

BOOK REVIEW

New Dimensions in Regional Security After the Cold War: The Case of South Asia, Edited by George A. Cooray, Institute for International Studies (IIS), Sri Lanka, Colombo 1997, 131 pp.

The demise of the Cold War in 1990 brought in its wake some changes in the international environment that propelled the scholars to rethink the problems and the approaches of regional security in the changed perspective. The concerns that were critical at that time remained no longer that grievous as the states sought to accommodate to the new and changed circumstances. In the post-Cold War era, the concept of security has also acquired a new definition by bringing in the primacy of non-military sources of threats.

However, the parameters of regional security in endemically conflict-prone South Asia have not changed much in the post-Cold War period compared to the earlier decades. The ripples of global transformation, especially in the economic fields, no doubt, are felt both at regional and national levels. Yet, politics and security in the region remain almost unaffected by the 'wind of change'. If anything, some of the old conflicts have resurfaced with vigour, new conflictual issues have cropped up while, at best, some old ones have gone dormant.

In the context of this juncture, George A. Coorey along with his four colleagues has come up with new dimensions of security

in their collection of essays in the volume under review. All of these essays were presented at a seminar titled "New Dimensions in Regional Security After the Cold War: The Case of South Asia" held in January 1996 and organized by the Institute for International Studies, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

The essays mainly revolve round the question of security in a regional context. The book begins with an introduction by the editor which turns out to be a useful encapsulation of some of the basic issues raised in the course of the subsequent papers. The first essay is by Dilip S. Samarasinghe on "International Security at the End of the Cold War". The main thrust of his essay is the examination of the changes that have taken place in world security after the cessation of the Cold War. He emphasizes that a new security system should be established which will replace the now defunct East-West balance of power. He examines the new concepts, ideas and theories that have emerged to appraise the changes in the international environment. He finds out that at the bottom of these theories, ideas and concepts is the motivation for economic gains. According to the author, prestige in international relations does not rest any longer with nuclear power but is more derived from national wealth, financial power and industrial capability. This argument of his is, however, not without drawbacks. Because in case of South Asia, it is not wholly true. Nuclear power is still a matter of status and prestige to both India and Pakistan. Also, it is very much unlikely that either country will abandon its nuclear options in the near future. Even some military and political observers have started to predict that the South Asian region might witness the first-ever nuclear war in history.

Samarasinghe also examines the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. He opines that it was because of their failure to provide high standard of living and to keep abreast in high technology sectors. The collapse has led to the US

dominance of the international system. He argues that the US does not possess the confidence to act alone and has often sought the support of institutions such as the UN or NATO to legitimize its acts and deeds. He rightly says that the most insecure areas are the Eastern Europe and the so-called Third World although he does not seem to be sure about the role of Germany at this stage. But he is silent about the South Asian region. Does it mean that South Asia is a place where security is not at risk? As a backdrop essay it could have been more crispy if he had brought the South Asian scenario as well in brief which has become a hot-bed of communal and ethnic violence.

Ambalavanar Sivaraja in his article "Intra-Regional Relations in South Asia in the 1990s" attempts to examine the intra-regional relations in South Asia in the 1990s from the specific angle of security. No doubt the perspective of the actor that perceives, understands and reacts to the perception and behaviour of the other actors needs to be taken into consideration since perceptions mould behaviour to a large extent. And as such Sivaraja makes no bone to begin his essay with theories of perception and seems to be greatly inspired by the theory of perception forwarded by Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema. He has divided his analysis into three sections. In the first section, he deals with relations between India and Pakistan. Section two is devoted to relations between India and its smaller neighbours and the third one deals with Pakistan and its smaller neighbours. He examines the nature of these relations and concludes rather pessimistically that unless a common security perception among the states of the region was found, the intricate problems between the states are bound to continue not only in the 1990s but also in the 21st century. His arguments sound sensible but most of these have appeared many a time elsewhere.

The third study is on "Strategic Trends in South Asia: Cross Roads of Conflict and Cooperation" by Iftekharuzzaman which

examines the emerging strategic trends in South Asia in the post-Cold War framework. He tries to review the international context focussing on the main aspects of global changes that have special bearing on South Asia. The central theme of the paper is that contemporary South Asia is placed at the crossroads of conflict and cooperation. Prospects of peace in South Asia remain obscured by continued instabilities and conflicts within the countries and between them. Dominated by India-Pakistan rivalries, inter-state relations in the region remain too volatile for regionalism to take firm roots. He argues that the legacies of the past continue to push the countries from each other while the considerations for the future pull them together. He concludes that the future of war and peace in the region will be determined by the degree of success in its search for the right balance between these push and pull factors. He is always convincing in his own way but the paper appears as a refinement of his previous work. As a result it fails to break new grounds in the study of regional security especially in the South Asian context.

The fourth essay in the collection is by the editor himself. In the article titled "Militarization of South Asia: Implications for the Security of the Region", he poses a question: Will the process of militarization in South Asia be able to provide anticipated security to the states of the region? He examines the nature and manifestation of militarization in general and the exact form the militarization or the quantitative and qualitative improvement of the armed forces has taken place in South Asia. The main objective of this paper, is however, to analyze some aspects of the military developments in South Asia in the recent past, with the purpose of testing the hypothesis that South Asia is a militarized region. He also tries to identify adverse socio-political consequences of such military developments. In order to know that, he reviews some of the definitions of the terms and prefers a functional definition pointing to indicators of the process and the condition of milita-

rization. He then adopts the comparative method where necessary and treats South Asia as a unique case. Using some of the indicators, the author brands the region of South Asia as a militarized and militarizing region. He rightfully shows that the military expenditure of South Asia is much higher and remains on the increase compared to the other parts of the globe. He substantiates his argument by statistical tables and an inventory of weapons.

He also tries to identify adverse socio-political consequences of such military developments. In the conclusion, the author comes out with the bold suggestion that more than providing security, the armed forces have a tendency to become a threat to the individual citizen, the democratic state and the region as a whole .

The last but definitely not least in the collection is the paper, "The Indian Ocean after the Cold War: Some Aspects of Changed Politico-Strategic Scenarios" authored by Gamini Keerawella. He attempts to identify some aspects of changed politico-strategic scenarios in the Indian Ocean after the Cold War that would help identify the issues in the post-Cold War Indian Ocean. In the process he raises a number of questions concerning the basic character of the post-Cold War Indian Ocean, peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and nature of emerging security regime in the Indian Ocean. While one can agree with the author that the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of CIS have reduced the great power status of Russia, it may also be argued that it is not unlikely that Russia in some future date will regroup and reemerge. After all, the new trend emerging in the Indian Ocean and the Ocean region is the increased interest in economic dimension of the Ocean over politics. And precisely on this point it will definitely attract the attention of Russia since its thrust is now economic aspects rather than politico-ideological orientations. Likewise, China could be a probable power in the Indian Ocean region to reckon with because it is also trying to get

access to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean through Myanmar.

Although the title of the book promises new dimensions of regional security, I am afraid a coherent and convincing view of new dimension does not come out right away. The collection is better more at prompting issues than providing answers. The book might have been better if it could have included the perspectives of some more South Asian Scholars. A word of caution: it seems that most of the scholars of this volume have a tendency to use the word 'dramatic' rather too loosely in explaining the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War. But were changes associated with the end of the Cold War anything dramatic? Were they not already in the offing? Perhaps they are now surfacing and becoming more visible because of the end of the superpower rivalry.

Proof-reading is slack, and there are several printing errors that irritate the readers (for example in most places Cold War has been misspelt as 'old war'). Again, the footnotes are not appropriately placed (for example p. 28, p. 33 etc.). However, the book reads well with its lucid language and handsome get-up. Overall, this volume will be a valuable addition to all libraries which maintain a holding in South Asian security and defence studies and will cover a wide range of audience both in South Asia and beyond.

Shaheen Afroze

Senior Research Fellow

Bangladesh Institute of International
and Strategic Studies, Dhaka.