not only polarized the otherwise disunited government but also led to a bedeviled trend in inter-regional relations within the country, posing genuine threats to the stability of the Indian political system. Pakistan came to the summit not really knowing what was the prospect of fledgling democracy in that country. Both had one commonality—each blaming the other for not only continuing arms race between them but also for each other's domestic problems. Endemic problems of economic vulnerability and political instability compounded by the growing setbacks inflicted by the Gulf crisis remained high on Bangladesh's agenda. So also for Sri Lanka, pre-occupied as ever with ethnic problems. Nepal, for its part was yet to be able to define its emerging political structure following the sweeping changes of the recent months. The summit did revive hopes of cooperative ventures in the region with the leaders issuing statements reaffirming their commitment towards SAARC. The association is no magical formula for resolving South Asian problems. But it can certainly contribute to the strengthening of the understanding of the need to cooperate for mutual benefit rather than continue to involve in wasteful confrontation.

Issues in nation-building : Like most other developing societies, the South Asian countries are also 'nations in hope'. Problems common to such nations, like those of identity, integration, legitimacy, participation, institution-building, leadership and accounta-

bility are more or less prevalent in most of them. The South Asian states generally represent low and divergent levels and patterns of political development. The divergences are the outcome of the varying degrees of socio-economic development and political turmoils that they have experienced. Most of the states emerged with shared colonial past, similar political experiences and common social values. Divergences, nevertheless are significant. In terms of type of government, India and Sri Lanka are recognized as functioning democracies with varying degree of success. The Indian experience of democracy has had severe tests in recent years beginning since the emergency period of 1975-77, while Sri Lanka had to compromise democratic norms more recently as a result of ethnic crisis. The two are nevertheless considered success stories among Third World democracies. Pakistan and Bangladesh have always been swinging between military dominance in politics and democratic experimentation. Nepal's transition from the status of traditional monarchy is yet to take a decisive shape. Bhutan has been striving to retain the authority of monarchy as the dominant institution while Maldives has been practicing one-party rule.

Divergences are manifest in values and principles followed in statecraft. The Indian political system is a blend of democracy, socialism and an ever-troubled secularism. Bangladesh started off with more or less same principles as the fundamentals in statecraft, but later changed the course more towards increasing influence of religion, an issue on which a national consensus is yet to emerge. Pakistan has Islam as the basis of its political system while Maldives is an Islamic society with relatively lesser influence of religion in politics. Nepal remains under Hindu influence whilst Bhutan and Sri Lanka are Buddhist societies.

The ethno-religious dispersion has been contributing towards tensions in intra- and inter-state political relations. Ethno-religious violence, in many cases with cross-border ramifications particularly with an India factor in almost all cases has rendered South Asia a

proverbial 'ethnic cauldron'.²³ The maltreatment of Muslims in India and Hindus in East Pakistan (the latter upto 1971) has been a constant issue between India and Pakistan.²⁴ Alleged involvement of Pakistan in the Sikh problem in India and of India in the ethno-regional problems in Pakistan and tribal issue in Bangladesh have been more recent factors in the embittered matrix of inter-state relations. The autonomy demands of the Nepalis of Indian origin in Southern Nepal and correspondingly alleged political activism of ethnic Nepalis in Sikkim, Darjeeling and other adjoining areas had made Indo-Nepalese relations abrasive.²⁵ Indo-Bhutanese relations have also been for a time troubled by cross-country implications of the conditions of Bhutias living in Sikkim and other parts of Northern Bengal.²⁶ The cross-border implications of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka has been an extremely disconcerting outcome of ethno-religious violence. All these, coupled with the whole range of outstanding political and economic issues in bilateral relations of the states have rendered the region one of the most unstable and volatile even by Third World standard.

In the frame of regional configuration portrayed above, there has been a persistent urge for the use of force and violence at both intra- and inter-state levels, resulting in growing arms spending. Besides defending national frontiers from perceived or real external threats, armed forces have been employed in maintaining regime security. In either case, growing arms spending has been related to tensions and turmoils at both domestic and regional levels. Ethnic and communal violence in India since early 1980s has been at the highest level since its independence. Estimates show that about 10,000 people were killed in various separatist, ethnic and religious violences in India during 1983-86,²⁷ and the casualties have recently

23. Bhabani Sengupta, "The Ethnic Cauldron", *India Today*, 31 August 1983.

24. Leo E. Rose and Shatish Kumar, *op. cit.*

25. *Ibid.*, see also Bhabani Sengupta, "The Ethnic Cauldron", *op. cit.*

26. Bhabani Sengupta, *et. al.* "Changing Pattern. . . .", *op. cit.*

27. *SIPRI Yearbook 1987, op. cit.*, p. 312.

been on the increase. Pakistan continues to suffer by forces of disintegration and according to reliable estimates about 9000 lives have been lost in related violences since 1972.²⁸ Similar types of problems also continue to bedevil the domestic political scene in Bangladesh where the armed forces have been deployed to face a small but potentially grave ethnic minority problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Sri Lanka is the most striking example where government policy of military response to domestic violence led to disproportionate rise in military expenditure.²⁹

IV. Concluding Observations

From what has been presented above, it is clear that arms spending in South Asia has a dynamics of its own. The recent dramatic changes in the international disarmament movement may have only a minimal positive impact on the prospect of South Asian disarmament. As long as the domestic and regional imperatives for arms race in South Asia continue to persist, there can be hardly any reason for optimism.

South Asian states have to realize the enormity of losses in terms of foregone opportunities. The first and foremost prerequisite for disarmament in the region is to adopt at respective national levels such measures as would strengthen the state system including the polity and the economy, develop socio-politico-economic institutions, achieve national cohesion, accommodation and integration. South Asia cannot afford to be spectators in the global race for the so-called 'peace dividends' accruing from the end of the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War period. It has also to be recognized that such dividends will not filter down automatically unless an appropriate South Asian response to global detente is worked out. South Asia may join the global progress in disarmament provided some specific and practical measures towards

28. *Ibid.*

29. See for details, *ibid.*

that end are adopted. These should include a) use of dialogue, and not confrontation in resolving outstanding bilateral issues, b) a mutually agreed immediate embargo on further expansion of armed forces, production, import and export of armaments aimed at eventual reduction of the same ; and c) a regional consensus to declare South Asia as a zone of peace free from nuclear weapons.

The need for an institutional mechanism which can promote mutual cooperation and development, diffuse tensions and build up confidence is clear. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) appears to provide some reasons for 'guarded optimism' in this context. There is an over-riding imperative for shared political will to cooperate—SAARC or no SAARC—in the regional context, so that stress is more on areas of mutual agreement and understanding than on disagreement and conflict. Above all, there is an imperative for creating a South Asian public opinion in favour of disarmament through intensification of deliberation and dissemination on the pernicious effects of the arms race in the face of evidences against any positive outcome thereof. There is the pressing need to realize that arms race, if anything, leads to further instabilities, mistrust and sense of insecurity, and thereby to further wasteful spending on arms—a vicious circle of arms—insecurity—arms.

Annex Table : Status of Defense and Social Expenditure and Military Manpower in South Asia

Index	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Total South Asia	Low income countries	High income countries*
Population (<i>millions mid-1988</i>)	108.9	815.6	18.0	106.3	16.6	1,065.4	—	—
GNP per cap. (\$/1988)	170	340	180	350	420	—	320	17,470
Life exp. at birth (<i>years/1988</i>)	51	58	51	55	71	—	61	76
Def. Exp. (\$/millions 1988)	281	8830	50.9	2,539	288	11,988.9	—	—
Def. Exp. as % of GNP/GDP (1986)	1.3	3.5	1.3	6.5	8.9	—	—	—
Share (%) of Central Government Expenditure on :								
— Defense	11.8	18.4	6.2	33.9	8.0	—	11.7 ¹	16.4
— Education	9.9	2.1	12.1	3.2	8.4	—	11.2 ¹	4.5
— Health	5.3	2.1	5.0	1.0	4.0	—	4.8 ¹	12.9
— Housing, Social security and welfare	0.6	5.6	6.8	10.5	11.1	—	15.2 ¹	39.0
Per Capita defense expenditure : (\$/1988)	2.58	10.8	2.8	23.9	17.4	—	—	—
Number in armed forces : (<i>thousands/1987</i>)	101.5	1269.0	30.0	680.6	22.0	2,103.1	—	—
Per cap. calorie supply	1,927	2,238	2,052	2,315	2,400	—	2,384 ¹	3,390
Debt Service as percentage of :								
— GNP/1987	1.6	1.5	1.2	3.4	4.7	—	5.6 ¹	—
— Export/1987	20.5	21.5	8.5	23.5	17.2	—	17.0 ¹	—

Sources : (a) *Sipri Yearbook 1989*, SIPRI, Oxford, 1990. (b) *Military Balance 1989-90*, IISS, London, 1990. (c) *World Development Report 1990*, World Bank, 1990.

Note : *) Industrialized Market Economies ; 1) Figures for Middle-income countries.