Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury

SECURITY CHALLENGES OF SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES IN THE COMING DECADE : AN OVERVIEW

Abstract

Since the nuclear explosion by India and Pakistan in May 1998, their old rivalry has taken a new dimension. While Kashmir issue is a major hurdle to normalisation of their relations, the inadvertent or accidental use of nuclear weapons is a clear danger. At another level, sectarian violence and religious fanaticism, poverty and illiteracy, an increasing gap between rich and poor are threatening the states structures in South Asia. On the political front, democratic political institutions need to be strengthened throughout South Asia, and especially in Pakistan. Any attempt to discredit or destabilise Pakistan will not only help the radical forces in that country, it will threaten stability of India as well. South Asian states should encourage democratic, secular values in the socio-political life that will curb religious extremism and ultra-nationalism. Drugs and arms trafficking, and organised crime can be combated only by a combined efforts of all states. SAARC could play an important role in strengthening regional security. Regional economic integration will deter war and encourage peaceful conflict resolution. SAARC could encourage military co-operation within member states. This may not be immediately feasible, but as the relationship between states normalises, the benefits become obvious.

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INTRODUCTION

The nations of South Asia[1] share geographical contiguity, and historical, cultural and religious ties. However, the region has a long history of war and insurgency, civil strife and ethnic rivalry. India and Pakistan, the two biggest nations of South Asia, have fought three wars in the last fifty years. Nuclear explosions by the two in May 1998 removed lingering doubts about their nuclear capability. The two are now engaged in a missile race with no end in sight. A general war between India and Pakistan could escalate into a nuclear Armageddon. While the focus had been on the Indo-Pak rivalry, new threats are posing serious security challenges to the entire region. Ethnic conflict, sectarian violence and religious fanaticism are on the rise. Poverty and illiteracy, an increasing gap between rich and poor, violence between castes and creeds are posing threats to the state and society. The new century holds a lot of promise as well as perils. The people of South Asia could enjoy unprecedented peace and prosperity in the next century, but they could as well slide into the abyss of wars and conflicts. To preserve peace in South Asia, one needs to study the security challenges that the countries are likely to face in the future.

The paper will define national security and explain the changing concept in the emerging world order. It will then examine the nature of the security threats that the South Asian countries are likely to face in the coming decade and would argue that those could best be faced regionally. The paper will postulate that peace and security lies in greater regional cooperation in the form of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

SECURITY: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Security is a basic human need. There will be no human progress without a peaceful, secure society. The state provides a

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[1] South Asia, previously known as the Indian sub-continent, includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.

peaceful society, an environment free from external and internal threats. The state is to prepare against, and if needed resist by force, any group or individual that threatens the state's or its citizens' security. National security is the collective security aspiration of the state's citizens. Conventionally, national security is defined as the immunity of a nation from external aggression. The state ensures national security by having a military force capable of defending its territorial boundary and ensuring the exercise of sovereign authority.

Most of the post-WWII Western literature on security deals with the external threat scenario. During Cold War period, national security meant the defence of the national territory and state sovereignty. Amidst unprecedented economic prosperity, the countries of Europe and North America did not face serious internal disturbances or instability. *"As a result, perception of security and insecurity in the West always revolved round the external factor, and the various dimensions attached to it."*[2]

Many countries of Asia and Africa had large, well-equipped military, maintained at an enormous cost, ready to fight a war that never came. In fact, it can be argued that powerful military forces often became a threat to the very state that they were supposed to protect. Talukder Maniruzzaman suggests that in the developing countries *"higher per capita arms transfers relative to population and GNP may be a critical factor not only in the occurrence of military coups, but in prolonging military rule."*[3] It is argued that over militarisation led to long periods of military rule in Pakistan that ultimately led to her breakup in 1971. The recent coup there once again demonstrates the vulnerability of the state to military intervention. Too much military hardware and not much food or other social services has created state of anarchy in countries such as

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[2] Md. Nuruzzaman, "National Security of Bangladesh: Challenges and Options", *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 12, No.3, Jul 1991, BIISS, Dhaka, 1991, p. 370.

[3] Talukder Maniruzzaman, "Arms Transfers, Militrary Coups, and Military Rule in Developing States", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 1992, Sage Publications Inc, New Heaven, USA, p. 751.

Somalia, Zaire, Rwanda and Liberia. Robert S. MacNamara, ex-Secretary of Defence, USA and later President of the World Bank, said, *"It is increasingly being realised that it is poverty, not the lack of military hardware that is responsible for insecurity across the southern half of the planet."*[4] On the defence versus development dichotomy in the developing countries, he had this to say:

> Security means development. Security is not military hardware, though it may include it, security is not military force, though it may involve it, security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it. Security is development and without development there can be no security."[5]

Today, national security means not only immunity against foreign aggression or intervention, it also includes an absence of hunger and disease, poverty and illiteracy. National security policy must ensure not only the physical protection of the state; it must provide a framework for the growth of a healthy, progressive and democratic society. Political leaders and policy makers have to carefully balance the country's defence and social needs. This has always been a difficult task. The ruling elite in the developing countries often used the military to consolidate their position. *"Despite the rhetoric of many third world leaders, the sense of insecurity from which these states – and more particularly their regimes – suffer emanates to a substantial extent from within their boundaries rather than from outside."*[6] In the developing countries, the military generally have a greater say in the policy making process than the poor. Meagre state resources, therefore, find their ways more easily into the barracks than to the slums. It is an irony that the developing countries spend a greater percentage of their wealth on the military than the developed countries. The table below illustrates this point further.

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[4] Robert S. MacNamara, *The Essence of Security,* Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 149.

[5] *Ibid*, p.149.

[6] Mohammad Ayoob, "Security in the Third World: the Worm about to Turn?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No.1 Winter 1983/84, p. 43 cited in Md Nuruzzaman, *op. cit*, p. 371.

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

Country	Defence Budget			Defence Budget as % of GDP		
	1985	1996	1997	1985	1996	1997
United Kingdom	$45.4b	$35.26b	$35.74b	5.2	3.0	2.8
France	$46.5b	$47.4b	$41.5b	4.0	3.3	3.0
Canada	$11.14b	$8.6b	$7.75b	2.2	1.4	1.3
India	$8.9b	$12.07b	$12.8b	3.0	3.3	3.3
Pakistan	$2.95b	$3.65b	$3.50b	6.9	5.9	5.8
Sri Lanka	$325m	$887m	$898m	3.8	6.3	6.1
Bangladesh	$356m	$554m	$593m	1.4	1.7	1.9

Source: *The Military Balance 1998/99*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1998, p.295-297

SOUTH ASIAN SECURITY SCENE

Socio-Political Trends

The societies and politics of South Asia are in the midst of change. Lack of good governance, weak administrative infrastructures and corruption are commonplace throughout South Asia. Just when the prospect of parliamentary democracy was getting brighter, the coup in Pakistan has thrown the wheel backward. South Asian societies continue to remain divided along caste and creed, communal and ethnic lines. Religious and ethnic minorities suffer discrimination and apathy. The politicians use religious and cultural differences among people to advance their narrow political ends. Minority discontent often explodes into armed insurgency. Endemic poverty is another common feature throughout South Asia. A large proportion of the world's poor is concentrated here; almost half the populations live below the poverty line. According to the UN Human Development Index of 1999, among 174 countries of the world, India and Pakistan rank 132, 138

respectively, compared to 77 for Philippines, 67 for Thailand and 56 for Malaysia. The HDI of Bangladesh had been falling; it was 143 in 1997, 147 in 1998 and 150 in 1999.[7]

Despite poor showing in human development, there have been positive gains too. Death and birth rates are falling and personal income and life expectancy are rising. The economic growth rate is slowly, but steadily rising too. Global communication network, Internet, and efficient transportation systems have greatly increased human mobility and economic activities. Trade and commerce with the outside world is expanding. South Asian states have been gradually opening up to the world markets. However, regional cooperation is yet to develop to any significant degree. Despite great geographical advantage and economic viability, regional economic cooperation falters mainly due to mistrust and misgivings between the member states. SAARC had been in operation since 1985, but intra-regional trade within SAARC countries accounts for only 3% of the total trading, the rest i.e. 97% of the trade occurs with countries outside of SAARC.[8]

Geo-political Scene

During the Cold War, Pakistan entered in a military alliance with the USA, while India established close military link with the USSR. Today, India is the preeminent power in the region – a status that she cherished for long. Her smaller neighbours, especially Pakistan, resent this. Neighbours feel threatened by India's diplomatic and military muscles. India insists on dealing with each neighbour bilaterally, whereas the neighbours feel more secure in multilateral arrangements. It is a fact of geography that India is much bigger than all the other six nations combined. No South Asian country borders on one another, but all share

[7] *UNDP World Report 1999,* available in the UNDP Website in the Internet.

[8] P.R. Chari, "National Security and Regional Cooperation: The Case of South Asia", in Iftekharuzzaman (ed.), *Regional Economic Trends and South Asian Security,* University Press Ltd, Dhaka, 1997, p.193.

borders with India. India is in the centre with others on the periphery. India perceives herself as the power destined to bring about stability to the region. On the other hand, India's neighbours are apprehensive of her hegemonic design.[9] This contradiction had shaped the security perspectives of South Asian countries.

Impact of Indo-Pak Rivalry on Regional Security

We need to delve into recent history to better appreciate security perceptions of India and Pakistan. In August 1947, the British partitioned colonial India into two independent states of India and Pakistan. Pakistan, a Muslim majority state, was based on the "Two-nation Theory."[10] The idea of partition was accepted as a compromise solution for maintaining communal harmony between two major communities – the Hindus and Muslims. But India and Pakistan soon locked themselves in conflicts. Among others, the Kashmir issue proved to be the most intractable. The two wars over Kashmir in 1948 and 1965 ended in stalemate. In the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, India actively supported Bangladesh. That war ended with a victory for India and dismemberment of Pakistan. To the Pakistani psyche, the war in 1971 was an act of subversion by India to cut Pakistan down to size. Despite occasional thaws, Indo-Pak relations remain cool, if not frigid. India and Pakistan continue to view each other as their principal security threat.

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9   See, ex-Indian P.M., P.V. Narashimha Rao's statement on defence policy in the Parliament on 16 May 1995, cited by Jaswant Singh, *National Security: An Outline of Our Concern*, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 59-60.

10 M. A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was the proponent of the "Two-nation Theory." He claimed that the Hindus and Muslims are two nations because of their religious belief and cultural differences. Thus, Pakistan was the first nation-state born based on religion, the only other being Israel.

India's Security Perspective

India's security perspective is focused primarily on Pakistan and China. Pakistan is generally considered as the principal threat because of her territorial claim on Kashmir, which presents a 50-year history of conflicts and continued nuclear and conventional arms buildup. In the past, India accused Pakistan of supporting the separatists in the Punjab. India now accuses Pakistan of harbouring, training and arming the Kashmiri militants. Kashmir continues to be the focal point of Indo-Pak rivalry. China comes up next because of the border dispute, occupation of territory in Kashmir (Aksai Chin), Chinese military and diplomatic support to Pakistan, deployment of nuclear-tipped missiles in Tibet and competing economic and political interest. Looking beyond the immediate future, most analysts identify China as the main challenge to India's foreign and security policy objectives.[11] George Fernandes, India's Defence Minister, echoed this view in May 1998 while justifying Indian nuclear tests.[12] Rising Islamic fundamentalism around India's western flanks is a matter of concern for India who has more than 120 million Muslims within its populace. Continuing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, alleged illegal migration from Bangladesh,[13] cross-border movement of insurgents and criminals also figure in the India's external security agenda. Commenting on the insurgency in the NE Indian states, Dr. S.P. De writes, *"The fundamental problem confronting the north-eastern states today have their roots in the massive stream of demographic flow from Bangladesh into Assam ever since the partition of the sub-continent."*[14]

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[11] For further details, see, K. Subrahmanyam, "Nuclear India", *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 13(2), April-June 1998, Lancer Publishers, pp. 8-18.

[12] *Time*, May 25 1998, p. 32, and *Newsweek*, May 25 1998, p.31.

[13] Jaswant Singh, *National Security: An Outline of Our Concern*, op. cit., p. 48.

[14] S.P. De, "Demographic Flow from Bangladesh", *Indian Defence Review*, Vol 14(3), July-Sep 1999, Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, p. 76.

Armed insurgencies in various states of India and isolation of ethnic and religious minorities from the mainstream Indian politico-social life are serious threats to national integration. India's secular ideology is challenged by the forces of the nationalist *Hindutva* or Hinduism. Communalism is threatening the secular structure of the multi-religious nation. Deteriorating law and order, criminalisation of politics, the growth of crime syndicates, and growing influx of arms and drugs into the society are some of the domestic issues that will be of serious security concern for India in the next decades.[15] Indian defence and foreign policy planners wish to see India emerge as a major power by the first quarter of the next century. K. Subrahmanyam stated back in the 1980s:

> This country with its population, size, resources and industrial output will be a dominant country in the region just as the US, Soviet Union and China happen to be in their respective areas. This is just a fact of geography, economics and technology.[16]

The strategic frontier for India in the 21st Century drawn by an Indian foreign policy expert include all landmass and seas lying in South East Asia, Central Asia including Tibet, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean.[17] Such power projection will, however, remain a pipe dream unless India could resolve domestic insecurities.

Security Perspective of Pakistan

Pakistan's security perspective is focused on her relationship with India and particularly on Kashmir. Minor skirmishes between Indian and

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[15] For a detailed analysis, see, J.N. Dixit, "India's Security Concern and Their impact on Foreign Policy", *Indian Foreign Policy Agenda for the 21st Century*, Vol. 1, Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 143-158.

[16] K.Subrahmanyam, *Indian Security Perspectives,* ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 214.

[17] A. K. Ray, "For a Twenty-First Century Foreign Policy", *Indian Defence Review*, Vol 14(3), op. cit., p. 46.

Pakistani forces often flare up in Kashmir along the tortuous, undemarcated border known as the Line of Control (LoC). Kashmir has captured international headline since 1990, when the demand for independence by the Kashmiris turned into an armed uprising. Both India and Pakistan are opposed to an independent Kashmir. While India accuses Pakistan of supporting the insurgents, Pakistan denies direct involvement, but claims to provide 'moral' support. There is, however, evidence to suggest that *'Mujahedin'* militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and beyond are joining in the *"Holy Jehad."*

Sustained and heavy military expenditure since independence had put a heavy burden on Pakistan's economy and curtailed resources available for the social sectors. The military's omnipresence in national life hinders growth of democratic traditions and institutions in Pakistan. Repeated coups and military intervention in the political process is a case in point. Since the "Two-nation Theory" was repudiated in 1971, Pakistan is yet to find a suitable platform for nationhood. Spillover effect of the Taleban movement of Afghanistan is visible in the domestic affairs. *"The folly of Islamabad's support for Islamic militants like the Taleban was already apparent in Punjab, where armed Sunni extremist groups have actively targeted Pakistani Shi'ites and Iranian diplomats. ...Pakistani disciples of the Taleban took control of pockets of the NWFP, imposing their version of Islamic justice."*[18] In longer term, patronising the militants could seriously hamper Pakistan's attempt to institutionalise democracy and develop a modern nation-state.

Despite continuing showdown in Kashmir, General Musharraf, Pakistan's Army Chief and concurrently the Head of the Government, opined that nuclear weapons had restored the strategic balance between the two countries and reduced the possibilities of a full-scale war. He stressed the need for Pakistan to develop into a responsible nuclear power, ensure nuclear non-proliferation, and devise a fail-safe nuclear command structure. He identified the main threat to the security of

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[18] *Strategic Survey 1998/99*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1999, p. 223.

Pakistan as stemming from internal sources. These were economic breakdown, deteriorating law and order situation in the country, ethnic conflict in Sind and sectarian violence in the Punjab.[19]

Security Perspective of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's security perspective has largely been Indo-centric. Indo-Bangladesh relations deteriorated after the military coup in Dhaka in August 1975. The military rulers nurtured anti-India and pro-China policies to gain support of the religious right and the Marxist left. Meanwhile, India responded with the commissioning of the Farakka barrage on the river Ganges. Unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water posed an ecological disaster and threatened the economic viability of Bangladesh. Another major issue was the alleged Indian support for the insurgents in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Since the signing of the Ganges Water Treaty in 1996 and the CHT Peace Accord in 1998, the bilateral relationship is on a high note again. There are outstanding issues like trade imbalance, illegal migrants, cross-border insurgency, demarcation of the maritime boundary, etc.; all these issues have security implications for the future.

Bangladesh's short border with Myanmar has the potential for future conflict. The military junta in Myanmar often diverts the attention of the people from domestic troubles to external threats. Myanmar's record on minority issue is particularly bleak. The ethnic Muslim minority Rohingyas, forced into Bangladesh, creates pressure on Bangladesh's economy and social order. The exclusive economic zone between Myanmar and Bangladesh are not yet delineated; both countries claim a substantial portion of the Bay of Bengal and the claims overlap. Oil and gas exploration and fishing rights in the disputed sea could create tension in future between the two countries. The end of military dictatorship and

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[19] Gen. Pervez Musharraf, "Security Perspectives of Pakistan", a paper presented at a seminar organised by The English Speaking Union in Karachi on 12 April, 1999, quoted by Farook Choudhury, "Pakistan and Taleban", *The Daily Prothom Alo*, Dhaka, 13 May 1999, p. 6.

the establishment of democracy in Myanmar might improve Bangladesh-Myanmar relations and reduce the possibility of armed conflict.

Security Perspective of Sri Lanka

The relations between Sri Lanka and India soured soon after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 on the question of the citizenship of nearly a million Tamils of Indian origin. However, by 1974, the issue was resolved through negotiations. The minority Tamil uprising for a separate state, which started in the early 1980s, was a backlash to the majority Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism. Sri Lanka often accused India of harbouring and assisting the insurgents. Sri Lanka meanwhile developed, much to India's dislike, military relationships with Pakistan and China. Bilateral relations touched its nadir on 4 June 1987 when the Indian Air Force (IAF) repeatedly violated Sri Lanka's airspace. The IAF missions were apparently to drop humanitarian supplies for the civilians trapped due to war. In fact, those were to dissuade Sri Lanka from seeking military help from countries inimical to India.

India's experience with the Tamil insurgents has not been happy either. The Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) stationed in Sri Lanka from July 1987 until March 1990 was caught in the quagmire of the civil war and suffered heavy casualties. "Tamil Tigers" killed Rajiv Gandhi, an ex-Prime Minister of India, in a suicide bomb attack in May 1991. Tamil insurgency is the principal security concern for Sri Lanka. Peace overtures by successive governments in Colombo have failed to arrive at an understanding with the rebels. The economic and political future of Sri Lanka is closely connected to a permanent solution of the Tamil problem.[20]

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[20] For details of Indo-Sri Lanka relations, see P. Sahadevan, "India and Sri Lanka" *Indian Foreign Policy: Agenda for the 21st Century*, Vol. 2, Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 161-195.

Security Perspectives of Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives

India considers Nepal and Bhutan as buffer states between her and China. She would not like an increase of Chinese influence in either country. Nepal does a tight-rope-walking act: maintaining friendly relations with two giant neighbours, India and China, with the aim of not offending either. Nepal is faced with a long-simmering Maoist guerilla movement in the South. The insurgency could intensify in future unless the government effectively addresses socio-economic issues. In Bhutan too, there is a growing desire for democratic reforms. It would be interesting to see how the absolute monarchy evolves in future to adjust to the changing world.

Sitting in the middle of the Arabian Sea, Maldives has only a small police force to look after internal security. Maldives has no conflict or territorial dispute with anyone. However, Maldives' security was threatened in November 1988 when a group of Tamil mercenaries landed on the shore and tried to topple the government. India, responding to a request from Maldives, sent a contingent of paratroopers, who quickly restored order. This incident highlighted two security issues: the vulnerability of a microstate to attack from organised criminal gangs, and the dependence of these states on an external power for security.

Threat of Military Conflicts

A war between India and her neighbours, other than Pakistan, is highly unlikely now, or in the future. What is the basis of this hypothesis? First, the power asymmetry between India and these countries is so acute that it would be irrational for the smaller countries to go to war with India. On the same logic, there is no rationale behind India's attacking them. India could achieve her objectives in respect of these countries without resorting to war. Clausewitz defined war as "a mere continuation of policy by other means."[21] A nation goes to war when diplomacy fails. India enjoys such overwhelming superiority in

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[21] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Penguin Books Ltd, England, 1985, p. 119.

the diplomatic arena that resorting to war will be unnecessary. Second, India has no major border dispute with smaller neighbours. India's maritime boundary with Sri Lanka and Maldives, and land boundary with Nepal and Bhutan are demarcated. Except for short, undemarcated stretches of about 6.5 km, the whole of 4000 km Indo-Bangladesh border is also demarcated.[22] The two most serious issues between India and Bangladesh e.g., the sharing of the Ganges water and the insurgency in the CHT have been peacefully resolved. Although the maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh is yet to be demarcated, the national positions are not too divergent to exclude a diplomatic solution. The possibility of a war between India, and smaller neighbours are, therefore, highly unlikely.

The Kashmir dispute is the only issue that could escalate into a war between India and Pakistan. The conventional military balance between India and Pakistan is about 3:1 in India's favour,[23] but considering India's far longer land and maritime boundary and especially if the China factor is added, the forces in the field even out. In a limited battle such as in Kashmir or even in Punjab, Pakistan can hold out against India. Since India and Pakistan became nuclear weapon states, there has been a new power equation between the two. The conventional military edge that India enjoyed for so long has been counterbalanced by the nuclear "Balance of Terror." If neither side can hope to win, there will be no war. Therefore, a war between Pakistan and India is unlikely. This hypothesis is, of course, based on both countries acting rationally, but we know in the real world that is not often the case.

What is the possibility of a war between India and China? There was a border war between the two in 1962. The border between India and China runs along the Himalayas. It is impossible to fight a long

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[22] Mustafa Kamal, "Bajpayee's Visit Creates New Opportunities for Cooperation", A report on Indian. P.M's visit to Bangladesh, *The Daily Prothom Alo*, Dhaka, 22 June, 1999, p. 12.

[23] *The Military Balance 1998/99*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1999, pp. 146-164.

conventional battle in the Himalayas. In a hypothetical Indo-China war, the Chinese occupying the high grounds will have initial advantage, but once they reach the plains of India, the Chinese would be extremely vulnerable. Their supply lines would be tenuous and uncertain; without armour, heavy artillery and air support, which Indians will have in plenty, the Chinese might suffer defeat. With the nuclear weapons and the *Agni II* ballistic missiles now in place, the Indians have achieved a credible deterrence. Since 1962, both sides respected the line of control (LoC) along Indo-China border. India has *de facto* accepted the Chinese occupation of Aksai Chin and the Chinese have apparently reconciled to the McMahon Line[24] as the India-China border. They are actively engaged in improving bilateral relations. The possibility of a war, in future, between India and China is unlikely.

The possibility of an armed conflict between Myanmar and Bangladesh cannot be ruled out in future. Although the land boundary is demarcated, the maritime boundary, drug trafficking or refugee issues could be the sources of conflict. However, these conflicts are unlikely to develop into a general war between the two countries. Although there is little possibility of a general war in South Asia, a number of unresolved security issues will need to be addressed in future.

Post-Nuclear South Asia

There are new uncertainties in post-nuclear South Asia. India and Pakistan must urgently take Confidence Building Measures (CBM) and develop a secure nuclear command and control (C2) structure to ensure that there is no accidental or unauthorised release of nuclear weapons.

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[24] Part of the border, which runs from Bhutan to the tri-junction of China-Burma-India border, was formalised at a tripartite conference held at Simla in 1913-14. The borderline, drawn on a large-scale map, came to be known as MacMahon Line after the name of the British Indian representative at the conference. It now forms the border between China (Tibet) and the Indian state of Arunachal. Quoted from Dr S.S. Bindra, *India and Her Neighbours,* Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 99-100.

Establishment of "Hot Line" between the two heads of governments and the declaration not to attack each other's nuclear sites are steps in the right direction. Other CBMs could be: signing a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons, deploying military observers during exercises, arranging security seminars, offering training courses in each other's country, sending military goodwill missions, reduction of conventional forces etc.[25] K. Subrahmanyam writes, *"Since India and Pakistan are nuclear neighbours and are not friends, it is imperative that the two countries should be in continuous communication at the highest levei."*[26] He urges India to start a negotiating process with Pakistan for nuclear risk reduction and war avoidance. In August 1999, the Indian government released a draft nuclear doctrine that called for control of nuclear weapons at the highest political authority, no first use of nuclear weapons, non-use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear power etc. These will to some extent remove the fear and uncertainties that now prevail in the region.

The C2 of nuclear weapons is going to be problematic for Pakistan. First, Pakistan's nuclear threshold is going to be lower because of her conventional inferiority vis-à-vis India. Pakistan is, therefore, unwilling to declare a no-first-use policy. Second, democratic institutions in Pakistan are fragile. The political control of the military is tenuous at best. There is a big question mark on who controls and authorises the release of the nuclear weapons. Since the October 1999 coup, Pakistan has become the first country in the world where the nuclear button is in the hand of a military commander who is also the executive head. The world has to contend with this unique and dangerous situation. Lastly, the Islamic militants play an uncertain role in the Pakistani politics. During the recent Kargil crisis, the Pakistan government, in effect, admitted that the militants operate outside the control of the government. If the militants seize power in Pakistan, the danger of nuclear

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[25] P. R. Chari, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[26] K.Subrahmanyam, *Indian Defence Review, op. cit.*, p. 18.

proliferation to radical Muslim countries will increase. Strategic Survey reports:

> Everyday life in Pakistan must contend with political, sectarian and criminal violence at a level never seen before. ...Against this dismal background of failure of existing institutions and tensions involving the military and Islamic authoritarians there is a risk that the vestiges of parliamentary democracy will be undermined. Nuclear weapons are of no use against this threat. [27]

Kashmir Problem

The recent conflict in Kargil area once more reminds us of the danger inherent in this issue. Pakistan wants a plebiscite on whether the Kashmiris want to join Pakistan or India. India claims the whole of Kashmir, but would probably agree on the LoC, with minor adjustments, being declared the international border. Meanwhile, Kashmiri insurgents want an independent state. Pakistan wants to internationalise the issue whereas India wants bilateral discussion; both seeking advantage in negotiation. India wants to go ahead with bilateral and regional cooperation while the Kashmir issue can remain frozen for future, whereas Pakistan views Kashmir issue as the key to all future cooperation and normalisation of relations. Both nations seem adamant and intractable in their positions. The present stalemate along the LoC will continue for quite some time. None can predict the final settlement, but at present, more than a billion South Asians are hostage to the Kashmir problem. It is a sad commentary on the state of leadership and shortsightedness of the politicians. While Kashmir remains at the focus, a number of other security issues would be causing increasing concern in the coming decades.

Internal Security Issues

Insurgency by various ethnic minorities is the most critical internal security issue in South Asia. 'Khalistan' movement for an independent

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[27] *Strategic Survey 1998/99, op. cit.*, p. 231.

Sikh state in the Indian Punjab was suppressed after much bloodshed. A number of ethnic minorities in India's Northeast have been fighting for decades for greater autonomy or outright independence. The Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka has virtually cut off the country's northeastern part from the rest. In Pakistan, the Muslim refugees from India who form a majority in the urban centres of Sind have been engaged in urban terrorism for nearly two decades. The Shia-Sunni divide is threatening the very core of the Pakistani nationhood. The Taleban militias are virtually masters in the Northwestern Pakistan. The Maoist rebels are engaged in a murderous campaign in the Nepalese countryside. A negotiated settlement of the quarter century-old insurgency in the CHT in Bangladesh could be a model for others. A purely military solution of insurgency is elusive. While military pressure persuades the insurgents to negotiate, a political solution must ultimately be found that would satisfy all sides. It will be a challenge to the politicians to bring the insurgents to the negotiating table and more importantly, how to address genuine grievances of the ethnic and religious minorities. The issue of national integration must be addressed democratically – the aim is not to impose the will of the majority, but to accommodate the interests of the minority.

Encouraging insurgency in the neighbour's backyard is a common problem in South Asia that vitiates inter-state relations. Thus, while India complains of Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir, Pakistan alleges Indian hands in Sind. While Bangladesh blamed India for harbouring Chakma insurgents, India accused Bangladesh of providing sanctuaries to guerilla groups of the northeastern states. Considering the adversarial relationships in South Asia, there is and was probably some truth in the allegations and counter-allegations. However, further breakup of the state system is not in the interest of the region. Baladas Ghosal writes:

> For the safety and security of the people of the South Asian region, there is no alternative to the existing international borders and the present state structures. ...What is needed is not the fragmentation of

states, but the decentralisation and devolution of power to the constituent units, a better record of communication on the part of the state with its sectarian and ethnic minorities.[28]

Arms and drugs trafficking are common security threats to South Asian countries. They often go hand in hand with insurgency, terrorism and organised crime. South Asia is positioned between the "Golden Crescent" and the "Golden Triangle" – two major narcotic growing areas. The drug menace is slowly creeping into the South Asian societies. The Pakistan Army has been engaged in a drug-war for quite some time. Recently, Bangladesh Army units were committed to counter-drug operations in the CHT. Drug lords generally have close connection with the establishment and often operate with impunity. Arms smuggling and its proliferation in the criminal world are common phenomena throughout the region. In India, Vohra Committee report stated:

> All over India crime syndicates have become a law unto themselves... a nexus between the criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians have come out clearly in various parts of the country. The existing criminal law system is unable to deal with activities of the Mafia.[29]

The problem is most acute in Pakistan where, since the Afghan war, sophisticated weapons are openly traded.[30] National borders offer the criminals opportunities to engage in cross-border terrorism, extortion, and smuggling and to seek sanctuary. Law enforcement agencies, including regional armed forces, will have to work together to combat the menacing threat of drug and arms trafficking and organised crime. The forces will have to coordinate operations, exchange intelligence and deny cross-border sanctuaries to the criminals if the evils are to be rooted out.

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[28]   Baladas Ghosal, "South Asian Security Dynamics: Domestic and Internal Factors, The Case of India", in Iftekharuzzaman (ed.), *South Asia's Security: Primacy of Internal Dimension*, BIISS, Dhaka, 1994, pp. 62-63.

[29]   Jaswant Singh, *op. cit.*, p.49.

[30]   For details of proliferation of small arms in Pakistan see Jaswant Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

The rise of religious fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism is a threat to peace and liberal democracy. We see increasing influence of the Islamic religious groups in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The declaration of Islam as a state religion in Bangladesh and introduction of *Sharia* court in Pakistan are due to pressures from the Islamic radicals. Opposing Muslim sectarian groups are engaged in violent clashes in Pakistan. In India, the rise of Hindu nationalism is a challenge to secular and multi-racial character of the state. It is increasingly alienating ethnic and religious minorities from the mainstream. In Sri Lanka too, extreme Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism is the root cause of alienating the Tamils. The countries and the civil societies in South Asia will have to take concerted actions to arrest the rise of religious fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism. Only a liberal democratic society can ensure peace and progress in the South Asia's religious, ethnic and cultural mosaic.

Non-Military Security Issues

While military issues are in the limelight, many non-military issues will be vital to the security of states in the 21st Century. Growing population is a major threat for the security of South Asian states. Despite a fall in birth and fertility rate, South Asian populations will continue to grow until the middle of the next century. Additional population will exert tremendous pressure on the limited state and natural resources. The region will have to cater to food, clothing, shelter, schools and hospitals for almost half a billion additional mouths that will be added within the next fifty years. Within the next twenty-five years, India's population will exceed that of China. Already, Bangladesh is experiencing tremendous population pressure. Its ramifications on the society in the form of environmental degradation, deteriorating law and order, breakdown of the family values and traditional ties, unemployment and crime is evident. India alleges illegal migration of Bangladeshis and Nepalese into India; illegal migration is becoming a security issue. As each country grapples with limited resources and jobs become scarce, the issue of illegal migrants will be accentuated.

Environmental degradation is threatening the future well-being of the region.   Deforestation and desertification, soil erosion and riverbed siltation, global warming and sea level rise, water and air pollution are some of the issues that present real-life security issues to the people of South Asia. For example, if the sea rises by one meter, nearly one fifth of Bangladesh will go under water. Supply and availability of fresh water could become a major source of tension in future. As the demand multiplies and the water supply becomes scarce, there will be increasing tension not only between states, but also within the state between different regions and between different classes of users.   Arsenic pollution of groundwater is threatening the life of millions in Bangladesh and India.   Poor people are the first victims of environmental degradation; environmental issues are, therefore, not high on governments' agenda. For people who are already living on the edge, the concept of state, sovereignty and security means very little. If security means a life free from danger, then the governments in South Asia will have to consider environmental degradation as a vital security issue and treat it in that manner.

SAARC AND REGIONAL SECURITY

Economic Cooperation under SAARC

SAARC is involved in diverse areas such as trade and commerce, industries and investment, transportation and communication, rural and urban development, environment and ecology, culture and education, etc. The South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) has been signed and by the year 2005, it will be upgraded to South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). India's initial reluctance to SAARC has now changed into one of enthusiastic participation. Strengthening the SAARC is the stated policy of the government and the opposition in India. India now realises that by strengthening regional cooperation, all the nations gain and India stands to gain the maximum. Nancy Jetley writes, *"India has a long-term stakes in peace and cooperation in the region. India's credibility outside the region would depend not only on*

its own power profile, but also on its ability to carry its South Asian neighbours with it in a cooperative framework."[31] It is not a zero sum game, rather a win-win situation.

Addressing the Security Issues

SAARC can now address many non-military security issues that pose common dangers to all. Poverty alleviation, environmental degradation, arms and drug trafficking, population planning, health and disease control etc. are already in the SAARC agenda and they all have security connotations. If the purpose of security is peace then peace can best be maintained by closer economic integration of South Asia. The European Union has shown the way. It was said that the business community has made it impossible for the politicians to go to war in Western Europe. The economic ties within the EU are so intricate that a war between members is currently inconceivable. There is a great future for economic integration of South Asia too. The region is geographically contiguous and had a unified economy until partition in 1947. The road and railway transport systems can easily be integrated to allow fast and efficient passage of goods and passengers across the region. South Asian communication networks will be part of a greater Trans-Asian Railway and Highway network. Customs and tariff barriers within the region should be minimised. There is a huge potential for hydroelectricity generation in Nepal, Bhutan and Northern Pakistan. Electricity generated there could mitigate acute shortage in North India and Bangladesh. Similarly, Pakistan and Bangladesh could export gas or gas based products to India. South Asian Integrated Power and Gas Grids should be constructed that will ultimately be connected to the planned Trans-Asian Power and Gas Grids. All these need huge foreign investment. Peace and tranquility is, of course, a pre-requisite for attracting foreign investment. A bigger, vibrant and peaceful South

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[31] Nancy Jetley, "SAARC: Looking Ahead", *Indian Foreign Policy: Agenda for the 21st Century*, Vol.2, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Asian market will attract foreign investment, boost economic activities and improve the socio-economic condition of the people.

In future, SAARC should have a defence forum to encourage defence cooperation within the member states. Except between India and Pakistan, SAARC countries are already engaged in various fields of defence cooperation. A SAARC Defence Forum could one day evolve into a common defence structure that could act as a shield against extra-regional interference. Such an arrangement would be particularly useful for microstates like Maldives who cannot afford a standing army, yet are vulnerable to external interference. The idea of common defence is not new; indeed Jinnah, Nehru and Ayub Khan at various times in history proposed it.[32] In future, the Indian and Pakistani forces could be operating together. After all, who thought that the British and French, or the Americans and Russians would be on the same side?

Improving security through regional cooperation is a common theme among the academics. Many have suggested an integration of nations much like the European Union. Kanti Bajpai, an Indian academic, writes:

> The most stable and long term path to peace is the integrative path to community-building wherein force as a means of resolving the conflict is more or less permanently absent. Convergence of South Asia's political way of life towards democracy, secularism and parliamentary institutions, while by no means irreversible, presages a unique moment in regional politics, one that should lead down the integrative path.[33]

Nilufer Choudhury of Bangladesh writes:

> It is possible to perceive this new forum as an avenue for greater interaction of states at the official and peoples' level whereby a psycho-

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[32] Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 35, 68-69.

[33] Kanti Bajpai, "Pathways to Peace in South Asia", *BIISS Journal,* Vol. 15, No. 2, April 1994, BIISS, Dhaka, 1994, p. 150.

social environment may be created leading to greater cooperation in the future and ultimately to a peaceful and stable regional environment. [34]

More and more people believe today that a lasting peace can be secured in South Asia only through greater economic cooperation, peaceful interaction, and people-to-people contact. The civil societies and the NGOs are increasingly vocal about regional peace and cooperation; politicians can no longer ignore them. As we usher in the new century, the voice of peace is growing louder everywhere.

CONCLUSIONS

National security includes, along with military protection of state, food and economic security, environmental protection, political and human rights. Whilst the threat of one country occupying another has reduced, the nations will have to deal with a host of new security issues in the coming decades. Instead of addressing various socio-political causes that are at the roots of security problems, most developing countries are seeking military solution to the issues. South Asian countries are no exception; they continue to look at the national security issues primarily from a military perspective.

The inter-state disputes in South Asia are mainly between India and her neighbours. India is the preeminent power in the region. Because of acute military and diplomatic asymmetry, there is little likelihood of a general war between India and her neighbours. However, since 1947, Kashmir had been the main obstacle to better relations between India and Pakistan. Kashmir issue started two wars, brought external powers into regional politics, and initiated an arms race that culminated into nuclearisation of both countries. It is hoped that good sense will ultimately prevail on the politicians of the two countries and a solution to the Kashmir problem will eventually be found.

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[34] Nilufar Choudhury, "Regional Approach to Security of Non-Aligned States: The Case of South Asia" *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3, July, 1988, BIISS, Dhaka, 1988, p. 258.

Nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan have given rise to new security uncertainties. The inadvertent or accidental use of nuclear weapons is a clear danger. Given the unstable political culture in Pakistan, the danger of these weapons falling into the wrong hands cannot be ruled out. While all efforts must be made to secure a fail-safe C2 system for the nuclear weapons, there must be a series of confidence building measures in place between the two states to prevent any crisis from escalating out of control. Since the coup in Pakistan, control of nuclear weapons lie in the hands of a military commander who is also the executive head. This is a dangerous situation for the whole world. Democratic political institutions need to be strengthened throughout South Asia and especially in Pakistan. India should create conditions that would allow democratic forces in Pakistan to flourish. Any attempt to discredit or destabilise Pakistan will only help the radical forces in that country.

The domestic security threats that the South Asian nations are likely to face in the coming decades are common in nature and need a regional approach for their solution. Major security threats are: alienation of ethnic and religious minorities leading to violence and insurgency, drugs and arms trafficking and terrorist activities by organised criminal gangs. While each nation strives to bring the minorities into the mainstream of national life, others should stop meddling in their affairs from across the border. Interference in the internal affairs of the neighbours is a double edged-sword that has caused much instability and insecurity in South Asia. Meanwhile, all states should encourage democratic, secular values in the socio-political life that will halt the rise of religious fundamentalism and ultra-nationalism in the region. The civil societies and the NGOs could play important role in bringing the people closer. Drugs and arms trafficking, and organised crimes are common features throughout the region. The criminals have no nationality and no respect for national boundaries. Only concerted and joint efforts can eliminate these scourges. Law enforcement and security forces of South Asian countries will have to defeat them together.

SAARC is bringing the countries and people of the region closer together. The potential economic, social and political benefits are so vast that SAARC could be the catalyst to bringing the nations of South Asia into a closer union in the next century. Close economic integration of the region will prevent war and encourage foreign investment. Meanwhile, SAARC could encourage military cooperation within member states. This may not be immediately feasible due to the belligerent relationship between India and Pakistan, but as the relationship normalises, the benefits become obvious. SAARC could draw up a common defence and security structure. This would, while encouraging regional peace and security, deter external or extra-regional interference in South Asia. All nations have a role to play in improving inter-state relations, but India being the biggest partner has to take the leading role in forging unity. India must dispel the fear of hegemony from the minds of smaller neighbours. The neighbours too need to get rid of a xenophobic fear of India. It is only through peaceful, mutual cooperation that the states can combat the emerging security threats of the next century.

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