Global Change and Regional Cooperation in South Asia

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The post-war international order presently stands transformed following a series of traumatic changes both in its theoretical and practical constructs. The changes, which are geo-strategic and philosophical in dimensions, have forced reconsideration in the basic premises of post-1945 international politics with an urgent need to revisit the world's security and strategic spheres in a new perspective. The former Soviet Union's lost politico-ideological and military struggles with the United States and its ultimate disintegration together with the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe have left the world in almost a fluid situation, at least in strategic and security considerations. The end of the cold-war dominated East-West confrontation, however, stands far from shaping a 'New World Order', as propagated by the West, the US in particular. Notwithstanding it, one can hardly deny that the changes have already made some far-reaching impacts on the contours of current international politics. Perhaps, the most spectacular impact made by the changes is an approach on global scale towards a more unified world in ideological constructs and political outlook and this is taking concrete shape through democratic upsurge round the globe. The values of free market economy, on the other hand, are gradually making inroads into each and every state of the world making the message clear that capitalism remains the only viable way of development in the future.

In the Third World, the erstwhile ideological battleground of the two superpowers, the changes are gradually making telling effects both on the political and economic surface. The
long existing cold war dominated geopolitical rationale or precepts are rapidly being replaced by the imperatives for economic cooperation on regional level. The two Koreas, for example, are coming closer together forgetting their past bitterness and they have already signed a no-war pact and an agreement on reunification and cooperation. The ASEAN group in Southeast Asia is trying to mend fences with the mainland nations of Vietnam and Laos while the People’s Republic of China is currently engaged in a process of normalizing relations with its once adversaries - India in South Asia and Vietnam in Indo-China. So vast and pervasive is the economic impact of the changes that it has forced the communist regimes in China, Vietnam and even Outer Mongolia to cope with the rising demands of economic liberalization and perestroika.

The purpose of the present paper, in this backdrop, is two-fold; first, it analyses the magnitude and nature of the changes that have occurred in the world order in a swift course of time from 1989 to 1991, and second, it then examines the impact of the changes on South Asian regional cooperation.

Nature and Impact of Changes in the Global Order

The dramatic changes that have shaken up the post-war world order stretch from the collapse of socialist regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989 to the peaceful disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Precipitated by Mikhail S. Gorbachev’s grand package deal reforms, widely known as glasnost and perestrioka, in the former USSR, the changes have culminated in the declaration of a ‘New World Order’ by the United States in the wake of Iraq’s defeat in the Gulf War. The West’s ideological victory against the East, as Marxist socialism and the concept of the centrally planned economy have definitely given way to political and economic liberalism, led one Western scholar to confidently assert that this was the ‘end of history’ meaning the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.1
Geostrategic and Philosophical Dimensions of the Changes

The debate on whether history has come to an end or not, the changes have generated two very critical new dimensions in current world politics—geostrategic and philosophical.\(^2\) In geostrategic terms, Soviet power has not only crumbled down but shrunk back to the original Russian border making the once mighty existence of the Soviet Union a historical past. The dissolution of the USSR has forced the half-a-century surviving bipolar world order to embrace a unipolar character with the US in the lead. This is undisputably true in the world’s military and security arena. The post-Cold War world has in reality given the US an unconceivable opportunity to dominate the world, although in concert with its Eurasian allies during crisis time, in the way it wishes. Economically, however, the US is no longer in a position to restructure the world economic order after its own design as it once did in the aftermath of the Second World War. The gradual decline in her economic strength vis-a-vis Japan and the EC countries may in the long run reduce her dominant role in world politics.

In the changed strategic landscape of Europe, the reunification of Germany, at the strategic heart of the European continent, has again made her the new principal factor in European politics. Although inward-looking at the moment, Germany, the economic powerhouse of Europe, holds the potentials to emerge as a world military power but she is likely to take a long time to mark her active presence on the world political chessboard.

The waning of bipolarity in world politics, at the same time, has strengthened the position of two power centres in Asia—China and Japan. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union has increased the relative power position of China in world affairs. Now, it no longer faces any circumventing strategy directed either from Washington or Moscow. The strategic changes in the post-Cold War order, on the other hand, gives China a major power role in the whole Asia-Pacific region. China’s role in the security equation of the Southeast Asia region is likely to be more prominent in the future. Her recent efforts to normalize relations with Indonesia, and also Singapore and Vietnam, indicate her preparedness to play an active and positive role in
the conflicts and crisis management of the region. The continuing modernization of conventional capabilities and the expansion of the naval fleet may soon turn China into a major maritime power of the Asia-Pacific region. China's geostrategic weight in world politics would however depend on how best she can in the long run modernise her economy and armed forces.

In the Far East, the dissipation of the Soviet threat has left Japan with a real choice whether to emerge as a superpower both in its economic and military dimensions. Japan, an already economic superpower by any measure (GNP, level of technological accomplishments, international financial power, quality in human resources development, innovation in research and technology and so on), possesses the assets and attributes which can be readily converted to military power. The Japanese political leaders have so far relied on the US military for their security needs preferring to focus the nation's energies toward economic growth and productivity. But the demise of the Cold War has created two specific types of pressures on Japan's regional defence planning and outlay. First, there is a need to define new rationales for continuing with high level of defence spending, and second, there is pressure for greater burden sharing with the United States. The two pressures are such that Japan cannot possibly avoid either of them and may comply with both. While a status quo role denies Japan the opportunity to emerge as a real superpower of the 21st century, she is at the same time tied up with the question of burden sharing with the US to face eventualities like the recent Gulf war. Recent actions on Japan's part however indicate that she is trying to emerge, although in a subtle way, as a great military power. The passage of a bill in the Diet, although as a contribution to UN peace-keeping operation, allowing Japanese troops to station on foreign soil seems to offer a deal towards this direction. The bill is the first of its kind after Japan had sustained a crushing military defeat in World War II.

The philosophical dimension of the changes, on the other hand, emanates from the eventual defeat of Marxism, not to speak of its Leninist-Stalinist offshoot, in its long race against imperialistic capitalism. For about seven decades the Soviets had preached the values of socialism as something superior to
the basic tenets of capitalism which, according to them, was replete with the sense of immoral exploitation and deprivation. But socialism has ultimately failed to stand the test of time. This has given democracy a universal acceptability. Quite clearly, the philosophical tenor of the present time is dominated by western concepts of democracy and free market economy. The appeal of these two concepts seems to make impelling dent even in the twenty-first century. There also seems to develop no effective alternative to challenge the basic premises of Western philosophical precepts at least in the foreseeable future. The disgraceful departure of once powerful socialist ideology conforms to it.

Basic Premises of International Security Unchanged

The western perspective on the traumatic systemic changes is, however, dominated more by security considerations and calculation than anything else. Clearly, the Cold War dominated security perceptions lie at the root of such consideration and calculation. That hardened bipolar security perceptions now ceases to exist. Indeed, some of the basic features of post-War international security have been forced to change in a major way. A brief resume of the changing security environment compared to the post-War security situation may be relevant here.5

Objectively speaking, there has been a halt to the post-1945 polarization of world politics around two ideologically and geo-politically hostile superpowers which concentrated their attention to seeking geo-strategic preponderance in Eurasia. This has been followed by a delinking process of regional conflicts from super-power rivalry around the globe. From global viewpoint, regional conflicts are now less critical simply because with the end of superpower rivalry the importance of the conflicting Third World regional actors to the existing great powers has ended much earlier. Lastly, another important aspect of the systemic changes is the shift of public political attention from military issues to non-military ones, such as global warming, continuing environmental degradation, etc.
The general outlines of post-War international security thus stand changed in a major way. Questions may be, however, raised whether the changes stated above mark any departure from the core fundamental premises of post-War international security. Any perceptive study from a Third World perspective would suggest that the changes are far from basic to the premises of world security both in nature and orientation. This contention appears to be acceptable on a number of counts.

First, the end of communism and the concomitant demise of the Cold War do by no means herald the end of hegemonic domination in world politics. Rather the shift of power to a single centre may put more limitations to the foreign policy manoeuvrability and, by implication sovereignty, of other states, especially the Third World states. Second, despite the changes the world order in its present phase continues to remain captive to a club of few Western powerful states who shaped it following World War II. These states - the US, France and Britain in concert with Boris Yeltsin's Russian Federation which of late has opted for capitalist way of development by discarding Marxist socialism control nearly 90% of world military might and their economic prowess including Japan and Germany is formidable as well. The majority Third World states, excluding China, possess only 5% of world military power and they remain most vulnerable to Western domination as before. The economic plight of these countries, excepting the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) of East Asia, is also increasingly deteriorating reaching the level of intoleration. Third, the changes indicate an end to East-West confrontation while no breakthrough in North-South relations. The developed North still continues to ignore the causes of the impoverished South where the vast majority of humanity lives in endless sufferings. This rather suggests that the World Order, despite the changes, remains unaffected in its post-war orientation and values.

The South - the Victim of the Changes

The disappearance of the East, and also the impossibility of the reemergence of a further unified Eastern bloc, have perhaps cast the most grievous blow to the interests of the South. The dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the capitalist
reorientation of its East European allies have definitely left the Southern countries without any counterweight in their growing differences with the North. It has also reduced the possibility of material aid for them, however amount they got from the Soviet bloc in the past.

Ali Mazrui, a sophisticated exponent of this view, while equally blaming the East and the West for committing crimes against the South, categorically states that the abuses of each side were in some degree checked by the opposition of the other, and the Third World states had some opportunity to play off East against West and vice versa. The unchecked power of the West would henceforth victimize the South in relentless motion. 6

The South, not being a cohesive and unified power bloc, might increasingly fall prey to unipolar domination directed all from the centre of western gravity of power - the United States. Lacking any common ideological bond the South presently stands far from mounting any worthwhile challenges to the West. Yet Western perception, particularly the US, is shaped by possible threats arising out of the Third World to a significant extent. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990 and the subsequent war against the latter by US-led forces is often cited as a prelude to possible Third World threats of the future.

The 'Third World threat syndrome' in Western security perceptions is so dominant that it has forced thinking to develop means to deal with any eventuality in the South. There is also considerable discussion in Europe of the need to develop an independent 'out-of-area' capacity - that is, a capacity to intervene militarily in the South - possibly under the aegis of the WEU. 7 The incapacity on the part of a single power, be it the US, to meet the challenges brewing up in the South renders the development of a 'out-of-area' force necessary. This is quite alarming for the South simply because it would limit their scope of independent assertion in world politics.

The continuing US military efforts to prop up its existing arsenals seem to have definite linkages with 'Third World threat syndrome.' In the absence of a Soviet threat posing formidable challenges to Western interests the American military expenditure has not decreased in an expected way, it
rather shows an incremental growth trend. US defence expenditures in the year ending September 30, 1990 totaled approximately US $300 billion. In constant dollars it was 50% more than a decade ago, only 3% less than that at the height of the Vietnam war, and only 10% below the peak of Korean war expenditures. The five-year defence programme, presented by the US President to the Congress in January 1991, also projected a gradual decline from the 1990 levels. Moreover, defence outlays in 1996, in constant dollars, are estimated to be at least 25% higher than some 20 years earlier, under Richard Nixon, in the midst of the Cold War.

The incremental growth in American defence-expenditure, justified by Western strategists in view of new strategic realities of the world, is essentially steps towards preserving the post-War status quo ante bellum. Projection of the South as a possible threat to Western interest is but a device for it. This is also supported by continuing American military presence in the world's strategically most important regions. Although the end of communism initially showed a declining trend in US strategic values the Gulf war was immediately portrayed as the single most fulcrum to highlight the utility of US bases in the Philippines, Guam, Japan and South Korea in contrast to the planned closure or scaling down of 150 bases in ten countries for 1991. Prior to it, a significant announcement was made by the Bush Administration in April 1990 of plans to withdraw up to 15,000 troops from Asia within three years, with more reductions to follow.

Russia's Military Status Unchanged

Apart from US Cold War like military thrust in a post-Cold War world, one unexplained interesting point that deserves mention here is the military position of the former Soviet republics now regrouped under the rubric of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the Russian Federation as its natural leader. The CIS, according to Halford Mackinder's theory of geopolitics, constitutes the most important part of the heartland of the Eurasian landmass and still retains the most formidable land army throughout the world. Although its survival may be at stake in the future, the CIS clinches to a common military policy with the former Soviet army kept
under joint command. The European powers minus the US are still unable to effectively counterbalance the threat arising out of a loosely constituted CIS. Despite being inward-looking Russia still continues to occupy the most strategically advantageous region on the globe. At the present time, there is even no Eurasian power or alliance of powers to produce an effective counterweight to Russian military power.

Tendency Towards Nationalistic Assertion

Perhaps, the most spectacular impact, with a certain amount of globally spinning implications, of the changes is the tendency to nationalistic assertion by the various ethnic groups throughout the world. The massive pro-West socio-political and economic changes in East Europe were largely driven by nationalistic aspirations. The earlier Hungarian and Czechoslovakian moves towards reforms, respectively in 1956 and 1968, had obvious nationalistic impulses to get rid of Moscow, although that were cloaked in communist velvet. The recent changes, by contrast, have let loose forces of nationalism openly and Balkan has fallen the most hapless victim to it. Yugoslavia, a federal socialist state till recently, is currently passing through the severest form of nationalistic furore while Croatia and Slovenia, the two most important units of the federation, have already become independent states. Besides, simmering tensions caused by ethnic overlappings between Rumania and Hungary, and between Bulgaria and Turkey may burst at any time with the possibility of waging hot wars by the involved parties.

The East European nationalistic upsurge, although still confined to its own geographic boundaries, may have equally negative impacts upon major multi-ethnic Third World states. In South Asia, for example, India and Pakistan, already beset with ethnic turmoils, are likely to face serious ethnic unrest with overt and covert undertone for independence in the years ahead. It would be indeed difficult for them to hold the nations together unless the exploitation and domination by the major ethnic groups over the minority groups end.

Regional Conflicts: Persistence or Decline?

In the past, the unending fued between the two
superpowers greatly coloured regional conflicts in the Third World, although in most cases the conflicts had their local roots. The end of superpower rivalry was, therefore, naturally expected to cool down the conflicts and to usher in a shift from conflict to cooperation in different Third World regions. Contrarily, however, the Gulf war demonstrated that the end of the cold war does not necessarily spell the end of regional conflicts. However, in the face of momentous changes in the global order conflicts in the Third World have taken two opposite dimensions. On the one hand, conflicts in some regions are taking positive directions towards solution. The end of the Cambodian crisis in early this year and the ongoing vigorous diplomatic offensive to give Arab-Israeli peace a positive shoot in the arm are worth notable here. On the other, conflicts in some regions continue to get sharpened to the detriment of regional interests. The ceaseless pouring of arms into the Middle East and the continuing persistence of Cold War like hardened perceptions in South Asia are examples of this type. The persistence of regional conflicts at the end of the Cold War rather suggest that unless positive initiatives come from the regional actors the existing profile of conflicts could not be resolved satisfactorily. In this respect, active participation by the great powers may give an extra boost towards conflicts resolution in the Third World. The solution of the Cambodian crisis remains as a model here. The August 1990 agreement among the permanent members of the UN Security Council on a comprehensive peace plan, which subsequently received endorsement by the General Assembly, greatly facilitated the solution of the crisis in Cambodia.13

South Asian Regional Cooperation in the Changed Global Context

South Asia, although a well-defined sub-system in contemporary international system, has been for too long the only region in the world without any regional cooperative venture. The successful launching of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, in Dhaka, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, gave the region the opportunity to try positive regionalism for its constituent
members. But when SAARC was launched in 1985, let alone its mooting by the late President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh in early 1980, the unprecedented global changes definitely remained out of the vision of every one of us. Therefore, a few pertinent questions can be raised: do the changes in the global order matter for South Asia? Would the changes in any way influence the future course of SAARC? How the changes are going to influence the mutually hardened perceptions of the member-states for which actual cooperation is still remaining a distant dream for South Asia?

The changes in the global order do matter for South Asia, as also for other regions of the Third world, at least, in two ways: first, it is a signal that in the emerging unipolar world of tomorrow the maintenance of national independence and sovereignty would be harder than ever before unless concerted regional efforts are geared up to attain a considerable degree of autonomy in the economic realm to cope with the difficulties of the coming years. The acceleration of the pace of economic growth needs to be followed by corresponding domestic political changes to put into force the process of incomplete nation-building in South Asia; and second, the end of East-West confrontations amply testifies that regional conflicts in the Third World with simmering arms races, that only contribute to drying up their economic life-blood, are something more than Luxury. The South Asian actors must put an end to it if they desire to thrive and survive in the future.

The accomplishment of this objective demands that the South Asian neighbours must bridge the existing perceptual gaps and exaggerations that bedevil the entire region and frustrate efforts at cooperation on regional level.

The SAARC was originally conceived of as a vehicle to ameliorate the unacceptably gruesome economic condition of South Asia where poverty, illiteracy, malnourishment reign more supreme compared to any other regions in the world. It contains the highest concentration of poverty in the world. 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 are illiterate; the people of Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Bangladesh have one of the lowest
per capita income in the world. It was and still is thought that unless effective cooperation can be promoted South Asia can little hope to improve its economic lot. The imperatives for cooperation notwithstanding, very little progress has been achieved in this field while the possibility of institutionalization of cooperation remains a distant dream.

Strategic Harmony and Regional Cooperation

One pertinent point is why cooperative arrangement under SAARC has not till today started getting off the ground in concrete terms. To put it practically, economic cooperation hardly takes off unless there is a conducive political atmosphere. A number of factors leads to the creation of a conducive political atmosphere which may commonly be called strategic harmony. The prevailing concern here would be to see whether the global changes would contribute to the creation of strategic harmony in South Asia, the pre-requisite for effective regional cooperation.

Strategic harmony evolves through certain essential factors discernible in practical experience of states. Mohammad Ayoob, a prominent Indian scholar, has identified four such critical factors that help create strategic harmony between states of a given region,

a) Similarity in Security perceptions (i.e., common or similar threat either from internal or external sources);
b) Similarity in ideological/political perceptions (i.e., similar political systems in the cooperating states);
c) Similarity in strategic perceptions (i.e., common foreign policy orientation) and
d) a consensus regarding the role of the pivotal power within the regional grouping, a consensus shared by the pivotal power itself.

The European Community and the ASEAN are commonly cited as the prime examples of regional cooperative bodies whose members share common strategic values and consensus. Briefly speaking, in addition to compelling domestic socio-economic needs, the enormous external pressures in the form of threats - for EEC the expansionist drive of the former Soviet
Union and for ASEAN the threats posed by communist Vietnam first in conjunction with the Chinese and later with the Soviets - forced the leaders of both the organizations to minimize their differences and thus forge the required unity to engage in cooperative dealings. The need for unity gradually fostered convergence in political outlook and in turn, strategic consensus on various issues. In the case of SAARC one is encountered with compelling socio-economic needs but no externally pushed urgency for cooperation. Moreover, numerous differences in political and strategic perceptions have narrowed down the prospects for convergence in political outlook.

The original Bangladesh Working Paper on SAARC, however, made an indirect attempt to moderate the differing political and strategic perceptions of the South Asian countries. The Working Paper said:

"Seeking to promote peace and stability in the region through adherence to the principles of the United Nations and of Non-alignment. Determined to uphold respect for the principle of sovereignty, national independence, territorial integrity, non-interference in one another's internal affairs, non-use of force and peaceful settlements of disputes".18 This concern is also reflected in the SAARC Charter adopted at the first Dhaka summit of the organization in 1985.

At the time the Bangladesh working paper was circulated in May, 1980 or the SAARC was launched formally in 1985 there was no sign of strategic harmony in South Asia. There were wide gaps in perceptions and practices. There were military autocracies in Bangladesh and Pakistan, totalitarian monarchy in Nepal and Bhutan and democracy in India and Sri Lanka. The threats to security were and are perceived coming from not external but internal sources and India continues to be the common enemy of all, except Bhutan and perhaps the Maldives (the management of Bhutan's external affairs is placed under Indian guidance by a treaty concluded on August 8,1949, in which India pledged not to intervene in Bhutan's internal affairs while Bhutan agreed to be "guided" by Indian advice in its external relations. On the other hand, India's intervention in the Maldives in late 1988 to save the government from mercenary attack probably rules out India
as a threat to that island state. However the perception of India by these two small states may change at any time. The foreign policy orientation of the South Asian states has also tilted either to the East or to the West (take the case of India and Pakistan). The divergences in perceptions and practices have negatively contributed to the bolstering of a strategic schism in the region.

The strategic disharmony of South Asia that creates embroilment in the region’s interstate relations, is visible in a combination of factors some of which are: divergence in political system, nation-building strategies and defence and security policies; hierarchical power structure of the region with India at the apex and the incapacities of the neighbours to match India even in combine; and external penetration exploiting on the divergences and power-asymmetry of the region. 19

It is notable here that the in-built strategic divergences initially led India and Pakistan to view the Bangladesh move for cooperation with scepticism. Moreover, the coincidence of the move with Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 sharpened India’s scepticism a bit further. India considered that this would trap it into a pro-West strategic consensus in the context of Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and accordingly force it to endorse the proposed renewal and enhancement of Pak-US military ties. Pakistan, on the other hand, feared that the Bangladesh proposal would lead to its closer strategic identity with India and as a consequence affect its position on Kashmir and its overall strategic stance in South Asia and elsewhere. 20

Both India and Pakistan subsequently joined SAARC. Perhaps, the question of political isolation, in case SAARC minus either India or Pakistan could have been floated, influenced ruling elites in both countries to finally opt for SAARC. India’s joining the SAARC was also clearly influenced by the consideration that in her absence from the organization SAARC matters might be influenced by external powers which stands at variance with her foreign policy objective of preventing external powers’ involvement from South Asian affairs. The objective of other South Asian States, also that of Pakistan, to joining SAARC was basically political. That is to
neutralize India through collective ‘friendly pressures’ which would eventually (a) wipe off some of the rough edges that existed in their bilateral relationship with India, and (b) increase their capacity for collective bargaining vis-a-vis India on issues that hitherto have remained basically bilateral in character. India perceived it as the ‘ganging up’ of the smaller neighbours against her.

The strategic divergence ridden environment, in which SAARC was originally given its concrete shape, now has changed to a significant extent. Today, except Bhutan, democracies are in operation in all the SAARC countries and this is no doubt a significant beginning toward the initiation of a uniform political system in the region. This has, however, incidentally coincided with the democratic upsurge in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The break-up of the bipolar world system has reduced the possibility of wooing external powers by the smaller neighbours to counterbalance India. In the past Pakistan almost entered an alliance relationship with the USA; Sri Lanka sought to involve external powers by sponsoring a UN resolution to make the Indian Ocean a nuclear free Zone; Nepal sought to establish itself as a ‘Zone of Peace’; and Bangladesh has sought close links with Pakistan, the Islamic States, the USA and China with the avowed intention of escaping from the alleged Indian hegemony. The transformation of the bipolar world order into a unipolar one now leaves very little or no opportunity for the neighbours to use external powers against India. This seems to be the end point of the maxims of the past, that is, the attempt to neutralize the neighbour by forming some sort of alliance with the neighbour’s neighbour or a distant power. On the other hand, the smaller neighbours, and India as well, have come to realize that the cost of confrontation is unacceptably destructive for regional peace and stability and it must give way to the benefits of cooperation.

This development is a pointer to the fact that South Asian actors are approaching, although slowly, to a convergence point at least in domestic political practices. The uniformity in political practices is important since it is one of the four critical factors that positively contribute to creating strategic harmony in any region. Fortunately, this is for the first time
that the overall political atmosphere in South Asia has attained a democratic character. The introduction of democratic practices in the conflict-prone parameter of South Asian interstate relations may ultimately usher in creating convergence in political outlook - the first step towards the development of strategic harmony in the region.

However, in contrast to the positive internal changes some externally induced and internally absorbed developments are apparently running counter to building strategic harmony in South Asia. Of the developments the post-Cold War nature of strategic alignments between South Asian states and the external powers merits special discussion here.

The New Strategic Alignments

The new strategic alignments in South Asia primarily involve the evolving pattern of relationship between India and the United States. The shift of the US traditional tilt from Islamabad to New Delhi is a marked feature of the new alignment. The new tilt towards India was first heralded in December 1990 with the visit of a sizable American defence delegation led by Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security, Henry Rowen, for talks with his Indian counterparts. This was followed in August 1991 by a visit to the US from an Indian delegation led by General Sunil Francis Rodrigues, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army. The new alignment takes its concrete manifestation in the 'Kickleighter Proposal' which provide for defence consultations and eventually joint military exercises between the two countries. These proposals were first made by the former commander of the US Army in the Pacific, Lt-Gen. Claude Kickleighter, in April 1991.

It would be interesting to analyse what factors led India and the United States to develop the new strategic reed. There is, indeed, a number of motives operative behind the new Indo-US strategic alignment in a cold war free world. Both India and the US have their respective calculations and interests perceptions that significantly converge in the new world strategic realities created in the wake of Soviet disintegration. This merits discussion here in proper perspectives.
Change in US perceptions on South Asia relate both to its perception of global strategic order in the post-communist world and its pattern of alignment with Pakistan in the Cold War period. The US tilt toward Pakistan, according to American assessment, entailed heavy costs for the United States and contributed only to poisoning its relations with New Delhi. Moreover, the tilt only brought some temporary advantages from Pakistan, especially the use of electronic monitoring facilities adjacent to Soviet Central Asian intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test sites, and anti-satellite test sites and launching sites, and the use of the ISI as a conduit for weapons aid to the Afghan resistance. With the end of the Cold War the strategic importance of such facilities has declined and Pakistan, therefore, figures low in current US strategic calculations.

The emerging new US tilt toward India, on the other hand, is viewed by Americans potentially significant on some important grounds which fall in line with America's overall strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region. First, India has the potentials to emerge an a world military power with a formidable blue water navy. Therefore, American access to the Indian Ocean, and to a lesser extent the Persian Gulf, will require a compatible relationship with the Indian Navy. Second, the Americans view the so-called growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the Islamic world, which now also comprises the former Soviet central Asian republics, as something more serious than the threats posed by the now-defunct communist Soviet Union. Also, Pakistan's continuing efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, which has an ostensible Islamic and anti-Zionist aspect, is a major cause of concern to the Americans. Here Indo-US interests converge as both are opposed to the growing threats of so called Islamic fundamentalism in the Muslim crescent from Pakistan to Morocco.

On India's part, three definite reasons prompted her to get entangled into an alignment with the United States. The disintegration of the Soviet Union leaves her no option but to respond to US proposals and thus to neutralize Pakistan's long alignment with the United States. Second, for India the Gulf war carried the message that Soviet military technology, on
which the Indian war machine currently relies, is no match for US high military technology with which Pakistan to some extent is equipped with. It compelled the Indian military strategists to seek avenues for more developed and highly sophisticated US military technology. The new alignment provides India that opportunity. Third, the new alignment also seems to amount to a de Jure recognition by the US of India's supremacy in South Asia which the Indians are trying to assert since right from their independence in 1947. India got the de facto recognition earlier through her intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis in 1987 and its policing role in the Maldives in 1988. Pakistan was so far the regional stumbling block to India's regional ambition but the diminishing strategic values of the former to the US now cleanse up the road for India.

Although not in parallel to the shift in US-Pakistan relations, Sino-Pakistan relations are undergoing a major shift. The increasing number of high level visits between India and China appear to dilute the traditionally strong relationship between China and Pakistan. Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's visit to New Delhi in December last year, which is a belated reciprocation of late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1989 visit to Beijing, has succeeded in restoring confidence between the two countries by dispelling the mutual phobia created after the 1962 war. There is even possibility, in the absence of the ex-USSR threat to China, of reverting back to the 1950s type relationship between China and India. 27

The Indian Defence Minister's recent visit to China may, however, signal an Indo-US type strategic alignment between China and India in the future. The official Chinese news agency NCNA termed the visit "as a big event in the history of friendly contacts between the Chinese and Indian armed forces". 28 This move may be regarded as an attempt on the part of China and India to correct the global power imbalance created in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The joint statement issued after Li Peng's visit to New Delhi is very significant in this regard. The statement said: "No big country or countries could or should be allowed to manipulate world affairs and practise power politics". 29 The development of strong bilateral politico-military relations between China and India may in the long run result in an Asian
counterbalance to Western domination and hegemonistic assertion. But how India adjusts to its relations with China and the US at the same time remain to be seen.

The emerging pattern of strategic alignments in South Asia is most likely to produce wide repercussions on the regional milieu in general and on Pakistan in particular. Because of its deep-seated hostilities with India, that led to the eruption of two major wars respectively in 1947 and 1965, Pakistan is probably forced to view the new development in negative perspective and take it as detrimental to her interests. The US suspension of aid to Pakistan in 1991 over the question of nuclear weapons production goes a step further to heighten her negative perception on the new alignment. This may lead Pakistan to seek closer relationship especially with Iran and the Central Asian Muslim republics apparently to produce a counterweight to India. Late Pak President Zia-ul Huq dreamt of a 'strategic realignment' that would counter India through the establishment of a Pakistan-centered Pan-Islamic confederation embracing Afghanistan, some of the central Asian republics, and Kashmir. The Islamic fundamentalist leaders who form a significant part of current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ruling coalition are calling for efforts to realize Zia's dream. As events suggest Pakistan is clearly trying to develop strong relations with the central Asian Muslim republics. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's presence in the first central Asian summit this summer is a pointer to it. Resource constraints on Pakistan's part to meet the economic needs of the Muslim republics is likely to keep the profile of its relations with them at the low ebb.

The traditional 'enemy image perceptions' of the neighbours vis-a-vis India, on the other hand, is most likely to be sharpened further in the wake of the new strategic developments in South Asia. India itself is not also immune from perceiving her neighbours as enemy, particularly Pakistan. Ever since independence in 1947 India and Pakistan are locked in perceiving an enemy image in each other. The Indians see Pakistan as an enemy which is bent upon destroying the Indian state both by aggression as well as by internal subversion. Pakistan's alleged involvement in the Sikh and Kashmiri separatist movements are cited by the
Indians as Pakistan’s ulterior motives to cripple India and thus destroy her. In contrast to India’s inimical perception of Pakistan, the Pakistanis view India as a hostile state which has not so far reconciled itself to the existence of Pakistan. They point to such references by Indian leaders as “India’s heritage” or Jawaharlal Nehru’s insistence that “India’s foreign policy was grounded in its history” to project India as an enemy poised to swallow up Pakistan.

For the smaller South Asian neighbours, who lay in the periphery of India, giant India amounts to denying them the opportunity to assert themselves independently. India’s security outlook and strategic view in South Asia, which equates South Asia’s security with India’s security stands in sharp contrast to the independent security pursuits of the smaller neighbours. In the past, these states were pursuing a course independent of India depending on the leverage extended by external powers (for example, Bangladesh after 1975 has relied on China and the US to assert its independence vis-a-vis India, and Nepal on China to reduce its dependence on India in the name of maintaining equidistance from China and India). These states are now in a dilemma as to how to reconcile their security and interest perceptions vis-a-vis India.

While the pre-Cold War strategic divergences were held responsible for scaling down the much needed course of South Asian regional cooperation, the post-Cold War strategic developments do not promise a lot as well. But for regional cooperation strategic harmony or consensus is a must which SAARC has to develop to step in the take off stage of cooperation. The major question, however, remains as to how to initiate a process of strategic harmony in the strategically disharmonious region of South Asia. The following points may be pondered over in this regard.

First, political issues and affairs are solely managed by political elites - both ruling and opposition. In the management of political issues and affairs elite perceptions always prevail and the elites can manipulate politics in the way they perceive best to suit their interests. In each state of South Asia the elites are manipulating political issues to the detriment of regional interests. For example, the ruling elites in South Asia often capitalize on the differences with India to hold on to power
while India itself allows it by not allaying the fears of other peoples in the region suffering from India phobia - real or imaginary. It only leads to the stockpiling and complications of the intra and interstate issues. That game has to come to an end for the greater interests of the peoples of South Asia. The best solution lies in the firm commitment by the states of the region to abide by the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in each other's affairs. The SAARC Charter already stands for an effective solution, but what is needed is the practical demonstration by the concerned parties of their faith in the Charter and in its spirit.

The second important step, somewhat related to the first, is the urgent need for convening a regional political conference to reach a consensus on India’s role in South Asia. The smaller neighbours want India to play a low profile role in South Asia in order to allow greater initiative, self-confidence and participation on the part of them. Indonesia's role in the ASEAN is put up as a good example. India however rejects the low profile role demand of the neighbours on the ground of its geographic contiguity with all her neighbours, which Indonesia does not have, and, unlike Indonesia, its incompatible security outlook and strategic values with the neighbours. But to make SAARC effective a change in the incompatible outlook and values is imperative. The importance of convening a regional political conference lies herein. The political leaders, both ruling and opposition, from all South Asian states can sit together and discuss as to what extent they can comply with India’s demand for a dominant role in South Asia and India can comply with the demand of the neighbours. If a consensus could be reached this way it might positively contribute to developing strategic harmony in the region and give SAARC a big push ahead.

Concluding Remarks

The momentous changes in the global order with their far-reaching impacts on the world's strategic environment have shaken up each and every region of the world. The atmosphere of hostility in some regions, as mentioned earlier in this paper, has positively changed and perceptional gaps are
being bridged rapidly. South Asia is, however, running counter to the changes in the world order. The strategic environment of the region is changing but not in a way conducive to regional cooperation. It can be said that the probable implications of the India-United States strategic alignment are likely to initiate a more vigorous 'drift away pattern' of interstate relations in South Asia. Instead of bridging the existing wide strategic gaps between the regional actors, the new developments may set in motion a renewed heightening process of strategic divergence. It may rather contribute to de-emphasizing the regional cooperative venture – the SAARC. It is already discernible in the initial postponement of two successive SAARC Summits in 1990 and 1991. However, positive initiatives on the part of political leaders from the SAARC countries may correct the prevailing strategic divergences greatly and contribute to making the regional body a success story. This is the demand of the time in a changed world context.
Notes and References

5. For a brief discussion see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.
17. S.I. Khan, "SAARC: Any Room for Optimism"? Paper presented at the Round Table 'On the eve of the Third SAARC Summit' held at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIJSS), Dhaka on 24 October 1987, p. 3.
33. Javed Jabbar, a former Senator and State Minister of Pakistan, organized a conference of South Asian political parties, ruling and opposition, along similar lines. See *The Telegraph* (Dhaka) 8 August 1992.