REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE SECURITY OF
SMALL STATES

Bhabani Sen Gupta

This paper starts with a hypothesis: regional cooperation organisations which promote normalisation of bilateral and multilateral relations between and among its members, are probably the best insurance the small states in today's world can buy for the security of their national frontiers against external challenges, threats and invasions. Small states may find themselves threatened from other small states, from large states in the neighbourhood, from major external powers and the superpowers. In each of these four contingencies, small states are more secure if they belong to a regional cooperation organisation committed to bilateral and multilateral good neighbourliness. This kind of a regional cooperation organisation is best suited to mediate between two conflicting small member-states. In a regional organisation whose motto is cooperation and good neighbourliness, and which is endowed with mechanisms of conflicts control and mediation, it is unlikely that a large state will threaten a small member of the group; if it does, the threatened state can mobilise the other members of the group to bring pressure on the large state to moderate its behaviour and submit the dispute to negotiation or arbitration. The only way a small state can hope to protect itself from aggression or intervention by a major external power, or by a superpower, is by mobilising the support of an entire regional organisation in its behalf. This will certainly caution, if not always deter, the external power.

If a regional cooperation organisation is to ensure the security of its smaller members, it must fulfil two basic requirements. First, relationship between members of the regional organisation must be normal, if not entirely friendly. A broad strategic harmony must prevail within the regional organisation; in any case, the smaller states in it must
not feel threatened by the larger ones. Secondly, the regional organisation must be visibly and demonstrably independent of superpowers. It must not be linked with either cold war international alliance. None of its members must be seen as a proxy of a superpower. The member states of the group must not allow external major powers or superpowers opportunities of intervention in their bilateral or multilateral cleavages and disputes.

If all members of a regional group of states feel threatened from a common enemy, their own inequalities remain subdued, the smaller member-states even feel secure in the relative strength of the larger ones. This can be seen in the history of ASEAN; the fear of China, and later, the perception of Vietnam as an actually or potentially hostile state, have blurred the inequalities of ASEAN’s five (now six) members. At least some of the six regard the large size and stature of Indonesia to be an asset. If all member states of a regional grouping have friendly relations with a single external major power or a superpower, then, too, its own members do not feel insecure from one another provided the external patron power is committed to the security and integrity of each member of the group. The Caribbean group of small states that are friends of the United States do not feel threatened from one another, nor to the small French-speaking states in Africa that constitute the “French Community”.

Small states are, or feel that they are, insecure in five conjunctions of geopolitical and inter-state circumstances. First, when small states are too dependent on a major power or a superpower for national security, political stability and economic viability. Secondly, when the cold war has penetrated a Third World region linking small states to the regional or global strategic posture of a superpower, the security of these small states remain in danger from the counter-thrusts of the other superpower or its regional friends and allies. Thirdly, if neighbouring states are grossly unequal in size, manpower, resource and military strength in a region that lacks strategic symmetry and is afflicted with bilateral disputes and conflicts, the small states feel insecure from the large, more powerful one. Fourth, if a large state is committed to an aggressive ideology which it promotes beyond its frontiers, it will almost inevitably select one or more small neighbours to be the first targets of its ideological expansionism. Finally, the security of a small state that shares overflows of sizeable, potentially nationalist ethnic
groups with a large state, may be threatened from the latter if an ethnopo-

tical explosion locks the two in an adversary situation.

Each of these five conjunctions mark contemporary international relations. The cold war alliance system spawned by the United States has hardly contributed to the medium-and-longterm security of the small states of the Third World that have elected to be its members. Dependency generates insecurity, be it military, political or economic. Superpower rivalries in Third World regions tell upon the security of the small states more than that of the larger ones. Polarisation of the Arab states between pro-US and pro-Soviet groups has hardly made these states militarily secure or politically stable. A similar situation is now developing in southern Africa and the horn in the Caribbean and in Latin America. The small states of South-east Asia came under considerably pressure of the ideological upsurge in China during the Cultural Revolution. Nasser’s pan-Arab ideology made the conservative Arab countries insecure. Some of Libya’s neighbours feel the heat of the ideology of Muamar Gaddafi. How ethnopoliti-

cal explosions involving cross-country ethnic groups can make a small

state insecure from a large one is writ larger on contemporary history of

the Third World.

The five conjunctions have indeed characterised international

relations since the 1940s, and especially the 1960s, as the colonies and

semicolonies of the European empires have been reborn as independ-
dent sovereign states. In the last 25 years, the world community has

become truly global. It is a markedly hierarchical global community,

with a most uneven distribution of resource and power. It is a commu-
nity in which the vast majority are small states, some truly mini-states.

As in a democratic nation state each citizen is equal before the law

and has one vote but the rich and the powerful wield much more power

and enjoy vaster comforts than the poor and the weak, so in the global

community of equal sovereign nations, strong members command much

more power and wealth than the mamory of small and weak ones. In

common economic parlance, the great divide is between the industrially
developed countries of the North and the predominantly agrarian

states of the South. Politically, however, the world community is cate-
gorised as three groups - the First World of industrially developed
capitalist states, the Second World of industrially developed socialist

states; and the Third World of still largely agrarian states, which are also

known as developing countries.
These demarcations, however, ignore the dichotomy between large and small states. They coexist in each of the three categories, presenting peculiar contextual problems for each. In the first world, the United States towers over every other state. In the Western hemisphere, North America is a continental island divided into the U.S. and Canada. Canada is vast in space but puny in manpower; its economy is integrated with American corporate economy. It is obligated to live in peace and neighbourly harmony with the giant to the South with whom it cannot even think of going to war. Canada shares the United States' perceptions of global and hemispheric insecurity, and does not feel insecure from the United States even when Canadian nationalism chafes at the fact that American corporations control; 60 per cent of the country's economy.

The small states of the first world reside in Europe. Western Europe has no truly world power, three medium powers, and 11 small states. Most of the small states are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and feel secure under the protection of American arms, especially nuclear arms. At the same time, Western Europe has also made considerable progress towards regional integration and has developed a European identity and a sense of European collectivity of interests. No supranational European entity has emerged as yet, and national differences and competititons do stubbornly persist. However, the EEC and the European parliament constitute the most promising regional organizations in the world, steadily generating pressures for stronger unity and interdependence.

The overriding reality that the European states cannot any longer afford the luxury of war, an instrument with which they had conducted political relations for many centuries, has created a compelling environment of living together. The NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation has provided an umbrella of stable long-term security, and, in recent years, began to narrow the cold war divide. The Helsinki accords have generated cooperative fluids; Europe is now looking forward, with tremulous confidence, to a continent-wide regional security and cooperation system. If serious slippages and setbacks do not occur, Europe will probably come together more perceptibly by the end of the century. Western Europe's gradual independence of the United States would
encourage the East European states to assert their own independence of the Soviet Union. Whether future developments move in this direction or not, war among the European states is now a matter of history. The small states do not feel threatened from the large ones. The threat perceptions are inter-systemic rather than inter-state, a most significant departure from the continent's long conflictual history.

It is a moot point if the small states of Europe have not each one of them become finlandised. If Finland cannot live with the USSR except at the level of peaceful coexistence, nor can Belgium or Luxemburg with France, or Denmark with the German Federal Republic or the United Kingdom. Indeed, one can argue that the whole of Europe has been in all reality finlandised, it cannot plan its present and future on the assumption that it can make war with the Soviet Union and survive. The medium states of Europe and indeed strong in arms and economic power. The small states of Western Europe, even a non-aligned state like Sweden, or a neutral state like Switzerland, may be better armed than many large third World states. But national military power no longer guarantees the security of West European states, large or small. Security of the West European States and defence of the Western Europe are no longer the same thing.

The fate of the small states in the second world of socialist countries is not essentially different. They live under the overpowering shadow of the USSR. The Brezhnev doctrine limits the absolute sovereignty of the members of the Eastern bloc. None may elect to opt out of the socialist system, nor from the political division of Europe created by World War II. However, the East European states are secure; the might of the US cannot roll back the political regimes that prevail. Stable security from war and compulsion to live together are steadily generating pan-European sentiments in the Eastern states also. Helsinki is a pan-European concept.

The small states of Europe, then, are secure only in the two regional cooperation organisations in which the continent stands divided each woven into one of the two cold war military alliances. What is noteworthy is that in each regional grouping, bilateral differences and disputes have been muted; each has created mechanisms of conflict resolution. Each is wedded to an integrative principle, which has been carried forward to a considerable length.
III

The Third World is populated overwhelmingly by small and weak states; indeed the entire Third World is small and weak in comparison with the First and Second Worlds. The developing small nations of the Third World are insecure from many directions. Their poverty and under-development keep them basically insecure and vulnerable to pressures, internal as well as external. They are militarily weak and unable to defend themselves from invasion or intervention even by their more powerful large members. The very process of development which is unsettling and destabilising, and puts fragile political systems to considerable and often confusing political economic and social strains, chosen priorities or models of development often draw the displeasure, even the wrath, of the developed nation or nations with which a developing state may have self-chosen or imposed linkages. The bipolar world order in which the developing nations operate is far from secure for small and weak states. Despite political independence, a majority of the developing nations belong to the capitalist world system. This condition itself renders them insecure.

Insecurity is further aggravated by the competition, rivalry and confrontation of the two superpowers, each leading an international social system. Another source of insecurity is internal war, or conflict, or cleavage and tension that afflict the developing states. Since 1949 as many as 16 former colonies or semi-colonies of the Western empires in Asia, Africa and Latin America have gone through Marxist-Leninist revolutions. Over half-a-dozen more have waged or are still waging revolutionary wars or struggles with their former masters and/or their allies. In more than a dozen Third World countries one or another kind of internal war is going on. In more than 50 developing countries, there are cleavages of varying intensity between the rulers and the ruled. In almost as many countries, the military has taken over the reins of government directly or indirectly, thereby halting, or grossly distorting, the normal process of political evolution and development. Gavin Kennedy counted 200 military coups and more than 280 attempted coups in the Third World between 1945 and 1972, and diagnosed them as symptoms of “the fragility of the legitimacy of Third World governments” and of severe “elite incohesion”. Military regimes do not
resolve the legitimacy crisis, however, but, as Kennedy put it, “probably aggravates it”\(^1\). A regime lacking legitimacy is a pathological candidate for multiple insecurities.

The Third World, however, is not a separate entity, but is an integral part of a wider world and an international system that is predominantly capitalist. The insecurities of the small states of the Third World cannot be conceptualised, nor adequately understood, except in the context of these states’ interaction with other clusters of states in the world capitalist system. The overall structure can best be understood in terms of the centre-periphery metaphor. The transition from the centre to the periphery is neither clear-cut nor abrupt; it occurs in the form of concentric rings which merge into one another.

At the centre of the centre in the current historical phase of world capitalism is the United States, with the greatest concentration of wealth and military power. Around it are grouped the secondary capitalist powers Japan, Germany, Britain, France, perhaps Holland. Next come the relatively smaller and weaker capitalist countries: Scandinavia, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In the 1980s, the wealth of the United States has visibly diminished, while that of Japan and Germany has sharply increased. The overall hegemony of the US has declined; the relationship between the centre of the centre and the first ring of secondary powers is tending to get competitive and equal. This has produced two mutually contradictory but intersecting reactions in the United States. At one level, the US is tempted to rely on its own predominant military power in arrogant unilateral pursuit of its global goals. At another level, the United States is obligated to defer to the priorities, preferences and sensibilities of the second or even the third ring of capitalist states. The net result is a general containment of America’s tremendous military power and the inability of the US to use military power to secure political objectives.

Beyond the centre is the sprawling periphery. It has an inner ring and an outer ring. The inner ring consists of the large and strong states of the Third World - China, India, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Israel and perhaps Indonesia. (Iran was a member before the Islamic revolution). The outer ring is formed with the great majority of developing nations pursuing the capitalist path in spite of the feudal or semifeudal plummages of the political economy of many of these states.
Alongside the capitalist system has grown the adversary system of socialist states, which, at the present stage, does not quite mirror the rival system. In the first place, it is a much smaller system; secondly it is still far from an equal of the capitalist system in economic and technological power. The centre of the socialist system is the USSR. It has a ring of secondary industrialised socialist states, all of them in Eastern Europe. Its periphery comprises of the nearly two dozen socialist or socialism-oriented states in the Third World that flaunt Marxist:Leninist regimes. Unlike the capitalist world system, the socialist system has two mutually adversary powers - the USSR and China, though they are now trotting towards normal bilateral relations. Moreover, the socialist system lacks a second ring of powers that compete with and are getting equal of, the central power. The socialist system, however, has purchased its security; the strategic deterrence of nuclear terror has dictated a cold peace to the two rival world systems. The small states of Europe have known 40 years of peace - a rare historical event - and will probably enjoy permanent peace because nuclear war can neither be fought nor won.

An international order in which the member states feel generally secure has to be a coherent whole, with lines of authority and subordination running from the centre of the centre clear out to the edges of the periphery. Broadly speaking, a reverse flow of money and its counterpart, wealth, flows from the outer edges of the periphery through the middle rings into the centre of the centre. In the contemporary global capitalist system, the United States retained its economic supremacy for a quarter century, cushioned on a flexible international monetary system, and a relatively free flow of international trade, both under its leadership. It could draw on the resources of the entire capitalist world, run big deficits in balance of payments, push the dollar out into the economies and banking systems of the rest of the world. The economic hegemonism however, did not ensure peace and security for the states in the periphery in an epoch marked by revolution and fear of revolution.

In the 1970s, the United States lost its economic hegemony. Wrote Ann Crittenden, a financial analyst "A few years ago, an aggressive group of less developed countries began demanding a new economic order. What they wanted was some formal restructuring to give poorer nations a bigger slice of the pie. This implied that world leaders had
some rational control over events. It is now apparent that the old order is indeed crumbling — but amid such disorientation that the world is confronted not with a new order but a new global disorder.12

The 1980s have been witnessing a steady aggravation of the international disorder. The investment boom in the capitalist countries came to a half in the 1970s. Even in the 1970s the US had created what is known as” a new debt economy,” a “Wild and eccentric credit expansion.”3 Now, at the beginning of 1987, the US is the world’s largest debtor state, its foreign debt passing $500 billion and still rising. American multinationals are compelled to invest more in the domestic economy than in foreign economies, pointing to a dramatic shrinkage of America’s capital formation, while countries like Japan, Germany and France are investing more and more in the American economy. There is hardly anything left of the post-world international monetary system; the dollar is losing its status as the sterilizing of the world monetary order. Large budget deficits and yawning balance of payment gaps have created strong pressures in America for trade protectionism. A trade war characterizes the relations among the members of the capitalist world.

With a view to camouflage the sharp decline in its economic power, the United States has built, in the last decade or so, and awesome military power of its own and has enforced military buildup as the first principle on practically all states, be they in the centre or the periphery. In seven years of this decade, between 1982 and 1989, the United States will be spending $2.5 trillion on the greatest military buildup in peacetime history. This will be $300 billion more than what the US spent on the military in 35 post-war years, from 1945 to 1981. Britain currently spends 18.5 billion pounds sterling on defence, a hefty 5.2 per cent of its GNP and 50 per cent higher than the average defence spending of NATO countries.

The developing countries also are spending much more than before on arming themselves against supposed or real enemies. Global military expenditure has crossed $1 trillion per year. The developing countries’ share of this massive amount has risen to 16 per cent from 7 percent in the matter of a decade. In 1985, developing countries spent on an average 6 per cent of their GNP on defence, much more than on education, health or housing. The trillion dollars that the world spends on arms is almost double the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Africa, 83 per cent of the GDP of Latin America, and 72.5 per cent of the GDP
of the developing countries of Asia including China and India. It is about 17 times of all official foreign aid funds currently disbursed by the world's rich nations to the world's poorer ones.

Much has been written to establish a direct correlation between mounting military expenditure and lower spending on the development of material and social wealth. It has been computed that for every dollar spent on arms, investment in national economic development is reduced by 25 cents. The developing countries have to pay exceedingly high price for military hardware they import from industrialised nations, while the commodities they export remain perpetually in a state of slump in the international market. Military spending beyond what is really required for national defence eats into a developing countries' economic growth and subtract from their real security.

Indeed, political, economic and social insecurities strain the independence and sovereignty of developing countries, especially the small states among them, more than actual threats to their national frontiers. The trillion dollar debt burden, the slump in commodity prices, protectionism in the industrially advanced countries, shrinking development aid, all these and other factors add to the insecurities of developing nations, more particularly of the smaller ones. Inclement economic weather signals widespread political disaffection and unrest. The debt burdened nations are under constant pressure of the World Bank and IMF, as well as governments that come to their financial rescue, which is also their economic bondage, to retrench social welfare budgets, and jack up the prices of essential articles including foodgrains. These measures accentuate economic, social and cultural discontent, which, over time, lead to political unrest, political upheavals, and even revolution.

IV

Western literature on international politics, its wheels turning on the pivot of power, assumes that small states are quantities negligeables, too weak to defend themselves against larger powers, dependent for security on major states, incapable of making war, not because they are less war-prone but because they lack the wherewithals, and unable to exert much of an influence on other states. Raymond Aron found the power of the weaker states steadily declining during the twentieth century. The industrial character of war, he wrote as early as 1958,
made "the big even bigger and the small even smaller." Other classical writers like E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau agreed. Younger scholars found no reason to differ. One of them defined a small state as one "that cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities" and must therefore depend on "aid of other states, institutions, processes and developments to do so." Another saw a small state as one "that is neither on a world nor on a regional scale is able to impose its political, will or protect its national interests by exerting power politics."

A third posits that most of the small states "will tend to view their status in the context of a regional subsystem" rather than the entire international system—in terms of segments of the periphery rather than the centre. A fourth one is the bluntest: "The small state (or minor or tertiary) power, in other words, is that state which, in the long term, in itself and as a satellite or a client or close ally - that is, as a non-autonomous participant in international politics - can constitute no more than a dispensable and non-decisive increment to a primary state's total array of political and military resources, regardless of whatever short-term, contingent, weight as an auxiliary (or obstacle) to the primary power it may have in certain circumstances." These perceptions of small states are not essentially different from that of Thucydides who wrote, in The History of the Peloponnesian War: "... right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

It is significant that the frailty of the small states is a perception share by the small nation themselves. As the large states see little prospect of the small states remaining secure except in their protection, so do the small states tend to believe that they need the protection and patronage of large states to survive and develop. This mutual congruence of perceptions has spawned the global alliance systems in the bipolar world of our times. Small states have, either on their own option or under the duress of circumstances, sought and obtained the protection of the either of the two super powers.

Protection has indeed worked in a number of cases. The small states of Europe are fully and equally protected by one or the other superpower. The small or medium powers with which the Soviet Union has concluded friendship treaties with explicit security commitments have not so far been invaded by the United States. The US made a commitment not
to invade Cuba in return to the withdrawal of nuclear missiles from that country by the USSR in 1962. The situation resembles the one Mark Twain drew in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (p. 16):

So they stood, each with a foot placed at an angle as a brace, and both shoving with might and main, and glowering at each other with hate. After struggling till both were hot and flushed, each relaxed his strain and Tom said, "You are a coward and a pup. I'll tell my big brother and he can thrash you with his little finger, and I'll make him do it, too."

"What do I care for your brother? I've got a brother that's bigger than he is - and what's more, he can throw him over the fence too."

The big brothers did not exist in Mark Twain's novel; the warring boys merely bluffted one another. In the contemporary world, the two big brothers are supreme realities. However, their firm security commitments bind them only to a relatively small number of the small nations. Client states that lack superpowers' firm security commitments became doubly insecure; their dependencies generate unrealistic fears, and at the same time work against self-reliance. Mere ideological compatibility does not ensure a small state the protection of a superpower. The USSR allowed Grenada to be invaded by the US, rushing to the tiny nation's defence with nothing more than verbal missiles. If the United States does invade Nicaragua, the USSR will not intervene, even though a pro-Soviet Marxist-ruled state in Central America is of immense political importance for expanding Soviet influence in the western hemisphere. Pakistan got no protection from the US in its 1971 war with India. The US watched helplessly as its greatest ally in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf - the Shah of Iran - was swept away by the Khomeini revolution. In sum, the superpowers have become over the years less effective provider of security to their small-state clients. The emergence of a multipolar world, with several independent power centres instead of just two, illustrates the relative decline of the effective predominance or hegemony of the superpowers of the international order and their decreasing ability to protect the political systems and regimes in client states and protect these states, national frontiers.
Insecurity of the small states stem from generic, structural as well as functional-operational factors. The generic factors are historical. Apart from their economic and technological backwardness and the fragileness of their political systems and institutions, the new states have inherited the feuds and conflicts that were inherent in the colonial political and social structures as well as disputes and differences that characterised the different empires’ relationships with neighbours. The cleavage between India and Pakistan and the disputes and differences between India and China are embedded in the history of the British Indian empire and its relations with the Middle Kingdom. The Bangladesh liberation war was also rooted to the geographical distortions of the partition of India into India and Pakistan. In Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, too, the legacies of the past have generated many tensions and conflicts in the post-decolonisation period.

The structural factor is to be seen in the grossly unequal distribution of resource and power amongst the 160-odd members of the international community. Since the vast majority of sovereign nations are small, and there is no international authority to guarantee the security of the small and weak states, the present international system carries an overload of insecurities. And yet, at the Central level, it has enjoyed forty and more years of peace, while a fundamental change is noticed in the great powers’ interaction with the smaller states. The old-style conquest of countries is no longer even attempted. There is much greater respect in the Post-World War II period for the formal independence and sovereignty of small states than there used to be even in the period between the two world wars. The grab now is for the minds of the ruling elites of the small states and their resources.

The small and big states of the Third World have witnessed hundreds of superpower interventions. But the number of interstate wars has been fewer in the post-World War II period than in comparable periods before. Between 1823 and 1898 there were as many as 27 inter-state wars involving major as well as small states. The first 45 years of the twentieth century saw 18 interstate wars including two world wars. In the 41 years that have passed since World War II, only 15 inter-state wars have been fought, each one of them in the Third World, and 7 of them involving the two largest powers of the Third World, China and
India. India has been involved in four wars, the largest number for any state, of which three have been fought with Pakistan and one with China. China has fought three wars. It has earned the distinction of being the only state in the last 35 years that have fought wars with a superpower and with two major Third World powers, India and Vietnam, both its neighbours. In two interstate wars, Britain fought Egypt and Argentina, in the former war in the company of France and Israel. While Britain and France failed to regain their lost influence in Egypt in the Suez war of 1956, Britain did succeed in retaining control of the Falklands in the war of 1982. In the remaining two inter-state wars of the contemporary period, four African countries have been involved Libya and Chad, and Ethiopia and Somalia. Only one was interstate war, the on-going one between Iraq and Iran, can be compared in duration with long wars of history.10

All the inter-state wars of the period since World War II have been fought within the frontiers of the international system that emerged from the war. Only a central war can destroy one world system and build another. Since the inter-state wars have been fought only in the peripheries, the world order has not been destroyed, although it has been seriously destroyed and weakened. On the other hand, political alignments in the different geopolitical segments of the peripheries have undergone radical change. Change has moved in two particular directions: revolution and independent nationalism. Revolution and fear of revolution has dominated the foreign policy of the United States and its western allies since the victory of the Chinese revolution in October 1949. Between the revolutionary regimes like China, Cuba and Vietnam and the independent-nationalist regimes like India and Algeria, the industrialised capitalist powers have lost control of a large portions of the resources of the Third World, and of a majority of its population. The urgency of maintaining control over the rest of the new states that still constitute the backyard of the world capitalist system has therefore assumed the proportions of panic. The fear is fully shared by the ruling elites of these dependent states. The two levels of fear have mingled to create pervasive perceptions of insecurity and to create a psychopathological obsession with assembling the exterior scaffoldings of security - military power and weapons of war - neglecting the political, economic and social foundations of true security.

In large vital segments of the periphery, the superpowers have
not been able to provide true security to client states. The Middle East remains pathologically insecure. The principal provider of regional security, the United States, has brought Egypt, the largest state in the Arab world, within the framework of the Camp David accord, the bedrock of which is the unilateral peace treaty concluded in 1979 between Egypt and Israel. The treaty divided the Arab states into two groups. While none supported it, some, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, chose to live with it, while others like Syria, Algeria and Libya determined to oppose it. The most costly and tragic casualty of the uneasy peace and unstable stability that have prevailed in the Middle East since Camp David is Lebanon where a ferocious civil war has been raging for years with no less than eight actors fighting, inflicting massive casualties in terms of human life, property and business. The shadows of the Iranian revolution have fallen on the Middle East. The traditional Egypt-Iraq rivalry has yielded to a much more complicated kaleidoscope of conflict and rivalry among a number of regional actors, with the United States and the Soviet Union locked in competitive remote-control operations that sometime work and sometime do not.

The periphery, as noted, is very much under the control of the industrialised capitalist states led by the United States. This is conceded more candidly by some western observers than others. Gerard Chaliand, who was for ten years a correspondent of Le Monde has observed that"... the industrialised capitalist states control Asia, Africa and Latin America to their own profit. Their control keeps production, political and ideological relationships static, and development becomes impossible. Development, far from being a technical problem for economic experts (who at best can introduce improvements or stopgaps here and there, but who cannot make structural changes) is above all a political problem. Moreover, it is the extreme gap between rich and poor people in the Third World societies that brings the problems out in its full dimensions."

Regional alliances formed under US leadership or initiative are therefore predictably perceived by the USSR, first, as part of the American global strategy to contain Soviet power and influence and, secondly, to maintain the economic, political and social status quo in the peripheries of the international system. An Iranian scholar with a strong pro-Western bias concedes this point when he writes, "The quest for a 'regional' security arrangement and the maintenance of bases (by the US)
thus appear to the Soviet Union to reflect a policy of maintaining Western domination through local clients when, in the aftermath of Vietnam, a direct US presence is no longer politically possible." In the Persian Gulf region, writes this scholar, "The USSR's primary concern was the movement toward the creation of a regional security arrangement, which she saw as aimed at suppressing change."12 These competitive Third World thrusts of the two confronting superpowers mean that regional cooperation organisations set up in the Third World under American auspices immediately gets the region involved in the cold war. The Soviet Union has so far not been able to sponsor a Third World regional organisation or alliance system. However, there is hardly any Third World region now where the Soviets cannot count on an ally or a close friend. US-sponsored regional bodies therefore enhance the threat perceptions of states located in the same region that are close to the USSR. The US-sponsored regional bodies no longer build the long-term security of the small states. It is significant that the trend in the Third World has definitely moved away from US-sponsored regional organisation. Not only SEATO and CENTO quietly died in the post-Vietnam period, it has not been possible for the US even to put together a strategic consensus of countries in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and South Asia in the wake of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. System maintenance has emerged as a main justification of super power armed intervention in the Third World.

Among the reasons for the progressive decline in the superpowers ability to provide security to small states, four deserve to be particularly mentioned. First, new independent power centres have emerged such as Japan, the EEC, China, France, Western Germany, India and Brazil. Secondly, the international fiscal and economic order which provided the spine to US hegemony of the post-War world has given way to a makeshift system which can be described only as a functioning chaos. Third, the peoples of the small and medium states, if not their ruling elites, have developed an unprecedented fervour for national independences in the Third World, this fervour calls for the policy and the posture of non-alignment which today has nearly 100 subscribers. The overwhelming majority of the non-aligned states are small in economic and military power even when they are not quite so in size and population. For the ruling elites of most of these nations it is no longer politically safe to be seen by their own people as satellites of the United States. Even in the
socialist-oriented states of Africa, such as Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, total security and economic dependence on the Soviet Union is not considered to be adequate insurance against local insurgencies or hostile neighbouring nations actively backed by the USA and its allies. Finally the patterns of third world conflicts have changed significantly in recent years. The focus has shifted considerably from superpowers interests and interventions to local disputes and quarrels, inter-domestic, inter-state or regional. The cumulative impact of all this has driven the small states from the superpowers to regional organisations in search of their national security and even domestic stability.

The large and stronger states in the Third World have their own power and influence ambitions which often clash with the real or imagined interests of their small neighbours. Several states which are by no means small, in size, population and potential resource, nevertheless regard themselves and demand to be regarded by others, as small. Pakistan is by no standard a small state; Bangladesh has larger manpower than Pakistan. The smallness of a state is therefore a relative abstract, except in the case of land locked states like Afghanistan, Bhutan and Laos, or the mini-states that dot the South Pacific. There is essentially little difference in the behaviour of big and small nations; behaviour is determined by the resources at each nation’s command and the security perceptions of the ruling elite. Small is not necessarily beautiful international polity. Small nations are not innocent creatures born of holy angels. They have their own ego problems. Because they are weak, they are also patulant; their dependencies make them too sensitive about wounded national egos. Small and weak nations, particularly those in the Third World, have come to believe that they have a premium on the indulgence on the large and the rich. They want to be looked after, protected, indulged in. This desire, when translated into demand, creates psychological problems of a peculiar kind. Dependency and national pride, weakness and arrogance unite together in manifestation of insecurity and assertive nationalism. In several Third World regions, small states’ nationalism drives them into the arms of extra-regional powers for it is easier for these states to submit to the distant alien-culture strong state than to the identical-culture neighbouring one. This can be seen in Southeast, South and South-west Asia, in the Middle East and in Africa, indeed all over the Third World.

Extra-regional strong powers are unable to provide security to the
small states largely because the patterns of armed conflicts in the Third World has changed and also because the security of the small states are threatened more by non-armed than armed conflict.

VI

Armed conflicts between Third World countries are now triggered mostly by disputes over national borders, tensions between majority and minority groups, cross-national ethnopolitical movements, expansionist religious fundamentalism, demands for self-determination by politically assertive ethnopolitical groups, clashing claims to natural resources especially those endowed with strategic import, and systemic confrontations. Scores of armed conflicts have been fought since decolonisation between states sharing disputed borders, some of them in our own South Asian region. Disputed borders continue to fuel conflictual postures even when they do not trigger armed conflicts. Political discontent of ethnopolitical minorities has emerged as a source of confrontation and conflict between neighbouring states. Minorities suffering from real or perceived oppression and denial by majorities often take to armed struggle to affirm and gain their demands; these struggles inevitably draw out the coercive power of the state. The demand of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka for an independent Eelam, the Sikh demand for Khalistan, the struggle of the Somalis of Eritrea for a separate state, of the Kurds of Iran and Iraq, of the Baluchis of Pakistan for greater rights, of the people of Southern Sudan against the rulers in Khartoum offer a daunting sample of the ethnopolitical conflicts now afflicting third world countries and severely straining inter-state relations. The anti-US Islamic fundamentalism of the Iranian revolution fervently seeks recruits in the neighbouring Islamic countries and shakes the security of prevailing regimes. Kashmir, East Timor, the Aouzou strip of northern Chad, and Eritrea illustrate inter-state relations. The conflicts generated by history as well as by demands for self-determination. Bangladesh broke away from Pakistan after a successful national liberation struggle over its demand for self-government. At another level, Namibia has been fighting for its independence from South Africa with low-level international assistance. The existence of a cluster of mini-states as members of the United Nations encourages many ethnopolitical groups located in definable "national" territories to demand and even fight for sovereign states. These demands and
struggles get neighbouring countries locked in conflict when bilateral relations are unfriendly and the ethnopolitical groups flow across adjacent international borders.

Conflicts over distribution or possession of natural wealth have occurred in Indonesia and Brazil, and created tensions or serious disputes in Pakistan, India, China and Vietnam, among other countries. Zaire attempted to grab the oil-rich Gabinda province of Angola. In early 1985, Egypt's minister of state for foreign affairs, Butros Ghali, predicted, "The next war in our region will be over the waters of the Nile, not politics." His prediction may not come true, but it certainly reflects the importance strategic natural resources have acquired as a variable in inter-state relations. The seven-year-old war between Iraq and Iran started over conflicting claims to the strategically important Shatt-al Arab waterway.

Confrontation between competing ideological systems also generates armed conflict between and among small states. Indeed, there is a surfeit of this kind of conflict in the world of the 1980s - among the neighbours of Central America, in the Persian Gulf, in southern Africa and in Southeast Asia. The Khomeini regime in Iran disregards the legitimacy of the governments of the Arab countries including Iraq and Saudi Arabia. A bitter systemic conflict is going on between Angola and Mozambique on the one hand and South Africa backed by the US on the other; 20,000 Cuban troops have gone to war to protect the Marxist revolutions in the former lands, while South Africa and the United States are jointly arming and counter revolutionary forces fighting these regimes. In Central America El Salvador and Nicaragua are locked in a systemic conflict that is being fuelled by the United States through El Salvador and the contras fighting the Marxist regime in Managua. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea can also be described as a systemic armed conflicts.

The superpowers are indeed involved in many of these armed conflicts, more often indirectly than directly. But the main actors are the countries of the Third World. These countries are being increasingly thrown on their own resources to protect their prevailing political regimes and safeguard their national independence. Both tasks are proving increasingly difficult because of the high rate of dependencies on external financial and/or military patrons on the part of a majority of these states and regime-people cleavages that drain the sap of their ruling elites.
Small states tend to perceive large states as threats to their security and independence though the number of inter-state wars between small and large states in the last 40 years have not been too many. Iran intimates the smaller states of Arabia. In Nasser's days, Egypt generated a lot of fear in the regimes of neighbouring Arab countries. In South-East Asia, Indonesia was for many years looked upon by its smaller neighbours as an actual or potential source of danger, while all South-East Asian countries felt threatened by the Chinese People's Republic. In South Asia, India's neighbours tend to see it as hegemonic, and feel threatened from its enormous size, massive manpower, considerable military, economic and technological strength and thirst for regional and even world leadership.

Hegemonic aspirations, however, are a characteristic of all large states. China perceives itself as a world power and is often so treated by the rest of the nations. Latin America harbours four aspirants of hegemony. Brazil's geopolitical analysts are the country as "an archipelago consisting of a series of islands and peninsulas" (including the "aircraft-carrier of the Northeast"), which must be effectively coordinated in order to make possible a regional development of Brazil's interior. The inland Matto-Grosso zone which borders Paraguay and Bolivia is thought of as a "heartland" or "welding zone" that must come under Brazilian control to allow Brazil to play its predestined continental role. In Argentina, on the other hand, strategic analysts are preoccupied by "Brazilian expansion and hegemony" and with what they perceive to be the Brazil-US alliance. Argentinians see their own country as a leader of the Southern Cone, a maritime power as opposed to Brazil's more continental thrust, and take note, with nervousness, of the fast-growing Brazilian navy. The Chilean geopolitical school is strongly maritime in orientation, especially projecting power in the South Pacific, control of the Straits of Magellan and sovereignty in its claimed Antarctic sector. Venezuela, with its oil power, tries to counteract Brazil's pressure on its eastern Amazon region by developing a forceful policy of integration with the Andean countries, all of which have borders with Brazil, with the exception of Chile which is not a member of the Andean Pact. Latin America, then, has, in the last five to seven years, developed several regional sub-systems each revolving around the regional poles of power. The emergence of a number of regional leaders has helped restrain the ability of the United States to intervene in Latin affairs. But it has not reduced physical and
psychological pressures on the rulers of the small Latin states, who have to constantly manipulate the rivalries among the regional hegemony aspirants to keep their relatively small ships of state afloat.

Other Third World regions lack the balance that is provided by several regional leaders each drawing towards it a number of small states. Africa has a number of “key” or “core” states - Nigeria, Zaire and Kenya from the American point of view, and Ethiopia, Angola, Algeria, from the point of view of the USSR. However, no African state has emerged as a continental hegemonic power, nor has Africa been divided into a number of regional subsystems each gravitating towards a subregional leader. In the Middle East, the power of all Arab nations has been reduced in the 1980s, making the region leaderless. In the Persian Gulf, the Iraq-Iran war has thrown upon Saudi Arabia the mantle of the leader of the small Arab Shiekdoms, though the Saudi leadership is inherently weak and, the Gulf Arab states have their own fears of Saudi hegemony. In South Asia, Pakistan has the potentiality to balance India’s stature to a large extent. However, retarded political development, a big industrial-technological lag, crippling economic and security dependencies on the United States, and prolonged cleavage between regime and people have joined together to reduce the Pakistani’s confidence in the strength and vitality of his own country; hence Pakistan’s self-image as a small nation. In the Western Pacific, the United States, the USSR, Japan and China maintain a dynamic balance of power, while the future of the two of the three economic showpieces - South Korea and Taiwan is uncertain, while the third, Hong Kong, will be lost into the mammoth bosom of China before the end of the century, in Southeast Asia, the Indo-China states together are potentially capable of balancing China to some extent. One can visualise the Indo-China group of states balance ASEAN in the foreseeable future.

Whether a Third World region is balanced between competing regional powers or has a single dominant regional power, the security of the developing states, big and small, are better protected with regional cooperation organisations than without. Regional cooperation can, over time, blunt the edges of bilateral disputes and differences among member states and defuse and finally remove mutual fears and suspicions. Economic and cultural cooperation on a regional scale develops mutual bilateral and multilateral communication and understanding, besides bringing material advantage, and develop shared
interests and perceptions. Even when a regional association is not security oriented and does not bind the member states to a collective security alliance, it does, over time, promote common security by generating common interests, and by creating a web of multilateral institutions. Regional organisations contain, and sometimes, blunt, the hegemonic edges of the behaviour and language of the large states and mute their power aspirations. By reducing the volume of conflict, a regional organisation also reduced external powers’ opportunities to intervene in the region’s inter-state and intra-state tensions and disputes.

These hypotheses are confirmed by the experiences of contemporary Third World regional organisations. ASEAN has almost entirely removed the fears and suspicious with which the smaller states of South-East Asia used to see their big brother, Indonesia. Indonesian hegemonism is now adequately muted even though Jakarta’s strategic visions do not always coincide with those of the other ASEAN partners. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is building bridges of trust and confidence between Saudi Arabia and the small states of the region. It cautions those in Washington who talk in terms of American military intervention in certain Iranian situations. Even in South Asia, SAARC has provided an informal mechanism for conflict control and management. The portfolio level foundation of SAARC is very low, but is exceedingly high political profile - with two meetings of foreign ministers and a summit scheduled for every year - offers conspicuous opportunities for informal bilateral and multilateral dialogues which more often then not promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

The first SAARC summit at Dhaka in November 1985 paved the way for cooperation between India, Bangladesh and Nepal to develop the vast water resources of the eastern flank of the subcontinent. The second summit in Bangalore in November 1986 led to more vigorous efforts on the part of the governments of Sri Lanka and India to resolve the island republic’s ethnopolitical civil war. Even more significant was the second summit’s contribution to break a year-long deadlock in India-Pakistan relations. At an informal meeting between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan in Bangalore, it was decided that officials of the two governments would meet before the end of the year to pick up the broken pieces of negotiations. And so they did, putting Indo-Pakistan relations back on the track of gradual improvement.
In Africa, the Organisation of Africa Unity (LOAU) was able to keep the continent more or less free of intervention by the superpowers for over a decade. Community building is more difficult in Africa than in other regions because of its huge size (11 million square miles in area), immense diversities and complexities of the African states and the issues that divide them as they grow up in years. Neither pan-Africanism nor Negritude has lost its unifying appeal, but both have failed to produce mechanisms for effective nation-building and control and management of inter-state conflict. The African states, however, have put together as many as 31 regional associations or institutions covering political, economic financial areas and including special purpose organisations. Superpower intervention is confined mainly to the two strategically important regions of the Horn and southern Africa. Whenever OAU has been able to stand together, it has succeeded in preventing, or minimising the impact of, superpower intervention. Even now, the unity of the frontline states of southern Africa is the best defence against direct intervention by South Africa with implicit or explicit US backing, in the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique. It is also the best contribution African states can make to the liberation of Namibia from the illicit clutches of South Africa, and of the black population of South Africa from the apartheid regime.

How regional cooperation can contribute to the security of small state is also illustrated by the recent experiences of the Latin American countries. As noted, Latin America has five aspirants to regional hegemony. Brazil is the giant in Latin America close to as much as India is in South Asia. The Latin American states face multiple crises and tensions, of which their nearly $700 billion debt burden is the most dramatised. Some of the tensions are created by competing concepts of national interests emanating from the rival regional powers. Inter-state military conflicts occur frequently. Several states face domestic unrest or turmoil. At the political level, the wind of transition to democracy from dictatorship leaves its own trail of domestic and inter-state tensions and conflicts. The Cuban revolution’s 27-year-old shadow is now reinforced by the leftist regime in Nicaragua.

The most remarkable event of recent times in Latin America is the collapse of the US-sponsored security system. The “Inter-American Security System” began to die in the 1970s; nothing of it was left, except the empty shell of the organisation of American states (OAS), when
the US sided with Britain in the latter’s war with Argentina over the Falkland islands. The small states of Latin America, afraid of the US and also bound to it by strong political and economic ties, and always nervous about the regional bigs, have formed their own sub-regional organisations. The Andean Pact has played a key role in respect of the civil wars affecting Nicaragua and El Salvador, in pushing political liberalisation in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia and in condemning the recent coup in Bolivia. True, Venezuela plays a major role in the Andean Pact, but it is a “small” state compared with Brazil and Argentina, its main rivals. In Central America, the Contadora process has been an effective obstacle to direct American intervention against the leftist regime in Nicaragua.

The small states are doomed to co-exist with big states. They have no separate collective organisations to protect their independence and national frontiers. They are insecure from internal contradictions and failings more than from the pursuit of national interests by their big brothers. The big brothers do, however, generate threat perceptions in the ruling elites of small neighbours, especially if bilateral relations are not friendly and political regimes are grossly incompatible. Small states are more wary from neighbouring big states than distant world powers because they fear that they may lose their identities to the large neighbours. In reality, however, their dependences on world powers make them as much insecure as their fear of their larger neighbours. At the same time, the small states are certainly not without their clout. Quite often they put a large premium on their support to big states, even to superpowers. They have considerable bargaining power, and sometimes a good deal of black mailing power - a power that all states try to use provided opportunities for blackmail are available.

Small states can influence big states more by efficient management of their domestic political economies and by achieving faster growth and development. By mixing self-respect with modesty, correctness with objectivity, independence with cooperation and pride with restraint, the small states can contribute significantly to the expanding international pool of learning and experience of all nations, superbig, big, medium and small.
Security of Small States 287

Notes


10. There have been a very large number of conflicts and military engagements short of declared or undeclared interstate war, as many as 259 according to the historian of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and 307 computed by Dr. Nazli Choncri in Population and Conflict: New Dimensions of Population Dynamics (Cambridge, Mass, HIT Press, 1983).


15. Ibid.

16. The OAU all independent African states except South Africa as members. The Council of Entente states has 5, the West African Economic Community 7, Economic Community of West African states 16, the African Development Bank 37, Pan African Institute for Development 32, to name only some.