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THE ARMS RACE IN SOUTH ASIA: SOME APPROACHES TO STABILITY

The year 1991 marked a departure point in post-war traditional security and strategic thinking. In this historic year the cold war ended and the bipolar division of the world completely collapsed. Perhaps, the most remarkable feature of these unprecedented developments in international relations is a shift from confrontation to cooperation, a change under which political accommodation and dialogue are gradually prevailing over conflict and tensions. The resort to military muscle, on the other hand, as a means for achieving national goals and interests seems to be no more the number one option of the nation-states. The promising start of a security building process between the Arabs and the Israelis and between the two Koreas discourages military preparedness to achieve the 'unachievable'. Unfortunately, however, the dividends of the systemic changes have so far failed to penetrate into South Asia. Persistent conflicts and endemic tensions with a self-destructive arms race at the bottom still characterise the

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parameters of South Asian international relations. Despite being the world's poverty centre, South Asia spends more than it can afford to on its arms build up.

The central objective of this paper is to explore some fresh approaches not to disarm the South Asian states but to ensure stability in the military sector of South Asia. The premise of the paper is built upon a realistic outlook as it takes arms to be a significant part of the world order. Arms are much needed and also coveted objects for which nation-states would make ceaseless efforts in the future. This is the reality. The problem is how to ensure stability in arms acquisition or production potentials. The purpose is to show that after a certain period the current arms race in South Asia may be effectively contained within a permissible limit. The paper begins with an account of the trends and features of the continuing arms race in South Asia. The second section analyses the factors that allow the arms race to continue unabated. While the third section deals with the current arms control strategies in South Asia, the final part examines some new approaches that are expected to effectively contain the South Asian arms race.

I. FEATURES OF ARMS PROLIFERATION IN SOUTH ASIA

The arms race in South Asia, according to widely held views, has already entered an endless process. While the small states of the region are trying to amass as much arms as possible, the relentless competition for arms between India and Pakistan has reached an unusually perilous phase. The armament competition between the two states ranges from conventional to nuclear and ballistic missiles production and acquisition.

India and Pakistan, the two great subcontinental countries, entered the arms race immediately after their inception as independent states in

1947. The mutual enemy image perceptions which are germane to their process of creation remains at the root of the race. The external powers — the now defunct USSR, the USA and China — which had contended for influence in the region accelerated the race to a large extent. The acquisition of arms by one country was and is immediately followed by a similar arms procurement programme by the other country. Thus, the perception of zero-sum game has worked behind subcontinental ceaseless arms build up.

The Conventional Arms Build-up

The starting point of conventional arms build up in the subcontinent may be traced back to the Mutual Defence Assistant Agreement between Pakistan and the United States, concluded in 1954. Under the provisions of the Agreement Pakistan received a considerable amount of US military equipments to strengthen its armed forces. The treaty naturally made the Indians anxious about their security and it led them to seek Soviet weapons. And by the 1960s the Soviet Union had become India's primary arms supplier. Between 1976 and 1980, the ex-Soviet Union supplied 82% of Indian arms imports (\$2.3 of \$2.8 billion), giving India the fourth largest share (after Libya, Syria and Iraq) of total Soviet arms exports to the non-communist countries. Pakistan was raised to a position of similar security relationship with Washington in June 1981 following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The \$3.2 billion military and economic assistance package placed Pakistan fourth in the world (after Israel, Egypt and Turkey) among nearly 100 recipients of US security assistance.¹

The conventional arms race between India and Pakistan got a major boost at the beginning of the 1980s. The dramatic changes

1. See Robert G. Wirsing, "The Arms Race in South Asia : Implication for the United States" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, March 1985, p. 266.

happening in and around the subcontinent provided extra inputs. The military presence of the cold war rivals in the areas adjacent to South Asia increased dramatically. The Soviet Union invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 1979. The United States' long ally Iran collapsed in the same year. Pakistan had become physically involved in Afghan resistance pitted against the Soviet forces in that land-locked state. These developments naturally produced a drastic change in the security environment of South Asia and, of course, led to a change in threat perceptions of the subcontinent's two military rivals. On the other hand, the superpowers' own strategic fortunes became more directly tied than ever before to the consequences arising out of the new developments. Both superpowers, with a penchant for maintaining their strategic stakes, supplied arms to maintain military balance in the subcontinent.

The US \$3.2 billion military and economic aid package for Pakistan was followed by a similar Indo-Soviet package deal. In March 1984, India and the Soviet union had concluded a major arms agreement. Besides, India also explored avenues to procure arms from other sources, notably France. The massive arms procurement programme led India to be a major Third World arms importer. In a rank ordering of top 15 Third World arms importers from 1978-88 India stood sixth. The amount India spent for arms during this period is US \$ 21,488 million.²

The defence expenditures of other South Asian countries are high as well. During the period 1982-91, Bangladesh spent US \$ 2787 million for defence purposes. The amount Nepal had spent in the

2. Robert S. McNamara, *The Post-cold War World and Its Implications For Military Expenditure in the Developing Countries* (Address to the World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics, Washington, DC, April 25, 1991), p.40.

military sector during the same period stands at 449 million US dollars. Sri Lanka, a peaceful democratic country till the beginning of the 1980s, had multiplied its defence budget in 1985. In 1984, the island republic had allocated only 93 million US dollars for its armed forces but in 1985 the figure stood at US \$ 214 million. From 1982-91, the total amount Sri Lanka has spent for defence is US \$ 2367 million.³

The Nuclear Race

The nuclear race between India and Pakistan is the most critical issue to South Asian security. The race got off the ground in 1974 when India exploded its first nuclear device in that year. The device test was perceived in Pakistan as evidence of India's intimidating attitude and its intention to achieve regional supremacy at any cost. The late Pakistani Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto characterised the test as a fateful development and he noted that the explosion had "introduced qualitative change" in the relationship between the two countries. He further categorically stated that his country would not succumb to the "nuclear blackmail" by India.

India's 1974 Pokhran atomic explosion soon triggered off the nuclear programme of Pakistan. The Pakistanis first sought a reprocessing nuclear plant from France but due to US opposition they embarked on an uranium enrichment capability plant in 1976. The plant became operational in 1981.

According to reports, both India and Pakistan have produced or are on the verge of producing nuclear weapons. The capacity of these two countries to enrich bomb-making grade uranium is well-recognized and undisputed. India is believed to have designed smaller

3. *SIPRI Yearbook, World Armament and Disarmament 1992*, p. 260.

and more efficient warheads using beryllium and tritium which it can produce domestically. India is also suspected to be working on a thermo-nuclear device, with reports claiming that she came close to testing such a device in 1984.⁴ The general perception runs that India can make dozens of nuclear bombs at short notice.

Like India, the bomb-making capacity of Pakistan is also held high. The Kahuta complex is reportedly capable of producing more than 25kg of fission material annually. According to one estimate, Pakistan may have stockpiled between 175 and 325kg of weapon-grade uranium by the end of 1990, sufficient for 8 to 16 bombs.⁵ The bomb-making capacity of Pakistan was made public by the late President Gen. Zia-ul Huq in March 1987. President Zia disclosed that Pakistan had developed the requisite technology but had not chosen to exercise the weapons option. This was also echoed by Dr. A.K. Khan, the doyen of Pakistan nuclear programme, that Pakistan had mastered the technology for making nuclear weapons.⁶

The issue of nuclear weapons has considerably remoulded and reshaped the threat perceptions and threat assessments of Pakistan. Pakistan's definition of Indian nuclear threat assumes India as a member of the exclusive nuclear club. They define the threat this way:⁷

First, India must possess nuclear weapons. *Second*, she must use such weapons against Pakistan, not China. Hence, Pakistani strate-

4. See, Nazir A. Kamal, "Nuclear and Missile Proliferation Issues : Some Approaches to stability in South Asia" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 13, No. 4, March 1992, p. 376.

5. *Ibid*, p. 377.

6. *Ibid*.

7. Stephen P. Cohen, "Pakistan", in Edward A. Kolodziej and Robert E. Harkavy (eds.), *Security Policies of Developing Countries* (D.C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1982) p. 99.

gists rule out the idea of India developing nuclear weapons against China. *Third*, as the prime target of Indian nuclear bomb is Pakistan, so the Indian bomb has a military and political rationale. The Pakistanis generally see it as enabling Indian conventional forces to seize the rest of Kashmir from Pakistan or even to dismember all of Pakistan. The Pakistanis also view that nuclear weapons held in reserve as a threat against Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and other vital targets would effectively paralyse Pakistan and make it unable to resist the Indians. *Fourth*, a modest and limited Pakistani nuclear programme is essential to deter India's nuclear forces. These four factors provide the basic rationale behind Pakistan's nuclear programme today.

The Indians, on the other hand, initiated their nuclear programme with two basic objectives. The first objective was to maintain military superiority vis-a-vis Pakistan, and the second objective, which is extra-regional, was to meet the threat posed by Chinese nuclear forces. Pakistan, however, remains the main consideration in India's nuclear weapon programme. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the late Indian Prime Minister, has made it clear that should Pakistan go nuclear that would be the "point of no return" for India, meaning that India would be compelled to opt for nuclear weapons.⁸ As a result, a stalemate has developed over the nuclear issue with clandestine efforts by both sides to go nuclear.

Competition for Ballistic Missiles

Competition for ballistic missiles in South Asia is a development of the late 1980s. Spurred by the use of ballistic missiles, dubbed the

8. Bhabani Sen Gupta & Amit Gupta, " Changing Patterns of Regional Conflicts in South Asia" in Bhabani Sen Gupta (eds.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia*, Vol. 1, (New Delhi, South Asian Publishers, 1986) P. 266.

poor man's deterrent, in the Iraq-Iran war, India and Pakistan entered the missile race being as desperate as they were for nuclear weapons. The perceived potential of ballistic missiles also led twenty-four other countries in the Third World to start missile programmes.

As for the nuclear race the lead for ballistic missiles in South Asia came from India. India first tried to convert Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) into surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs). But abandoning the conversion programme, India in 1983 launched its Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP), which is run by Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL).⁹ In 1985 India set up its first missile testing range in Orissa at a cost of more than US \$ 80 million and in February 1988 it first tested its first SSM, called Prithvi. The Prithvi, which is reportedly much faster than the Soviet Scud-B, was tested at a range of 250km with a one-ton payload.¹⁰ The second test of Prithvi was conducted in September 1989 and currently it is under a plan for its series production, with its first deployment expected in 1992.¹¹

India's second great achievement in missile technology is the successful test of Agni, an intermediate-range SSM with a range of 1000km, in May 1989. The test success of Agni was widely regarded in India as the beginning of a full-scale deployment of ballistic missiles. The Indian Defence Minister expressed India's determination to develop a full-fledged missile defence system and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the late Indian Prime Minister, had declared that Agni would be able to "deliver weapons with high precision at long ranges" and that India would be concentrating on "large multi-stage propulsion systems, precision closed loop inertial guidance, atmospheric re-entry and terminal guidance".¹²

9. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 June 1989.

10. Nazir A. Kamal, *op. cit.*, p. 382-83.

11. *Ibid*, p. 383.

12. Quoted in *ibid*.

What is more significant here is that India developed both the missile systems based on indigenous resources and expertise. The foreign help was very meager. Only 5 percent of the total component cost of the tested Agni was paid to foreign suppliers. Dr. Abdul Kalam, head of the missile programme, declared in December 1989 that India could also launch ICBMs in the 5,000km range, but such testing had not occurred for lack of funding and a political decision to go ahead.¹³

Pakistan resumed the missile programme at about the same time India did. Pakistan first tested its missiles in February 1989. The successful testing of two SSMs- Hatf-I at 80km range and Hatf-II at 300km range-was conducted a year after India's Prithvi test.¹⁴ The Pakistan army chief claimed that the missiles payload was of more than 500kg. He also disclosed that a 600km missile was under deployment although its guidance system was not sophisticated for lack of adequate technology.¹⁵

In ballistic missile race Pakistan clearly lags behind India. The lack of progress in this field has probably motivated Pakistan to match India through importing short range missiles from China. Pakistan has already requested China for the 300km range M-11 missiles and China has reportedly acceded to the request.¹⁶

Domestic Arms Production

In the domestic arms production sector India and Pakistan have also made major progress. In arms production India tops the list not only in South Asia but in the Third World as a whole. At present

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p.384.

15. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 14 Oct. 1989.

16. Nazir A. Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 384.

India's domestic arms production accounts for 31% of the total of the Third World followed by Israel and South Africa which respectively account for 23% and 9%.¹⁷ By 1980, India had more than 70 defence plants and some 24 research and development units to support its drive for military self-sufficiency. In addition, India produces an extensive range of conventional weapons including high performance fighter aircraft, helicopters, missiles, electronics and communications equipment, and a variety of naval warships. Pakistan, on the other hand, has a Chinese-aided rebuild factory at Taxila for the country's large fleet of Chinese-supplied T-59 medium Tanks. It has also a major defence factory, the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex at Kamra, which is primarily a rebuild-and-repair facility for the Pakistan's Air Force's Chinese-supplied F-6s and French-supplied Mirage 3s and 5s.¹⁸

The other South Asian states do not have any major arms producing facilities. The armies of these countries heavily depend on foreign arms and amunitions supplies.

One may here raise a point how much resources the arms race cost in South Asia. Available statistics, without elaboration, says the cost is too high and beyond the capacity of the poor nations of this region. The percentage share of GDP on defence by these countries and a comparison of the defence expenditure to health and education expenditures may be useful here.

Table 1 shows that Bangladesh annually spends between 1.3 and 1.6% of its total GDP on defence. The figures for India and Pakistan are much higher. Whereas India spends 3.3-3.9% of its GDP on defence the figure for Pakistan is 6.6-7.1%. The GDP ratios on defence expenditure for Nepal and Sri Lanka are respectively 1.3-1.8% and 3.2-5.1%.

17. Robert McNamara, *op. cit.* p. 42.

18. Robert G. Wirsing, *op.cit.*, p. 270.

Table - 1: Military Expenditure of South Asian Countries as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 1985-90.

Country	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Bangladesh	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	--
India	3.3	3.7	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.3
Nepal	1.3	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.7	--
Pakistan	6.8	7.1	7.1	6.7	6.7	6.6
Sri Lanka	3.2	4.4	5.1	4.3	3.3	4.8

Source : SIPRI Yearbook, World Armament and Disarmament, 1992.

Table - 2 : Military expenditure (ME) of South Asian States Compared with Outlays on Health (HE) and Education (EE)

Country	1988 Military Expenditure (in 1988 million US \$)	ME as percentage of GNP	HE as percentage of GNP	EE as percentage of GNP
Bangladesh	342	1.8	0.6	2.2
India	9,458	3.5	0.9	3.4
Nepal	35	1.1	0.9	2.8
Pakistan	2,516	6.9	0.2	2.2
Sri Lanka	321	4.6	1.3	3.6

Source : Robert McNamara, The Post-Cold War World and its Implications for Military Expenditures in the Developing Countries (Address to the World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics, Washington, DC April 25, 1991).

Compared to the military sector the health and education sectors are much neglected in these countries. The percentage GNP share of military expenditures are three to four times higher than expenditures

in the health and education sectors and in some cases it is even more. The prevailing socio-economic condition of South Asia, however, makes increasing expenditure for armaments a mockery with the lot of the common people. South Asia is the poorest of the poor regions of the world and contains the highest concentration of poverty in the world as well. Nearly half of the population of India lives below the officially defined poverty line, some 80 percent of Bangladesh's population is undernourished, almost three quarters of Pakistan's population is illiterate, the people of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh have one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world and the quality of life for the great majority (measured in terms of food calorie intake, access to health facility, life expectancy at birth etc.) is unacceptably gruesome.¹⁹ In such a situation the simmering arms race in South Asia needs to be contained forthwith.

II. WHY NO ARMS RACE STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

The increasing defence expenditure in South Asia is analysed in terms of conflicting national and security perceptions, regional dynamics of conflicts, India's big power ambitions transcending the border of South Asia, various issues in nation-building and so on. In such discussions, India's view of 'strategic indivisibility', which considers South Asia as a single strategic unit and projects India as the sole master of the unit, naturally figures high. India as one of the world's oldest and largest civilizations has a great power image that at the bottom level seeks to establish a sphere of influence in its own region. The influence sphere primarily centers in, but not necessarily restricted to, South Asia. However, instead of analysing the causes of

19. Gowher Rizvi, "South Asia After the Cold War" paper presented at the International Seminar on South Asia's Security 1990s : Primacy of its Internal Dimensions, organized by BISS, Dhaka, 05-07 January 1992, pp. 52-53.

the arms race in South Asia we would be rather concerned here about the underlying factors which hinder stability in the South Asian arms race, that is, the permissible limit of arms acquisition and production.

Lack of a Deterrence-based Security System

The South Asian security order is one of the most unbalances in the world. A pyramidic politico-economic and military power structure characterizes the region. In terms of all tangible and intangible elements of power like geographical vastness, population strength, economic progress, technological advancement, etc., India supersedes many times all other regional states put together. This factor causes endemic tensions in the region and often leads the smaller neighbours to acquire arms to match India.

The unstable nature of South Asian security order seems to originate from the lack of a deterrence-based security system in the region. Till today, the South Asian states, especially India and Pakistan, do not have any declared nuclear deterrents in their arsenals, although India and Pakistan are widely believed to be the possessors of nuclear weapons. The values of nuclear deterrence lies in making war obsolete, in discouraging the conflicting parties to think of war as a viable policy option and thus in demoralizing the concerned parties to resort to military preparedness in a rejuvenated manner. A brief note on the European security order may make the point clear here.²⁰

The European security order, although deadly antagonistic in nature until the collapse of socialism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, was a stabilized security order. There was an

20. Md. Nuruzzaman, "Confidence-building in South Asia : A Bangladeshi Perspective" paper presented at the International Seminar on "South Asia's Security in the 1990s : Primacy of its Internal Dimensions" organized by BISS, 05-07 January 1992, p.9.

unwritten guarantee of 'no-attack' from either side, the capitalist or the socialist. Obviously, the deterrent values of the security order discouraged the Euro-Atlantic states to wage wars, even a conventional one. In other words, war was always a non-viable option for the Euro-Atlantic states. But it is the absence of the deterrent values that permit the arms race in South Asia to go unabated and cross the limit, from conventional to nuclear, from nuclear to ballistic missile programmes.

However, perceptive observers may raise a question: why did not the rival Euro-Atlantic states stop their arms race once nuclear deterrents were in their arsenals? And why should the South Asian rivals stop the race after adding the same to their arsenals? The reasons for a non-stop European arms race apparently boil down to two factors which are not visible in South Asia. *First*, the arms race in Europe did not get itself confined within the European boundary, it rather developed a global dimension. The Western alliance and the Soviet Union had world wide interests and, therefore, an urge to create a psychological impact beyond their national boundaries. *Secondly*, the European arms race did revolve round not regional dynamics of conflicts but for the cause of particular ideologies. While the former Soviet Union and its allies stood for socialistic political, economic and social order throughout the world, the Western alliance led by the US was committed to spread the values and ideals of free-market economy and democracy. This was an unending game even after the acquisition of nuclear deterrents by both parties.

In contrast to the European arms race, the armament competition in South Asia represents a quite different case. None of the two South Asian antagonistic actors has an urge to create a psychological effect to protect world wide interests and none has universal ideology whose backing requires continued sophistication of nuclear forces. What is obvious here is that the arms race in South Asia may achieve stability

after the hostile powers add a credible nuclear deterrence to their conventional arsenals.

Weak Economic Linkages

The lack of strong economic linkages between the states of South Asia acts as an indirect fueling factor to the arms race. Since 1947 up to 1980 the economic linkages between the states of this region remained at a very marginal level. Even the formal launching of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 has not till today contributed much to foster the linkages. Intra-SAARC import and export trade and investments strikingly reveal that South Asian economic interactions are unbelievably poor and compared to any other regions of the world it figures the lowest.

A projection of intra-SAARC export and import trade during the period 1981 to 1987 is attempted here to strengthen the point, mentioned above.²¹ In 1981 Bangladesh exported only 8.3% of its total export to her South Asian partners and in 1987 the figure came down to 4.7%. India's exports to South Asian countries in 1981 was 2.4% of her total exports while in 1987 it was 2.3%. The figures for Pakistan's and Sri Lanka's regional export in 1981 were 4.0% and 8.3% respectively and in 1987 they were respectively 2.4% and 3.3%. The picture is same in the field of regional import trade.

In 1987 Bangladesh imported only 4.3% of her total imports from her SAARC partners. India and Pakistan purchased even lesser share of their imports amounting to only 0.6% and 1.6% from within the region in 1987. The figures of previous years' export are more or less the same. Therefore, in terms of both exports and imports economic

21. For elaboration see, Md. Nuruzzaman, "Intra-SAARC Trade Cooperation : Prospects and Problems" in *Rastrabiggan Darpan* (Political Science Mirror) No. 3/1992, p. 108.

linkages in South Asia during the period 1981-87 was rather insignificant.

Whatever might have been the reasons, the poor intraregional economic interactions or linkages escalate the arms race in South Asia in a major way. It has contributed to creating a state of mind among the political elites of the respective South Asian states that confrontation or even bitter hostilities would in no way hurt their major national interests. Extensive mutual economic interests in the form of trade and investments persuade the concerned parties to refrain from hostile activities meant to damage others. Sino-American relations provide an excellent example in this respect. Despite occasional frictions and sharp differences China, because of its trade interests in the US, keeps its relations with the US within a manageable limit. Lack of extensive mutual economic interests, on the other hand, keeps the South Asian states apart from each other and encourages them to pursue a confrontational approach in their intra-regional dealings which has resulted in a race for armaments in the region.

Parochial Political Culture

The evolving pattern of political culture in India and Pakistan has been the next significant factor that hold potentials to frustrate stability in the South Asian arms race. In recent times, politics in India and Pakistan is increasingly becoming hostage to religious fanatics and communal forces. The political approach of the communal and religious forces is of more confrontational and less cooperational and their position on intra-regional issues is quite destructive. For example, on the nuclear issue the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) in India and the Jamaat-i-Islami(JI) in Pakistan take radical stand. The party manifesto of BJP calls for a strong nuclear deterrent for India and the JI has been the most vocal pro-bomb party in Pakistan.²²

22. Nazir A. Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 377.

Of course, it is not to say that there is no wide public support for going nuclear in India and Pakistan. But what is of particular concern is that both the BJP and the JI draw their hard-core support from religious 'fanatics' who hold highly antagonistic and confrontational positions on contentions issues between India and Pakistan, including the Kashmir dispute. The increasing parliamentary strength of both the parties, especially BJP's, is a pointer to the fact that once in power the two parties may turn South Asia's political culture into a permanent arms race culture. The probable fued between such parties over bilateral disputes may even lead to waging a fourth round of war between the two countries wherein nuclear weapons are likely to be used by both sides.

III. ARMS CONTROL INITIATIVES IN SOUTH ASIA

The massive arms build up and the growth of armaments potentials in South Asia have been followed by some attempts at controlling them. Initiatives towards containing further proliferation of arms have come from within the region coupled with pressures from outside powers, the US in particular. External pressure has, however, sought to keep itself confined to only one aspect of the arms race - the nuclear proliferation issue. There have been so far two distinct initiatives of arms control in South Asia : (i) the Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone (NWFZ) initiative, and (ii) the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) initiative. Both the initiatives were taken by Pakistan.

The NWFZ Initiative

The NWFZ initiative in South Asia is a direct outcome of the concern of nuclear proliferation in this region. Pakistan initiated the proposal for making South Asia a nuclear weapon free zone shortly after India's first atomic device test in 1974. The incapacity on

Pakistan's part to match India both in conventional build-up and nuclear bomb-making capacity led her to launch a diplomatic offensive to contain the suspected development of nuclear weapons by India. The offensive culminated through the introduction of a nuclear-free-zone proposal in the Political and Security Committee of the UN General Assembly in its 1974 Session.²³

The Pakistani proposal aimed at the establishment of a nuclear free zone in South Asia and called upon the UN Secretary General to initiate consultations among the regional states for helping them to draft an agreement on the subject. The proposal envisaged that the concerned parties to the agreement would refrain from producing or acquiring atomic weapons from any source whatsoever and from threatening their use against a member country of the region. On 9 December 1974 the proposal was overwhelmingly endorsed by the UN General Assembly by 82 votes to 2 with 26 abstentions. India and Bhutan opposed the proposal.

The Indian position on the proposal was spelled out by Kewal Singh, the then Indian Foreign Secretary. Singh argued that the designation of any region as a nuclear-free-zone required prior consultation with and agreement of all the parties involved and that it could not be imposed upon governments. He also referred to the presence in Asia of countries belonging to the military alliances, and the existence of nuclear-weapon powers having a vital bearing on the viability of a nuclear-weapons-free-zone.²⁴

Notwithstanding the Indian opposition, Pakistan keeps pressing for a 'constructive dialogue' with India for the avoidance of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Since the Indian nuclear explosion, conducted

23. For details, see, Zafar Iqbal, "South Asia As a Nuclear-Weapon-free Zone", *Strategic Studies*, Vol. IV, Winter 1980, No. 2 pp. 32-40.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

close to the Pakistani border, in May 1974 Pakistan has made a number of non-proliferation proposals to India.²⁵ These are :

1. a nuclear-weapons-free-zone in South Asia (akin to the Tlatelolco Treaty of 1967 applicable to Latin America);
2. adherence to the NPT on a reciprocal basis ;
3. a bilateral nuclear test ban treaty;
4. mutual inspection of nuclear facilities;
5. acceptance of IAEA inspection on a reciprocal basis; and
6. a joint declaration renouncing the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

In addition to all these, Pakistan in June 1991 introduced a new proposal calling for multilateral talks between India, Pakistan, the US, Russia and China for resolving the nuclear issue in South Asia.

India rejects all the proposal on the ground of the global dimension of the nuclear proliferation issue and continues to stress upon global approaches, such as a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT), or its 1988 scheme for a global nuclear disarmament process. India's global approach to the nuclear issue is greatly conditioned by the possession of sophisticated nuclear forces by China with whom she fought a humiliating war in 1962.

At this stage two specific points may be noted which may be behind India's negative response to the non-proliferation issue in South Asia. *First*, India would not support a non-proliferation regime that would tend to create power parity with Pakistan. *Secondly*, as Indian rivalry extends up to China, the proposed South Asian nuclear free zone is viewed by India as an artificial and untenable concept with China left out of it. Pakistan, on the other hand, driven by Indian threats, has consistently refused the unilateral acceptance of the NPT

25. Nazir A. Kamal, *op.cit.*, p. 381.

regime. Pakistan demands that the acceptance of the NPT must be linked to developments across the border with India.

Among the external powers the US is particularly concerned about nuclear proliferation in South Asia. But US non-proliferation pressures have been directed more towards Pakistan than India. In 1990 the US suspended its aid to Pakistan under the 1985 Pressler Amendment that requires the US President to certify annually that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear device. Of late, the US has also threatened to stop aid to India unless it agrees to sign the NPT.²⁶ Although its Soviet ally has disintegrated, India is most unlikely to succumb to American pressure and make any compromise on the nuclear issue. In response to US proposals for a South Asian pact for nuclear non-proliferation, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao categorically objected to regional approach to a global problem and indirectly pointed to the acceptance of the Indo-Pak nuclear race in South Asia. He stated, "it is not a question of India or Pakistan making any nuclear weapons," but "a question of thousands of weapons already made, stockpiled by other countries and the danger of finding their way elsewhere".²⁷

Of late there seems to have developed a convergence point between India and Pakistan on the nuclear question. The convergence in nuclear interests has already led them to sign a non-attack accord on nuclear installation. The accord was signed by the two countries on 17 December 1985 and it came into force on 1 January 1992 in the wake of mutual exchange of the lists of nuclear facilities. The accord has two implications : first, it directly and indirectly legitimizes nuclear proliferation in South Asia; second, it seems to accept the view that

26. *The Daily Star*, (Dhaka) 18 June 1992.

27. *The Daily Star*, (Dhaka) 9 June 1992.

production of nuclear weapons would not create any security implications in the region.²⁸

The MBFR Initiative

The second arms control initiative, the mutual and balanced force reduction, squarely relates to the conventional build-up between India and Pakistan. The initiative, first mooted in 1974 at the UN General Assembly alongwith the Pakistani proposal for a NWFZ in South Asia, seeks to reduce Indo-Pakistan conventional forces on a proportional basis. The initiative does not take into account the factors of size, population and resources. India opposes the proposal. Pakistan has, however, raised the issue many times with India.

The Indian strategists rule out the applicability of the concept of MBFR in South Asia on two specific counts.²⁹ First, according to them the concept of MBFR stands valid when two conflicting sides are identified as the major, if not the only, antagonists. They cite the European example where the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were the two lone parties. In South Asia, on the contrary, India and Pakistan are not the only rivals, India's rivalry also extends up to China. Therefore, the concept of MBFR is less practical in South Asia.

Secondly, in South Asia India has security commitments beyond the regional border per se, especially vis-a-vis China in the North and in the Indian Ocean which was till recently the zone of great power rivalry. Moreover, the Indian strategists argue that India's military

28. Md. Nuruzzaman, "Confidence building in South Asia," *op. cit.*, p. 7.

29. K. R. Singh, "India's Security Stakes in South Asia" in Surrendra Nath Kaushik, *et. al.* (eds.), *India and South Asia* (South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi & International Book Company Absecon Highlands, N. J. 1991), p. 33.

power would be in proportion to its size, resource base and population and it need not be necessarily governed by the real or imaginary fear psychosis of its neighbours.

Indeed, the MBFR initiative suffers from the inherent weakness that makes it a less practical arms control measure in South Asia. The initiative treats India and Pakistan on an equal basis. In practice, the case is quite different. It gives India the opportunity to reject the initiative outright.

IV. SOME NEW APPROACHES TO ARMS STABILITY

The two distinct arms control initiatives, discussed in the previous section, have succeeded neither in halting the simmering arms race in South Asia nor even in bringing India and Pakistan to the negotiating table. This is an explicit indication that the arms race problems and issues can not be resolved through military means or strategies. The practices of establishing military hotlines, prior notice of military manoeuvre, mutual commitment not to use force against each other, agreement on non-interference in each other's internal affairs etc., have very little to do with the ongoing arms race in any region including South Asia. The Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the hitherto comprehensive confidence-building measures in the military field, with the membership of 35 nations including the US and Canada as non-European members, registered very little success to stop the dangerous nuclear arms race in Europe during the cold-war period. The applicability of the Helsinki model to other regions outside Europe is also debatable.³⁰

The weaknesses or ineffectiveness of military measures to control the arms race in South Asia or even to roll back the nuclear competi-

30. Md. Nuruzzaman, "Confidence-building in South Asia : A Bangladeshi Perspective," *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.

tion between India and Pakistan clearly need to be met with mainly non-military measures, that is politico-economic and social measures. Of the important socio-economic and political measures to ensure arms stability in South Asia the following are put up to initiate debate and discussion here.

Evolving a Regional Security Framework

It is of vital importance to develop a common security framework in the region to ensure stability in the South Asian arms race. The logic for it comes from two strong directions. First, in South Asia arms race and the urge for advanced military equipments and technology are a bottom-less pit and constant attempts to fill the pit have never led to an increase in objective security, rather these have been often used for regime security and thus for keeping the interstate confrontational approach alive. Secondly, the time for South Asian states to remain enmeshed in unending arms race has passed much earlier. With the demise of the cold war the world is steadily moving from the past rationale of geopolitics to the harsh realities of geoeconomics. The competition in the emerging realm of geoeconomics would be so sharp that it confirms to the Darwinian theory of 'survival of the fittest.' South Asia with its more than one billion poverty-stricken people needs to get prepared to face the future realities of geo-economics.

However, the development of a common security framework requires the development of a sense of regional identity first. The development of a sense of regional identity is possible when there is a compromise between narrow nationalism and the compelling necessity to address regional problems on regional basis. But the possibility of developing a regional identity in South Asia is blurred by factors like divergent security perceptions, nation-building strategies, foreign and defence policies. The hierarchical power-structure of the region with

India at the apex and the attempts by the neighbours to escape from the overt and covert hegemony of India lie at the root of growing divergences in the region. In clearer terms, the problem boils down to the issue of role profile of India in South Asia. While India, in conformity with its vastness in size, population, resource-base and military strength, demands a predominant role, the neighbours ask her to lower down her assertive profile and to follow the Indonesian example in ASEAN. While the ASEAN states tacitly recognize Indonesia's big power status, Indonesia itself refrains from asserting its status formally. India, however, rejects the low profile role demand of the neighbours on the ground of its geographic contiguity with all its neighbours, which Indonesia does not have, and, unlike Indonesia, its incompatible security outlook and strategic values with the neighbours.

The role profile problem in South Asia can be probably resolved through the holding of a regional political conference like the SAARC Opposition Conference held in Karachi recently. In such a conference both the ruling and opposition parties in South Asian countries can meet together and discuss the extent to which a compromise solution to India's demands for predominant role in South Asia is acceptable to the neighbours and India can comply with the demand of a lower profile by the neighbours. The SAARC framework may be effectively exploited to have the expected results. Thus, once the issue is resolved the urge for continued increase in military power would gradually decline, and the need to address socio-economic problems by diverting resources from military sector to social and economic sectors would gain prominence. The emphasis on the socio-economic development would ultimately result in increased regional cooperation and stability in the arms sector.

The Need for Domestic Conflicts Control Mechanism

It is often viewed that the arms race in South Asia cannot be checked unless the regional conflicts that vitiate inter-state relations can

be resolved. Tensions and hostilities in the region are largely viewed as the outcome of the long-standing interstate conflicts which often have transboundary effects and implications. Ethnic conflicts and communal violence with cross-border impact are most notable here. To resolve such conflicts the need for evolving a regional conflict control mechanism is generally given over emphasis. Although a regional conflict control mechanism can temporarily contain or reduce the intensity of regional conflicts, it cannot address the conflicts in a comprehensive way or remove the causes that perennially give rise to the conflicts.

The weaknesses of a regional conflicts control mechanism can be successfully overcome with the initiation of domestic conflicts control mechanisms for each of the states of the region. This is because most of the conflicts with cross-border implications of the South Asian states originate from within their boundaries. The faulty nation-building strategies and discriminatory policies, both economic and political, pursued by the majority respresenting ruling elites against the ethnic minorities have in most cases led to inter-ethnic violence and armed conflicts. Presently, none of the South Asian states in the region has effective mechanisms, constitutional or otherwise, to fight and effectively contain divergent forces in the domestic arena. A possible way out may be the introduction of true democracies that would practically represent and reflect the aspirations of all strata of people in all the regional states. The curbing down of power of the central government in the form of a decentralized power-structure is a desirable option.

The containment of domestic conflicts within the domestic boundaries would give the ruling elites of the region little opportunity to justify the increasing defence expenditure using external linkages with domestic issues. As a result, the current fierce arms competition would lose its rationale, and an atmosphere wherein a arms race limit can be ensured would be created.

In addition to the above two main approaches, a South Asian nuclear approach with explicit and implicit backing from the existing

nuclear powers may be effective to stabilize the arms race in this region. As noted earlier, once there is credible nuclear deterrents in the military arsenals of both India and Pakistan the arms race between them would cool down, because nuclear deterrents would remove their mutual phobia and make war a permanent no-option for them. Extensive damages and massive loss of human lives resulting from a nuclear holocaust can not be a choice to either of the two parties. The existing nuclear states should recognize India's and Pakistan's rights to acquire nuclear weapons and help stabilize the security system of the region.

The open or declared possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan would most likely make the smaller states feel more secure. The smaller South Asian states, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka in particular, are currently at odds with India and they usually follow a strategy of distancing themselves from India. In both economic and political spheres they prefer to keep Indian contact to the minimum, while attempting to diversify their contact with countries outside the region. In contrast, relations of the smaller states with Pakistan are perceivably good and considered to be conducive to strengthen their common position vis-a-vis India. Moreover, Pakistan's role is perceived as a counter-balance and check on Indian hegemonistic ambition in the region. It also gives them the minimum opportunity to achieving autonomy of action in domestic and regional affairs. As a result, a nuclear Pakistan, as also India, may be positive in two ways. It would, on the one hand, ease tensions between the smaller states and India as the latter would cease to remain a grave threat to their security and, on the other, it would help remove the rationale for increasing expenditure on defence by the smaller states. However, the intention is not to deemphasize the national security preparedness of these states but to make the point clear that security preparedness by these states are required to get strengthened in the socio-economic sectors. The primacy of the socio-economic sectors would ultimately result in downgrading the unnecessary expenditure in the military sector. And thus arms race stability can be achieved in the region.