Security Context of Big and Small States

Security is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional concept. It ranges from the physical, i.e. the military threat, through the political and economic to the ideological. The threat to a state can come in many forms and must be met in all those forms. It is futile for a government to prepare and maintain a military force for physical defence only to find the state structure collapsing from within because of subversion or economic failure or an ideological explosion. Direct threats to security are easy to perceive and identify, while indirect threats are difficult to comprehend and counter.

The simplest threat to understand, and the most costly to counter and most traumatic in its consequences, is the military threat. This is normally the only threat so far as big and middle powers are concerned because such powers are less vulnerable to threats in other forms. They have the strength to quell subversion, repel political and ideological invasion and withstand political and economic pressures.

In the category of the big and middle states we have the superpowers, global powers, great powers, world powers, regional powers (some of these overlap)—in fact all those powers which have sufficient military, political and economic strength to hold their own against their adversaries. The middle powers discourage a military venture against them by being a difficult morsel to swallow, while yet being strong enough to influence the region around them. The term also has a relative quality: Pakistan is small compared with India, yet it is big compared with other South Asian states and with Afghanistan. A good example of a middle power is Pakistan.
Small states are more vulnerable to aggression in all its forms and we must examine this vulnerability in detail in the world of today. Since World War II more than 150 conflicts have broken out in the Third World, and wars by indirect means and proxies is being waged in small states the world over. As examples of such wars in South Asia, the security of Sri Lanka is being threatened by Tamil insurgents drawing their strength from outside the country, while Bangladesh as being hurt by foreign-aided insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The small state is a state small in territory or population, or both, as also small in economic resources. From this it follows inevitably that it is small even in its military capability to repel aggression. Certain examples will help to project the right image of the small state. Afghanistan is one, for although in geographical mass it is larger than France, its population is only 16 million, of which a quarter is now living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Bangladesh is another, because it is small in geographical size and economic capability, even if its population is more than that of Pakistan. In fact, its population is a source of weakness, as explained later. Holland and Denmark are small states, in spite of their economic and technological strength, because they are small in geographical space and population. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives are small states.

Military Threat: Conventional View

We will first take the military threat which is equally applicable to big and small states and is the easiest to understand and explain. It is a universal threat. While other methods can topple governments, force a change of political and economic system, even give the ideology of the nation a new direction, the military method is the most shattering. It can destroy a state altogether.

A threat is created when a conflict of interests arises between two powers or groups of powers which cannot be resolved by peaceful means. The conflicting interests may be political, economic, strategic. Nation "A" wishes to further its national interests at the expense of the national interests of nation "B", but "B" resists. When the two cannot handle the conflict by peaceful means—diplomatic, political, economic—
pressure, even a threat of the use of military force—the conflict explodes in war: the use of the military instrument for the attainment of national aims.

The enemy who poses the threat, i.e. the potential enemy, becomes the real enemy when he marches across a national border to impose his will. In military intervention, a border has to be crossed. Thus, in a continental setting, the potential enemy is the neighbour, always the neighbour, only the neighbour, and every neighbour is a potential enemy, provided there is a clash of interests strong enough and grave enough to make the horror and destruction of war acceptable.

This threat from a neighbour has to be seen not in terms of intentions but of capability. Intentions can change overnight, capability takes years to develop. Intentions can change with a change of government, or the change of an individual in the government, or a change of policy. Furthermore, aggressive states intending military action conceal their intentions till the last moment. Hence it is the capability of the neighbour-enemy to attack a neighbour with whom it has a clash of interests which matters and which should alert us to the threat and lead us to acquire the capability of defending ourselves against that neighbour. Intentions count for little.

It is conventional wisdom that the most effective way to deal with threatened aggression is to combine all resources against the threatening power. The weak band together against the strong: the like-minded pool their strength against a common enemy. This leads to defence pacts—much maligned by the non-aligned but effective all the same. A very good example of the defence alliance is NATO which has given Europe peace for a longer period than Europe has enjoyed in its entire history. Without NATO Europe would probably have already fought another war after World War II. However, there is no example of a successful defence alliance among small states to safeguard peace in any region. Defence arrangements amongst the Arabs have not deterred Israel from its pursuit of territorial expansion.

When it is not feasible to have a defence pact, the next step to have a bilateral or trilateral arrangement for help in case of armed aggression. A big state becomes the supporter of a small state when their mutual interests coincide. The alliance is beneficial to both,
each has something to offer while both have something to gain, often in intangible ways. The big state is able to extend its influence over and through the small state while the small state acquires some of the strength of the big state for its own defense. There is nothing either unethical or altruistic about this arrangement. A small state should not be blamed for seeking external help for its security; it is usually pushed into such a move by the threat to its security from aggressive neighbors.

Military aid, defense pact, mutual security agreement (and now friendship treaty) are like a business arrangement—a deal made for the good of all those who participate in the deal. It is not a love affair. Pakistan's security agreement with the United States and the Soviet Union's friendship treaties with several Asian states, which often include a military clause, are examples of such bilateral arrangements. As a matter of interest, in South Asia, India is the only country which has a treaty relationship with an external power.

Vulnerability of Small States

In the case of small states there are more facets to the question of security. They are more vulnerable than big states because of internal and external conditions peculiar to small states. Internally, the small state has a smaller capacity for defense. The country has fewer people, limited economic resources and therefore smaller armed forces. Its economic capacity for war is limited. It lacks the size and endurance to sustain the country in war. Its weaker economy, which usually accompanies technical backwardness, not only makes it more sensitive to economic pressure from an unfriendly power but also inhibits its capacity to acquire weapons systems necessary for its defense.

In terms of political strength, it is comparatively fragile. It is more vulnerable to subversion and might not be able to resist the pressure of bigger powers to overthrow its government or alter its political system. In terms of ideology, the smaller power has less ideological thrust or stamina. There are exceptions to this rule, but generally the small state plays a more passive and defensive role than the big state in ideological warfare. It has to depend on the goodwill of bigger powers.
In the Third World, the small state suffers from internal weakness. It is usually backward and poor. It often has divisive tendencies which lead to a lack of unity and homogeneity and encourage internal confusion. Ideologically it is either negative or in actual disarray. All these weaknesses add up to make the small state vulnerable to the machinations of big states. They place the one at the mercy of the other. The fate of Afghanistan, foreign intervention in Grenada and the raid on Libya have exposed the helplessness of small states against big powers. The big powers have set a bad precedent for regionally powerful states which like to ape their model of ‘power’ and the use of ‘the big stick’ against the weak.

**Importance of a Small State**

The first thing to consider in the matter of external vulnerability of a small state is its importance, because the importance of a small state makes it a more attractive target for big powers, a tasty morsel to swallow. We will now see the various factors which go to make a small state more important.

In terms of geo-strategy, the importance of a state depends on its location on or near routes of international movement: the closer it is to such routes the greater is the degree of importance which it enjoys (or suffers!). Some examples of such states are Sri Lanka, South Yemen, Malaysia and Egypt (not small state but vulnerable). Mongolia is not important in international terms because it is not on international routes of movement.

If not important in a geo-strategical sense a small state can become geopolitically important when it is located in a theatre where there is a clash between two world powers. The presence of the forces of clashing world powers bestows importance on a small state. A good example of this is Afghanistan, which was never thought of as an important state but became important because of what has happened there recently. Mongolia has no international importance, but it is important in the context of Sino-Soviet rivalry.

A state also acquires importance when it becomes a buffer state separating two big potential adversaries. It is in the interest of both countries to keep the small state intact, but it is a shaky position for
The small state because its existence depends on the goodwill of the potential enemies, and it will retain its independence only until one of them acquires the capacity to strike and overpower the other.

A small state becomes regionally important when it is located on routes of military movement between two powers, like Belgium in the world wars. It was vulnerable and opted for neutrality, but that was of no value to it, as was shown by the Germans in World War II. When placed in this situation, the only way of avoiding aggression is to have strong enough armed forces to make aggression more costly. Switzerland has achieved this position although as a neutral state it maintains strong defence forces and would be aggressors know that it will be a tough nut to crack. Fortunately Switzerland is not located on the major routes of military movement.

The importance of a small state can be due also to its possession of natural resources needed by big states and by the world in general. It may possess uranium, or oil, or have a monopoly of some other commodity. On the one hand this gives the small state distinct economic advantages on the other it makes it important, and its vulnerability is in direct proportion to its importance.

Thus, from the point of view of security, the small state is in an unhappy position when it also becomes an important state. It becomes a pawn in the game of international power politics, an attractive target for bigger powers to attack. It becomes a battlefield in the military, political or ideological clash between bigger powers.

In a South Asian context, Pakistan, the Himalayan states, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, all have their geopolitical and geo-strategic importance which is enough to invite the hostile attention of their neighbours and external powers. Bangladesh is geostrategically important because it links South Asia with Southeast Asia. It has also, by its geographical configuration, created communication bottlenecks for the entire north-eastern region of India. It thus invites the hostile attention of its big neighbour.

Ways of Big States
Big states are generally less principled than small ones. They care little for law and scruple and are guided by expediency and opportunism.
When they speak of principles, either they are being hypocritical or it serves their interests in a particular case to abide by principle. The relations of big powers with each other are governed not by morality or justice but by the need for balance, in order to minimise loss to both. This is usually so, and we allow exceptions for the several noble leaders who have appeared as heads of big states in recent generations.

Our list of big states covers a wide spectrum, from the superpower to the middle regional power, from the US and the USSR at the top of the ladder to Egypt at the lower rung. Big powers are big powers because they have the ability to defend themselves and are difficult for others to swallow; and they can create trouble for others or do good to others, thus having an impact on their environment which can be either beneficial or harmful. Being big, their policies also are more forceful, positive and dynamic, compared with small states which have to rely on moral principle more than on strength and have to adjust their policies in reaction to the policies of bigger powers.

In dealing with the small states, the big powers pursue their own narrow interest and use all available resources—political, economic, military, ideological—to achieve their ends. They even use the smaller powers as instruments in their relations with other big powers. They may experiment with small powers, use them as barrier states or as proxies to achieve their ends, even to try out new systems for use on the battlefield. They could test their muscles, using the small state as an arena, and if the small state is destroyed in the process that is just too bad! They are not seriously affected by its destruction.

The big states have the power to penetrate the small state and get into its internal affairs. Economically they can force the smaller state to its knees because a small state usually lacks flexibility and often depends on a single commodity for its prosperity and foreign earnings. The big state can start a price war and knock out the industries or other economic institutions on which a small state depends. It can use subversion and buy the people it needs to change the government. It can carry out assassinations, or in other ways twist the arm of the small state to impose its own will. It can create chaos in the small state, thus making it ungovernable until it extracts
from the small state the benefits which it needs. In the final analysis, it can carry out a military invasion of the small state if it knows or believes that it will not have to pay a high price for victory. We have seen many such invasions in recent years.

Ideally the big states would like to see themselves surrounded by small states which lean towards them in their policies and actions. They would also wish to have them as partners or proxies. If that is not possible, they would prefer to have the small states as non-aligned, which means that at least they are denied to the enemy. If they cannot win over and control a small state (relatively speaking) they would deny it to the adversary.

South Asian Situation
South Asia is a Sub-continent in which all the relationships between big and small powers are exemplified and accentuated. In the centre lies one big power, viz India, with a dominating leadership and increasing ambition to become a global power, even a mini-superpower. There is Pakistan, a middle power with decreasing ambition to act as the most powerful Islamic state in the world but increasingly determined not to let India establish its hegemony over the Sub-continent. The remaining four states are all small powers (excluding the Maldives whose security problems are entirely different).

It needs to be explained that Bangladesh is a small state in spite of the fact that its population is bigger than Pakistan's. In truth, it is its population which makes it a small power, for it burdens the state, saps its strength and reduces its power. If it had only half its present population, Bangladesh would be a bigger power and possess greater national strength with more ability to do good or harm to its neighbours. It is ringed on three sides by Indian territory and as if that were not enough of a handicap, it is now being physically walled in and fenced with barbed wire.

Nepal and Bhutan, the two land-locked Himalayan states, exist as buffers in a geographical sense, between China and India. They would have been three in number had India not incorporated Sikkim into the Indian Union, unwisely perhaps, because eliminating a buffer increases
the chances of a clash between two big powers and it is wiser to keep the buffer in being. The fate of Sikkim causes alarm in Bhutan and Nepal.

The threat to South Asia is partly external and partly internal. It is external in that the Soviet and Afghan forces are seen as a threat by Pakistan while Chinese forces are seen as a threat by India. China has no intention to practise aggression against India, but the threat retains its potentiality even if it is improbable. Let us remember: it is the capability that counts and not the intention!

Internally, the threat perception centres on India and most of India’s neighbours feel themselves threatened by the bigger central power. In fact, to most of them this threat is greater than the external threat. India is the key power in South Asia. It is the largest and strongest, with the most versatile elite. Unfortunately, it is also the chief source of political friction, for every neighbour fears its possible hegemony—fears which India’s professions of peace will not eliminate. The smaller states cannot forget that in the past, in spite of its trumpeted commitment to peace and abhorrence of war, India got what it wanted by military intervention, as in the case of Goa, Junagadh, Hyderabad, Kashmir and former East Pakistan. Lately it has ingressed in the Siachin Glacier area through military means and it is, wittingly or unwittingly, supporting insurgencies in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and in Sri Lanka.

India clashes with Bangladesh on the question of the river waters and immigration, with Nepal on the question of immigration and the Zone of Peace; with Bhutan (this is a minor one) on the degree of freedom from India’s control; with Sri Lanka over the issue of Tamils and the freedom of Sri Lanka to decide its own affairs in matters like the fuel tanks at Trincomalee, etc. With Pakistan it has a special relationship, alas, of rivalry and hostility rather than of friendship and cooperation.

Most of the tension in South Asia arises from India’s actions and postures. What makes the smaller states uncomfortable is India’s role consciousness and its approach to the fulfilment of that role. Right from the time of independence, when Nehru saw India as the successor of the British in the region, India has pursued the goal of becoming the dominant power of South Asia, an eminent power of Asia and a potential global power, perhaps even a mini-superpower,
National roles, like personal ambitions, are in themselves devoid of moral content. They become good or bad, beneficial or harmful, according to the methods used in achieving them. The Indian government appears to have chosen its path to greatness not by generosity to small states backing, supporting, helping its smaller neighbours and making them feel assured and comfortable, but by bullying and intimidation ranging from swallowing tiny Sikkim to breaking up middlesized Pakistan. Recently it has committed, to put it bluntly but squarely, aggression against Pakistan in the Siachin Glacier in Kashmir and against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh by supporting Tamil and tribal insurgents respectively. And as if that were not enough, India’s nuclear ambitions are about to nuclearise South Asia, thus further complicating the precarious security situation of the small states of South Asia.

So far India has looked at these states solely in terms of its own interests. There is no sign that its leadership is aware of the alarm and concern it is causing in South Asia by its thrust for regional dominance and its massive military armament in order to achieve that position by force of arms rather than by moral superiority or economic preeminence. Until India changes its methods and gives up its strongarm tactics, if not its ambitious goals, the threat to the security of South Asia’s small states will remain.

What is often not realised is that there is a threat to the stability of South Asia also in the presence of an unpopular communist regime in Kabul, propped up by the Soviet forces in the country whose aim may be more than just keeping Afghanistan under firm Soviet control. Some people might reject the allusion to history which suggests that any alien invader who crosses the Khyber Pass does not stop until he has taken Delhi, but most political analysts acknowledge that a domination of Pakistan by the Soviet Union would bring the Russians to India’s border, and that would not be a pleasant situation for Delhi to contemplate. It would at least be a blow to India’s pretensions of becoming the dominating or preeminent power of South Asia.

Himalayan States: The Himalayan states are Nepal and Bhutan. Sikkim too was an independent Himalayan state, but unfortunately, has been absorbed by India. Nepal and Bhutan have a positive,
proud and sensitive leadership. Their importance is not global but regional and only in the context of Sino-Indian relations. These are landlocked states lying between China and India, and thus have few options. They have to depend on the goodwill of their two big neighbours and, mercifully, they have good relations with China.

Nepal and Bhutan are border states and buffer states, in a geographical sense. In case of war their possession would give China an offensive advantage against India; their possession by India would give India a defensive advantage against China. Although not under threat in the immediate future, they have reasons to be concerned with their delicate position between the two big states. India’s assurances that it has no aggressive intentions against any Himalayan country might not be believed by all Himalayan people, who remember that the Chogyal of Sikkim must also have believed such an assurance before 1974. Both the state would like to revoke unequal treaties signed with India, in order to improve their security options.

_Bangladesh:_ The threat to Bangladesh’s security is essentially indirect, i.e. economic strangulation through stoppage of river waters and by encroachment on its maritime interests. Chakma tribal rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are being supported by the big neighbour in the garb of Shanti Bahini, which can be a source of constant irritation to Dhaka. Like Pakistan in the North-West, Bangladesh lies on a flank, of South Asia. It must enlarge its contacts with the world of Southeast Asia, through a buildup of its maritime strength. Bangladesh security needs development of other elements of national power like socio-economic strength, besides its military capability to repel aggression.

_Sri Lanka:_ Sri Lanka has a right to be allowed to resolve its Tamil question through political means without external interference, which is endemic at the moment. Its geostrategic location with an excellent harbour like Trincomalee is coveted by those who aspire to dominate the Indian Ocean. It, too, may be declared and accepted as a ‘Zone of Peace’ by the South Asian states and the world powers.

**International Institutions and Security of Small States**

Today we live in a world community which is better balanced than ever before. It is inter-dependent, and it is a bit more equal,
Human beings are voicing ideals which in the past were only expressed when they served the purpose of big powers. The smaller states are demanding a better world order, more equality, more justice, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

We have in the United Nations a unique body, which is practically a kind of world democracy. A tiny power like Togo has the same vote in the UN General Assembly as the giant United States. Even Togo can put the United States on the mat at the UN (the fact that it does not do so is another matter). The UN is the conscience of the world, the voice of humanity, a light, however dim, shining in the darkness. In spite of its misuse and the corruption of its ideals by big powers, it is the main refuge of the small states.

A note of warning may be necessary here: one must not rely too much on the UN to safeguard the national integrity of the small state. When India invaded former East Pakistan in December 1971, a vast majority of UN members condemned the Indian action and demanded a cease-fire and immediate withdrawal of Indian forces. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, again the UN General Assembly by a vast majority condemned the Soviet aggression. Yet, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President Brezhnev snapped their fingers at the UN and the world. However, when all is said and done, the UN is all that we have got. It is, at least, a platform for denouncing evil and aggressive powers. And in order to take advantage of that platform, small states of South Asia must pursue active diplomacy at the United Nations.

Strengthening Defensive Capability

Ideally, for defence, countries threatened by bigger neighbours should band together and combine their resources in order to repel aggression. In South Asia the countries threatened by South Asian or external powers are not in a position of geographical contiguity which is (almost) a necessary precondition of a military defensive alliance. Moreover, weak powers without an offensive capability do not add much to each other's strength.

In the absence of a defence pact, it is possible to rely on the military support of a bigger power which can bring its weight to bear in defence of
the small state. The flaw with such an arrangement lies in the fact that the small state cannot absolutely rely on the bigger power to come to its help in time of need (as Pakistan has learnt to its dismay) and furthermore, such an agreement could invite the hostility of an opposing power and provoke an opposite reaction to the one desired.

It is better for a small state, when alone and unsupported by others and hemmed in by two large mutually hostile powers, to maintain a balance of good relations with both, offer equal advantage to both, keep both at arm's length and maintain a correct distance between the two. This at times is tantamount to tight-rope walking, living on one's wits, but it is the best of several unappetising options.

No matter how small a small state, it must possess a physical defensive capability. The object here is to face a possible aggressor with resistance and certainty of bloodshed; the aggressor should know that he will have to pay a high price for victory, that his action will not result in a walkover. And if a small state is prepared to wage a people's war, to bleed the invader with guerrilla actions even after he has achieved a partial success, that would act as a further deterrent to a would-be aggressor. Even a lion would hesitate to attack a prey which is capable of fighting back.

Internal stability also is a must. A small state adds to its strength by having a happy and contented public, a sound and thriving economy, an effective and honest administration, and well-developed institutions. States in which the government enjoys the loyalty and goodwill of the mass of the population can be sure of greater security and are less vulnerable to the mischief of their neighbours.

Within South Asia, in view of the great-powers ambitions of India and its apparent reliance on strongarm methods to project itself, the small states of South Asia have to be on their guard. They cannot band together in a defensive alliance, because such things are out of fashion in the non-aligned world (and the lack of geographic contiguity also precludes the making of a defence pact)! Nevertheless, the small states must combine in a moral pact to denounce and deter aggression by big powers. They should help and strengthen one another in all possible ways. Big powers must be given notice by the small states
that threats will be met, aggression countered and sovereignty jealously guarded.

South Asian Solution

It must be borne in mind that security is best and most effective when it is shared, when a balance of strength is maintained—big or small which is sufficient to make a nation feel secure and to discourage aggression. Total security for one state means insecurity for others, and in any given regional setting, no state can be secure, and at rest, if its neighbours are feeling insecure.

To explain the point by example, in the case of the two major powers of the Subcontinent, those Indians who think that their country would be more secure if Pakistan were to reduce its armed forces are wrong. Those Pakistaniis who think that Pakistan would be more secure if India would reduce its armed forces are equally wrong. India would be more secure if Pakistan feels secure, and Pakistan would be more secure if India feels secure.

Security gains in mutual sharing. South Asia must adopt a regional perspective on security matters and should face outwards to check the looming menace on its North-West Frontier. It ought to produce a collective diplomatic response to problems like Afghanistan. To improve its regional security environment, it must demonstrate its ancient wisdom by taking the following statesmanlike measures:

a. As an initial step, it must freeze its conventional armaments at current levels. This applies mainly to India and Pakistan, the major powers of the region.

b. India and Pakistan should initiate talks to reduce conventional forces, perhaps by half, within the next five years. The financial resources thus saved should be diverted to strengthen the socio-economic basis of national security.

c. South Asia should not cross the nuclear threshold. It should declare itself a ‘Nuclear Weapon Free Zone’ and a South Asian agency and international agencies should monitor its implementation.
d. South Asian states should not destabilise each other by supporting insurgencies across their borders and strictly adhere to the five principles of *Panchsheel*.

e. All the states of South Asia should join in a non-aggression pact, a defensive mechanism for outlawing war as a means of solving regional disputes.

f. All the states should behave like equals, with no arm-twisting by the bigger powers. Indeed, one of them could be regarded as first among equals, but nothing more.

**Price of Peace**

Peace is not an idyllic state of being in which philosopher-rulers live and work in a world brotherhood of saintly men. It is not a paradise into which men can escape and seek sanctuary, like the opium-eater descending into his dream-world of fantasy. It is not even a natural state of being. Political reality is conflictual and feeds on conflict. Peace is a state of reduced and controlled tension, in which conflicting forces are merely held in balance and at arm’s length.

War cannot be outlawed from relations between states any more than crime can be outlawed in human society. Aggressive states, like human criminals, will always exist and prey upon the smaller, weaker states. But the aggressive bigger power must be prevented from committing brigandage, murder or assault.

War can be prevented and peace preserved only by maintaining the right balance between forces which oppose each other, by not provoking an aggressive state to commit aggression, by having friends and neighbours who are willing to go to each other’s help, by possessing sufficient military strength to warn the aggressor state that its aggression will not be easy and will not go unpunished.

Peace is a matter of constant effort and external vigilance. It demands a price: and nations which value their independence must pay that price.
REGIONALISM AND SECURITY IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Amena Mohsin

Introduction

'Small States' and 'Security' are the two key concepts used in this paper, therefore, it is imperative to define them at the outset. Today it is generally recognised that small states are different both in degree and kind from the great powers. However, political scientists hardly agree as to what characterises the small states. Traditionally states were ranked in terms of tangible power factors, like population, land, GNP, economic resources, and perhaps most importantly, military capability. States have also been graded in terms of their international commitments, involvement in different international organizations, and number of diplomats accredited abroad. Still others have taken the behavioral pattern of states in their foreign policy orientation, as the yardstick for the characterization of states.

These interpretations are dependent either on the objective or on the subjective variables alone, and therefore, while not incorrect, they are definitely insufficient. A comprehensive definition takes into account the objective as well as the subjective variables. Rothstein, perhaps has most aptly summed up the case. According to him:

A small Power is a state which recognizes that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognized by the other states involved in international politics.

The second concept 'Security' has generally been defined as freedom from danger, fear or attack. Based on all three indicators, security is subjective and relative to the internal and external environment of
particular human societies. Security therefore does not constitute of military security alone, rather it entails the defense of core values of nations. Threat perception, aims, objective and capabilities of a nation are determinants of its core value.

Within the framework of these two definitions, this paper explores the security of the Small Island States of the South Pacific. Based on an analysis of the subjective and objective variables, the external milieu, and the options available to these states, the paper submits that, *Regionalism is the most viable security option for the Pacific Islands countries (PICs).*

**Regionalism - Theory and Practice**
The study of Regional Integration picked up much momentum and pace after the Second World War. The European moves toward economic integration were viewed with much interest and enthusiasm by the political scientists. The approach they adopted is termed 'neo-functionalist approach' for it is a reformulation of the earlier functionalist approach.

The neo-functionalists believe that economic integration between sovereign nations can bring about political integration. The process involves co-operation in economic or social fields, which would result in a 'spillover' in other sectors. This expansion of co-operation would require the creation of supra-national authorities, which would act as a 'pressure group' on the respective governments, ultimately taking on political hue. Power and loyalties would be shifted to a new centre and consequently, full political integration would be achieved. Here, success is measured in terms of moving towards political unification.

The assumptions however have proved to be false in relation to West Europe as well as the Third World. In the Third World the value is seen not in political unification rather in a restricted form of economic integration.

Regionalism has been adopted as a priority in the foreign policy of the South Pacific states. The institutional basis for regionalism was provided through the establishment of South Pacific Commission (SPC) in 1947, by the six colonial powers of the time—Australia, New Zealand, America, Britain, France and the Netherlands. It was strictly as
a political body concerned with non-controversial matters such as economic development, social welfare education and health of the ‘native’ people.

In 1950 the South Pacific Conference was held for the first time. It was an auxiliary body of the SPC composed of delegates from the Pacific Islands, and it met every third year to advise the Commission. This created a regional identity for the Pacific islanders.

In 1965, Western Samoa became the first island nation to gain a membership in the SPC. By that time Netherlands had ceased to be a member of the SPC as she lost Dutch New Guinea to Indonesia. As the process of decolonization began, reforms within the SPC became necessary. The island leaders were determined to ‘decolonize’ and ‘indigenize’ the region. This led to the creation of the South Pacific Forum (SPF) in 1971. It includes the leaders of governments of the independent and self-governing nations of the South Pacific and Australia and New Zealand. The forum meets annually. Today it is the most important regional body in the region, and is very much political in nature. In 1972 the Forum established the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC) as its executive body. It co-ordinates its activities with the Commission.

Though a certain amount of tension exists within and between these regional bodies, Richard Herr, an eminent political scientist is of the opinion that by the year 2000 the region would witness greater organizational sophistication and growth of regionalism.

In spite of this growth, there is no attempt at political unification. Economic integration, too is kept at a low level. The success and strength of functionalism is measured in terms of the benefits it bestows upon the member states, rather than any state abstract objective it is supposed to achieve.

A Profile of the South Pacific

Today there are nine independent Pacific island nations; Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomons, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. The Cook Islands and Niue are in Free Association with their former colonial master, New Zealand.
The United States and France are the two 'Colonial' powers in the region. The U.S. has two territories, American Samoa and Guam. Also the former Strategic Trust Territories of the US (USTTP) have entered into a 'close' relationship with it. Four political units have emerged out of the region referred to as Micronesia. The Republic of Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau (Belau) are now in free association with the U.S. while the Northern Marianas have opted to become a Commonwealth of the U.S.

France has three overseas territories, which are considered to be integral parts of France: French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna. There is an independence movement going on in New Caledonia, but to date France has been extremely reluctant to grant independence or self-governance to the territory. Lastly, both Tokelsu and Piteairn remain dependencies of New Zealand and Britain respectively. They do not desire any change in their status.13

With slight variation, these islands share certain common characteristics, which are their sources of strength as well as weakness. The region is composed almost entirely of small states. This smallness is their chief unifying factor; at the same time it is their main source of problems. It robs them of the ability to change to new circumstances. Insularity is a common factor. The islands might be easily cut off and isolated in times of disasters. Transportation is difficult. But viewed from the strategic perspective it is also true that, the 'domino effect' tend to be absent, or be of lower magnitude where land borders are absent. The islands are remote from the world centres of trade and production. Transportation and shipping costs are high. This aggravates their economic problems. Yet, it is equally true that this remoteness has spared them in large measures the rivalries of the great powers.14

The PICs also share certain characteristics, common to the Third World to-day. These might be identified as rapid population growth, urbanization and a flood of rising expectations among the youths that create social problems and a deterioration of the law and order situation. In most cases, the governments are not equipped to deal with the problems.
The islands are subjected to natural disasters. They lack natural resources. Only the Melanesian islands have nickel and gold, and Nauru has a substantial deposit of phosphate. Tuna and marine resources are their principal means for income generation. But their management and exploitation require technology which the PICs lack.

So far, the region has maintained a pronounced Western tilt. Both colonization and decolonization have been relatively mild in the region. The people are devout Christians. Also the former colonial powers are very much involved in the regional activities through their membership in the regional bodies, and aid mechanism. Critics of western leanings point out that this is the primary risk to the island.

Sources of Vulnerability and Threat Perceptions of the Islands

(a) Economic Vulnerability: Economic vulnerability is the real, visible and immediate threat for the islands of the South Pacific. They believe that their economic dependence on the outside world and their vulnerability to exploitation on this account might lead to a compromise of their political sovereignty. Aid dependence is a reality for the PICs.

The expanses of their open seas contain tuna of immense commercial value. The ocean bed is believed to be rich in minerals. It is apprehended that the exploitation of these resources might turn the peaceful waters of Pacific into a troubled 'resource grab' scenario.

At a special colloquium convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat in Wellington, New Zealand in July 1984 to assess post-Grenada defence needs of small island states, it was concluded by the island leaders that it was not a threat of external intervention, but of economic insecurity that most endangered the PICs.15

(b) Domestic political threats: The islands' record for political stability and peaceful and smooth transition to democratic principles is impressive. So far there have been no violent changes of governments. The elections held have been open, peaceful, fair and fiercely contested.

Changes to the region's basic democratic character can emerge in two ways—changes which would result in a states ideological realignment and changes which would result in corrupt or repressive regimes independent of ideology. However given the record of the islands'
major setbacks due to its attitude of continued ‘benign neglect’ and insensitivity towards the needs of the region. But the growing independence and assertiveness of the island leaders and the steady rise of Soviet presence in the region finally served as the catalyst. It brought about a reappraisal and appreciation in Washington’s policy towards the region. Pacific is no longer an ‘ANZUS lake’. This awareness is reflected by its desire to have better economic relations with the region; conclusion of a fishing treaty with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA); finally, the appointment for the first time of commercial and political attaches at embassy in Fiji. However the prime motive behind this is to improve the West’s strategic stance through better economic relations and then to bump the Soviets from their Pacific toe-hold.

France is another major military power in the Pacific, with direct strategic interest in the region. Its reluctance to grant independence to New Caledonia has earned it the hostility of the island countries. The recently concluded meeting of the SPF, held in Suva, Fiji from August 8-11, 1986, has requested the reinscription of New Caledonia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories through the Committee on Decolonization. There is also extreme opposition to the continued French underground nuclear testing at Mururoa. But France regards these tests and its Centre d’ Experimentations du Pacifique (CEP) as central to the maintenance of its independent nuclear defense structure. Her activities have caused much damage and embarrassment to her Western allies and their interests. In fact the much debated Kiste - Herr Report to the State Department has inferred that if not careful “Washington and Paris can create conditions that could give unwelcome influences, notably Russia, a foothold in the region, it probably would not be able to win one in otherwise”.

Japan and Britain were the two important major regional powers in the Pacific. Today their interest and involvement is limited. Japan’s military power was eliminated after the Second World War. Today its presence is mostly economic in nature, which has given it an enhanced diplomatic standing in the region. Britain too is no longer a major factor in the military ecology of the South Pacific. The contraction of its colonial empire, and its decision to withdraw militarily East of Suez resulted in a permanent collapse of her military presence in the
area. But she continues to enjoy substantial influence in the region partly due to her membership in the SPC and partly because of continued ties with her former colonies in the area.

China is a new entry into the region. Her interest in the area seems to be guided by the three factors: (a) to enhance her diplomatic standing, (b) to offset Taiwan, (c) most importantly, to offset and displace Soviet Union. She has set resident missions in Suva, Apia and Port Morseby. The Chinese leadership has made no secret that they see themselves as a natural counterweight to Soviet interests in the area. In this respect China favours and endorses the present status-quo of western dominance in the region.

Australia and New Zealand have the most direct involvement and interest in the region. For all practical purposes the general strategy of the two is in line with other western powers—that is strategic denial. However their approach to achieving this objective is based on politico-economic relations rather than on direct military ties. Canberra and Wellington provide much of the infrastructure upon which current strategies of regional ties and co-operation in the South Pacific depend. Both New Zealand and Australia consider status-quo and stability in the region as vital to their own security. However they are also sensitive to the real military security needs of the PICs. New Zealand has long contributed men, materials and training to those states which maintain defence forces. Australia had very close defence relations with its former colony PNC and since 1977 has steadily expanded defence co-operation programme with other countries of the region. However they have avoided direct military alliance or formal ties on the ground that such treaty relations would draw a probable offsetting reaction from potential adversaries. The situation has remained unchanged even after New Zealand's exit from ANZUS. Though, indeed it has raised new security concerns for the island leaders.

The Soviet Union to date has failed to attain a viable foothold in the region. The Soviet fishing deal with Kiribati in 1985 had caused much concern both within and outside the region, despite its purely economic character. Renewal of the treaty for a second year has been suspended. The Soviets reportedly had a poor Pacific tuna catch in
1985 and would like to reduce their operations, while Kiribati is seeking a long term Soviet commitment.\textsuperscript{27}

The Soviet interest in the region might be due to a number of factors. These include a desire to disperse its North Pacific submarine fleet to avoid American surveillance; the continued pursuit of its aerospace research and development programme; the expansion of its distant water fishing operations; a scientific interest in oceanography; maintaining a capacity to interdict western lines of communication, and a desire to monitor Chinese activity in the region.

The fact that presently Soviet Union does not have a viable presence in the region does not however rule out the possibility of such a presence for the future. Such a scenario might emerge due to the willingness of the island states itself. Given the extent of their aid dependency and the personalized nature of foreign policies in these societies, one cannot rule out such a possibility.\textsuperscript{28} This apprehension to a large extent explains the hyper-sensitivity of the western powers to any Soviet move in the region, no matter how hypothetical and remote that scenario might be. The insistence therefore, is on 'Strategic denial'.

However, the islands definition or perception of security is not in line with the western perception. For the western powers, especially the U.S., Australia and New Zealand—regional security in the South Pacific essentially means the absence of Soviet influence and involvement. For many of the PICs, regional security means something different. First, there is a concern to exclude super-power rivalry in the region, this has implication both for the Soviet Union and the U.S. A second concern is to control outside involvement in the region—a total decolonization of the region is their objective. They want to be secure from other countries dominating their regional bodies, or carrying on nuclear tests or the continued colonialism carried on by France. Finally, there is a real concern with regional security in an economic sense. Aid dependency is not the only concern, but they are also concerned about the exploitation of their resources, especially under sea resources by outside powers.

The security perception of the PICs is, therefore, much broader in scope. It is not limited to military threats, but includes anything that
might compromise their political and economic sovereignty and their control of regional development\textsuperscript{28}. Limitations of size and resources makes this job more difficult for them. It has therefore been argued in this paper that regionalism constitutes the most viable security option for these island countries. Let us examine the prospects of this conceptual approach.

**Regionalism and Security**

Regionalism has played a central role in the international affairs of the South Pacific. As a group the islands perceive an intrinsic connection between regionalism and their security.

The PICs perceive their economic vulnerability as their greatest security threat. Hence the primary aim of regionalism from the islanders perspective is economic development. It offers them a means for moderating if not removing the threat posed by economic vulnerability. It is argued that such collective efforts help them achieve economies of scale, which is otherwise denied to the small states individually. Regional organizations also serve as multilateral vehicles for aid and thereby disperse the political consequences of aid dependency for each member.\textsuperscript{30} Management and control over their marine resources, especially tuna has been one of the most sensitive issues for the PICs. With this end in mind the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) was created by the SPF and was given the mandate to negotiate fishing deals and a treaty with the extra-regional powers, on behalf of the island countries. In general the emphasis of the regional bodies have been to combat and contain external influences.

However, the economic rationale for regionalism can not be stretched too far. It has been pointed out rightly that the small economies of the South Pacific offer scant hope for co-operation based on complementary economic development—their economies appear to be more competitive than complementary. Moreover, the magnitude of their aid dependency, and the dependence of their regional system on budgetary support from their traditional western sources of aid, almost nullify the possibility of attaining economic viability and ability to contain external influences through their regional bodies.
But it may be argued that while many of the Pacific island states may not be able to avoid a high level of economic dependence, this ought not necessarily to lead to political subordination. Regional activity in the South Pacific directed towards social and economic advancement of the people concerned represents a significant contribution to security policy planning.

Apart from the economic benefits, regionalism also contributes toward a better political environment in the region. The annual meetings of the SPF enable the island leaders to air and share their views on many politically sensitive issues. It also saves the small states the burden and cost of maintaining a fullfledged diplomatic mission in each of the island state. A strong regional system also serves the extra-regional actors for it makes diplomatic relationship with these small states more manageable. The proliferation of regionalism in the area is essentially an attempt at complete decolonization and indigenization of the region by the islanders. Regionalism is seen by the PICs as an assertive mechanism against an outside world upon which they have been politically dependent and continue to be economically dependent. The growth of a Pan-Pacific ideology or the 'Pacific Way' is a movement in this direction. It emphasizes anti-colonialism, opposition to neo-colonialism, assertion of a regional cultural identity, creation of a mythical past of affinity in the region. But it does not call for an ultimate political unification or federation. There is little doubt that there was never such a thing or mode of life that could be termed as 'Pacific Way' but this is a useful myth. It fosters unity and fellow feelings among the islanders and creates a sense of regional identity among them.

Military security measures have been matter of very little debate among the PICs. It is widely believed that regionalism in its present form is not without military security benefits. By combining to regulate regional affairs, the islands have promoted a stability which reduces the likelihood of extra-regional intervention. It also demonstrates to states outside the South Pacific that the islands are capable of further collective action if needed. The movement towards a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ) is an important manifestation of such collective action. The Treaty of Rarotonga signed by the SPF in August 1985, has called for a prohibition of all kinds of nuclear activities in the area,
The western powers also see an intimate connection between the growth of regionalism and military security. It is believed that a stable regional system would strengthen the 'Security Community' sentiment. It is further assumed that the more the countries not in concert the less likely individual states are to pursue 'adventurist' foreign policies.

The PICs had long been assured of collective coverage under the ANZUS treaty alliance. The 1979 UNZUS Council communique circumspectly declared:

The readiness of the members to co-operate with the South Pacific states in support of a common interest in a secure and peaceful regional environment in which the countries of the region could most effectively pursue their national polices.\(^\text{34}\)

An alignment with the western powers was, therefore preferred to an alliance. The recent differences over treaty interpretation between New Zealand and the U.S., and finally the exit of New Zealand from the ANZUS system has no doubt raised new security dilemmas for the Island states. Although there is yet to be a conclusive evidence of this scenario, one might choose to reassess a few of the substantial contentions of this paper. In order to examine this, an analysis of the feasibility and viability of other available options is presented here.

**Other Options**

There is a number of other policy options that have either been debated or could be considered for the PICs. But on the grounds of practical limits none appears too feasible, yet their likelihood can not be ruled out completely.

The most prominent proposal for security co-operation has been that for a regional peacekeeping force first put forward by PNG in 1980. This move was not supported by other states. A number of difficulties can be pointed out in its application. The first problem concerns the composition of such a force. Only PNG and Fiji have an armed force in the real sense of the term. A regional force would then essentially be a Melanesian force. It is most unlikely that the Polynesian states would agree to this. Many of the PICs would also oppose
the total exclusion of extra-regional powers, especially the U.S. from such an alliance system. It was also not indicated whether Australia and New Zealand would have been asked to join such a force.

A second problem concerns the situation in which such a force could act. It is obvious that it would be unable to counter any significant invasion of an island country by an extra-regional power. This leaves the other possibility, of an armed conflict between two or more intra-regional powers. Such a situation can not bring about an automatic intervention by a regional force. It needs the consent of the parties concerned. Moreover in view of the peaceful and stable nature of politics in the region, an intra-regional conflict is rather remote. Another possibility is a purely internal rebellion or civil war which threatens the authority of a ‘legitimate’ government. Under such a situation a regional force may have the capacity to act, but it would create ‘image’ problems for a regional force led by two Melanesian states. They would be seen as suppressing or even killing Pacific islanders involved in an internal political struggle. Another scenario is an internal rebellion fuelled and carried on with external support, like the Santo rebellion in Vanuatu. In this case an intervention would be easier to justify. But the problem is there is unlikely to be another case which could duplicate the Santo case.

In the absence of a real military threat to the region, the formation of standing regional force appear both inappropriate and burdensome.

Alliance with the western powers is another possible option for the PICs. In the past, some of the PICs had sought membership in the ANZUS in their own right. The case of Cook Islands, PNG and Solomon can be cited in this regard. However such requests had been resisted on the grounds that this might prove dysfunctional by attracting a countervailing response by the Soviets elsewhere in the region. Moreover in view of the islanders perception of regional security, such requests are most unlikely to be made by the regional countries nor is there any possibility of such a step by an individual member. It is most likely that instead of going into an explicit alliance with the west, the region would continue to prefer to have the implicit alignment that it now has with the West.
At the other end of the continuum is the possibility of having an internationally sanctioned form of regional neutrality. This might enjoy major support in the islands as an alternative to bilateral defense arrangements with an external guarantor or a general alliance with the western powers. Neutrality is deemed to reduce the chances of provoking an East-West rivalry than moves toward alliance by the islands. In a way, this would achieve some of the objectives of strategic denial. But such a move would place Australia and New Zealand in a very awkward position. If they opt to join such a neutral regime, this would mean an abandonment of future prospects of alliance, whereas refusal would create tensions within the present regional system. Also it is equally significant and true that, the policy of strategic denial has identifiable objectives of the western alliance system. The implementation of a neutral regime would call for a lesser role by the western powers. This is not a prospect that Washington or for that matter any other western power seems to endorse or accept.36

Moving away from the regional framework, each island state might attempt to build its own armed forces. But given the limitation of their resources, absence of any real threat, and tradition of the islands, this does not seem to be plausible either.

The limitations and inappropriateness of the above options strongly suggest the case for a stronger regional system as a security maintenance mechanism for the South Pacific.

Conclusion

Politics of the South Pacific is noted for its peaceful character. The physical and human characteristics of the area have spared it the need of military build up. The fragile economies of the region are not capable of supporting any viable defense structures.

The islands would have to depend on external support in case of an attack, though the likelihood of such a scenario is not that strong so long they continue to pursue their present course of policy, and avoid direct military alliance or militarisation of the region. Regionalism, so far has provided the island states with maximum security at a minimum cost. Given the continuance of the present arithmetic of the situation in the South Pacific, and based on the grounds of tradition, history,
style and above all pragmatism, one can not but argue the case for a stronger regional system, since it constitutes the most viable security option for the small island states of the South Pacific.

Notes


2. Ibid, p. 22.


12. Free Association is a free and voluntary choice on the part of a people of a territory to join in association with another state. It
delegates certain specific rights and privileges to other party in return for certain benefits.


22. See Kiste and Herr, *op. cit.*


32. Greg E. Fry, "South Pacific Regionalism: The Development of an Indigenous Commitment" op. cit., p. XVIII.


