Recent attempts at exploring avenues of cooperation within South Asia on a multilateral basis and efforts to institutionalise these preliminary attempts in South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) are a manifestation of the ingrained feeling amongst the ruling elites and opinion makers in the Indian subcontinent that there is an inherent geographic and cultural unity in South Asia (plus the fact that India until 1947 functioned as one economic unit) that needs institutional expression of some sort, however vague or feeble this expression might be. There are three additional factors that promote this drive (however half-hearted it might be) towards what is called "regional cooperation".

The first is the demonstration effect of such institutionalisation in other parts of the world, particularly the Third World, ranging from Latin America through the Gulf to Southeast Asia. The second factor is related to the hope that economic cooperation between the seven South Asian countries would somehow enhance their capacity for collective bargaining with the rest of the world, especially the developed world. The third is the feeling amongst the smaller South Asian countries that a multilateral forum which includes them as well as India would (a) take some of the rough edges off their bilateral relationships with India which have been uniformly uneasy and occasionally hostile, and (b) would increase their capacity for collective bargaining vis-a-vis India on issues that hitherto have remained basically bilateral in character.
The purpose of this paper is to raise the question whether these factors and considerations by themselves are enough to get a regional cooperation arrangement off the ground, and to look at the experiences of certain other institutionalised regional cooperation arrangements— the European Community, ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—to see what were the factors that contributed to their success and whether in the absence of all or any of these factors it is possible for SARC to hope to achieve even a modest amount of success.

Even a cursory look at the three examples mentioned above would lead a perceptive observer to the conclusion that the various constituents of these regional or sub-regional groupings share the following critical concerns: (a) Common and similar (though not necessarily identical) threats either from internal or external sources, or both. This provides a congruence in their security perceptions. (b) Similar political systems which provide a congruence in their ideological political perceptions. (c) Common foreign policy orientations regarding major issues related to the global balance of power and its regional manifestations. This provides a congruence in their strategic perceptions. (d) A consensus regarding the role of the pivotal power within the regional grouping, a consensus shared by the pivotal power itself. This provides the basis for internal cohesiveness within the grouping and sets the limits beyond which neither the pivotal power nor its partners may stray in intra-regional and intra-group relations.

Economic complementarity augments regional bonds that have been created for political-security reasons, and, as in the case of western Europe, might even evolve an independent life of its own; but economic considerations are secondary to the political-security factors, especially at the crucial early stage of community formation. This is why the emphasis on economic factors as the primary bases for regional cooperation in South Asia has a rather hollow ring about it.
The secondary importance of the economic factor is also borne out by the fact that the formulation of joint strategies regarding economic negotiations with the developed world can be achieved through larger organisations like the Group of 77, UNCTAD, etc, and there is little need to have a specific South Asian organisation for this purpose. Moreover, except for Nepal’s and Bhutan’s economic dependence on India, because of their land-locked character, the countries of South Asia are not of essential or vital importance for each other’s economic development. The disruption of the economic as well as the political unity of India in 1947 followed by Indo-Pakistani hostility over Kashmir and other issues forced the two major South Asian countries to build divergent economic linkages and to curtail, in fact destroy, their economic links with each other so as not to be held hostage economically at times of political or military confrontation. The severance of economic links between India and Pakistan (which then included Bangladesh as well) in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the result of political decisions based on political and security calculations and not on economic considerations. The primacy of the political factor thus demonstrated in the early years of independence has continued to haunt all subsequent efforts aimed at promoting economic cooperation within South Asia.

The crucial importance for cooperative regional efforts of the four political factors mentioned earlier in the paper is borne out by the experience of the three cases we have cited above, viz., the European Community, ASEAN and GCC. As far as the first factor, namely a common threat perception is concerned, it can be subdivided into perceptions of internal threats and external threats. If one looks at the crucially important formative stages of these regional cooperation arrangements, it becomes clear that had it not been for common threat perceptions—both of internal and external threats—the groupings would either not have been formed or, if such attempts were made, the sense of community would have remained extremely diluted. The first post-World War II step towards western European economic regeneration,
which was considered essential for western European economic integration, was the Marshall Plan of 1947 conceived, despite the invitation to the Soviet Union and its East European allies, within the framework of the emerging cold war and within the larger economic designs that the US had for the “free world”.

European economic regeneration was essential both because it could contribute collectively to the strength of the Euratlantic alliance and in order to neutralise internal threats to certain regimes—especially of France and Italy—from indigenous communists who were considered to be the Soviet Union’s “fifth column” in the capitalist democracies. The socio-economic dislocation caused by the war had provided fertile ground for communist popularity in electoral terms. A major aim of the Marshall Plan was to diffuse this internal threat by putting European economies back on their feet. Therefore, the two threats—the internal and the external—merged to provide the rationale not merely for adherence to the Marshall Plan but for later steps towards western European economic integration which led to the formation of the EEC in 1957.

It was no wonder, therefore, that NATO—the institutionalisation of the political-security Euratlantic alliance—predated the EEC by eight years. Western European economic integration was perceived as essential for the strengthening of the Euratlantic security community. As A. W. De Porte has concluded,

The eventual result (of this process) was the development from 1947 on of not one but two lasting sets of institutions that defined West as against East in Europe—the Atlantic-global, first in time and rank, and within them, the European regional. Both sets included political and security as well as economic components... (The) Atlantic economic system, developed within the framework of the cold war, is a major element in a broader system of state relations. Some, of course, have argued that the economic component was the mainspring and motive of the system, perhaps even the system itself. More accurately, the Atlantic economic
system that crystallised after 1947 was the American economic design for the post-war world scaled down to fit the part of the world then amenable to US influence. But it was also more than this. The cold war gave political solidity, a broader dimension to the economic system which it was not likely to have had in any other way.²

There was another source of threat common to all European states which led to moves towards European integration. This was the threat of a united, rearmed Germany emerging Phoenix-like from the ashes, as it had done after World War I, to threaten once again the delicate European equilibrium which had been unable to accommodate and/or control united Germany since 1870. The superimposition of the cold war division on a divided Germany, of course, acted as the primary check on potential German ambitions. But even a truncated (West) Germany was the preeminent economic and, potentially, military power in western Europe. German power, particularly if re-armed, could be kept in check, first, by expanding the European system to a Euratlantic system thereby including the US in the balance and, second, by proceeding with the rebuilding of German economic and military capabilities within a larger European or Euratlantic framework provided by ECSC, NATO, WEU and EEC.

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that the primary cementing factor as far as the EEC is concerned was provided by the external Soviet threat and the internal communist threat supplemented by the concern for a revitalised Germany which could turn out to be revanchist as well. It was to meet these multiple threats that the institutions of the European Community and NATO were devised. In fact, NATO provided the basic security framework within which European economic integration could take place. Even today scholars like Hedley Bull, when they display their intellectual de Gaulleism by calling for a Europeanist alternative to Atlanticist and neutralist attitudes in Western Europe, merely desire the strengthening of the European pillar of the NATO alliance not a security structure independent of the two superpowers.³
As for ASEAN, it has been clear from the very beginning that it "was conceived as a multipurpose organisation whose ostensible activities were social and economic cooperation but whose underlying raison d'etre lay in political coordination to cope with a still threatening regional environment". As the former Indonesian Foreign Minister and Vice-President, the late Adam Malik, made clear in a statement in October 1974, "Although from the outset ASEAN was conceived as an organisation for economic, social and cultural cooperation, and although considerations in these fields were no doubt central, it was the fact that there was a convergence in the political outlook of the five prospective member-nations ... which provided the main stimulus to join together in ASEAN".

This "convergence in political outlook" was the result, once again, of shared threat perceptions. All ASEAN regimes had been, or were, threatened by internal communist insurgencies movements. In fact, the attempted communist coup in Indonesia in 1965 and its failure symbolised both the high point of this phenomenon and its denouement; for the change in regime that resulted from the abortive coup brought Indonesian security perceptions in line with those of Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Singapore.

The existence, or recent memories, of these communist insurgencies, when coupled with a regional environment dominated by the struggle for Vietnam, convinced the prospective ASEAN partners to different degrees that there was an organic linkage between the external and the internal threats they faced and that a consultative-cum-cooperative machinery was essential for the coordination of their policies, for the extension of support to each other, and for the mobilisation of friendly international (particularly American) opinion on their behalf. Thus, ASEAN was formed in 1967.

The British decision announced in 1968 to accelerate their withdrawal from east of Suez and President Nixon's announce-
ment of the Guam Doctrine in 1969 introduced greater urgency in the ASEAN effort to evolve a regional association of like-minded regimes. But it was the American defeat in Vietnam in 1975 and the consequent unification of Vietnam and the emergence of a communist Indo-China under Vietnamese hegemony that acted as the "catalyst for the speeding up and implementation of a wider and more concrete ASEAN cooperation".6 The success of "national communism" in Indo-China in general, and Vietnam in particular, posed a major challenge to the ASEAN regimes by providing a fillip to the sagging morale of indigenous communist forces and by providing an alternative model of political and economic development to the peoples of Southeast Asia. It was no wonder therefore, that the first ASEAN summit meeting was held in Bali in February 1976 in the aftermath of the historic events of 1975 in Indo-China.

This does not mean that there is total unanimity within ASEAN regarding the source(s) of threat to its constituent members. Threat assessments made in Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta differ in important respects from those made in Bangkok and Singapore. This is particularly true in regard to perceptions of China. However, there is a basic common denominator that is shared by all members. This common area of concern has been enlarged and strengthened since the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea in late 1978. As Chan Heng Chee has argued, "The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea was god-sent. It became the common cause energising the process of cooperation, galvanising ASEAN unity. Without Kampuchea, there was every likelihood that ASEAN would suffer internal dislocation on how to handle an emergent Vietnam and would be forced to confront the structuring of a long-term security strategy in a fluid external environment".7 Kampuchea has, since the Vietnamese invasion, provided the major rallying point for the ASEAN regimes and become the "core focus"8 of ASEAN activity.

The economic dimension of ASEAN has had to take a back seat because its core concerns have been political-security in character.
Economic cooperation and coordination of economic strategies have taken place, as was the case in western Europe, within the security framework provided by the common or similar perceptions of internal and external threats of the ASEAN governments.

The GCC has been even more blatantly security-oriented. The very timing of its establishment is testimony to the fact that the overriding concern of its members has been that of security. The process of its formation was started in earnest at the Arab summit meeting in Amman in November 1980. In January 1981 the Gulf leaders, meeting at the time of the Islamic Summit in Taif (Saudi Arabia), approved the plan to set up GCC. In May 1981 the Gulf Summit in Abu Dhabi officially announced the formation of GCC.

This diplomatic activity was conducted in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980 and in the shadow of other developments which had significant security implications for the regimes of the Arab littoral of the Gulf. These included the victory of the Islamic revolutionary forces in Iran in early 1979 and the occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November of the same year by "radical fundamentalists". Both these events symbolised the strength of radical, populist Islam—"Islam from below"—which posed a most serious challenge to the traditionalist, establishment Islam—"Islam from above"—of the conservative Arab monarchies and sheikhdoms of the Gulf. The GCC was primarily the product of this confrontation and the conservatives' response to this challenge. As James Bill has put it very succinctly: "At one level the conflict (between populist and establishment Islam) divides the Gulf countries against one another, with Saudi Arabia and the other five Gulf Cooperation Council states now representing the forces of establishment Islam, and Iran attempting to fly the banner of populist Islam. At another level, this division helps bind the GCC countries closer together as they increasingly confront the internal challenge of populist Islam and the external challenge of revolutionary Iran". The division between Iran and GCC and between the two forms of Islam how-
ever goes beyond ideological-theological matters and is related fundamentally to the foreign policy orientations of the two sides and the respective threats they perceive from within and outside the Gulf. Within GCC, while there are certain differences in the approaches to security issues between, for example, Kuwait on the one hand and Oman on the other, these do not detract from the commonality they share in the identification of internal and external security threats.

When one turns to South Asia one finds a situation that is almost dramatically opposite to those prevailing within the European Community, ASEAN and GCC. The perceived sources of internal and external threats are not only very diverse but quite often emanate from, or are seen to be encouraged by, the prospective partners in the SARC enterprise.

If one leaves India out of the discussion for the moment, one would come to the conclusion that there are basically two types of internal threats that South Asian regimes face. These can be categorised as "autonomist" (Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and "democratic" (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal) on the basis of the goals the challengers to the system hope to achieve and/or the way they plan to restructure their respective polities. It is interesting to note in this context that almost all these domestic threats are linked in the minds of the ruling elites of the respective countries with India in one form or another. India has been accused of encouraging regime opponents, of supporting them morally and materially and, although this is not explicitly expressed, having a demonstration effect on them by its very existence because of its relative success (although this is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain) in operating an open, democratic polity which has provided avenues for participation and influence to diverse regional as well as ideological forces. It is no wonder, therefore, that India has been accused at different times of encouraging and supporting Pathan and Sindhi autonomists in Pakistan, Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka, the Nepali Congress in Nepal and the
Awami League in Bangladesh—all of which pose strong challenges either to incumbent regimes or to the very state-structures over which these regimes preside.

In the case of India, its relatively open polity and the relative success of its policy of cooptation of counter elites—from Tamil Nadu to Kashmir—has by and large diffused internal threats to its state-structure and its political system. Even the communists, who in the early years of independence appeared credible challengers of the system, have been tamed, divided and coopted. However, recently the system seems to be malfunctioning rather glaringly as a result of the over-centralisation of power and the concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of a few people handpicked by the late Prime Minister for ascriptive rather than genuine political reasons. It has also meant that regional elements have become more restive and more autonomist in their demands as recent events in Punjab have demonstrated. New Delhi has in turn tried to justify its policies by blaming neighbours, particularly Pakistan, for fomenting unrest in India. Therefore, the Indian ruling elites’ attitude towards internal threats to the Indian polity have started to mirror the attitudes of India’s smaller neighbours.

Again, in the case of external threats, members of SARC tend to identify regional countries as the primary and/or major sources of threat to their security. The classic “security dilemma” that dominates Indo-Pakistani relations is the most glaring example of this fact. But Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and for that matter Nepal) also tend to identify India, although this usually goes unstated, as the major external threat to themselves. This is largely a function of India’s “bigness”—in size, demography, resources, military capabilities, industrial prowess, etc.—and its obvious preeminence in the region which the other countries, except for Pakistan, can do precious little to challenge. But the fear of India is also intimately connected with these various countries, search for their own identity. Since they are all offshoots of India in one form or another and find it extremely difficult to
define their identities except in relation to India, their search for identity in non-Indian terms often leads them in anti-Indian directions and forms a significant psychological input in their process of threat perception and perception of India.

Therefore, the situation in South Asia on this score of common threat perceptions is very different from the cases we have studied earlier. There are two crucially important points that need to be made in this connection. First, in South Asia internal threats are of a very diverse nature and seen to be linked to regional encouragement of some sort. Second, external threats to South Asian countries are perceived to emerge primarily from other members of SARC, and external involvement is perceived primarily as a function of regional conflicts. Therefore, in the absence of common threat perceptions and security concerns—variables which we had identified as crucial to the formation and success of regional groupings—prospects for SARC do not appear very bright.

This conclusion is strengthened if we look at the other three factors that we had identified as being important in the successful functioning of regional cooperation arrangements. The first of these factors identified was the similarity in the political systems of the member countries which helps provide ideological affinity as well as shared domestic political and economic concerns thus enhancing empathy among their ruling elites. The industrial democracies of western Europe share similar political traits not only among themselves but with the US as well. The GCC members all share monarchical systems underwritten by tribal codes and legitimised by traditionalist Islam. In the face of threats to these “core values” by indigenous militants and the Iranian revolution they tend to close ranks even more than they did before.

While ASEAN may be a more polyglot affair with three basically military-based regimes (Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines), one traditional monarchy (Brunei) and two functioning democracies (Malaysia and Singapore), their laissez-faire economies,
their dependence on the international capitalist economy and, in fact, the greater convergence of their political systems (with Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines moving towards dilution of their authoritarian systems and Malaysia moving towards greater restriction on open politicking, with Singapore falling somewhere in between) have generated a degree of empathy amongst their rulers almost approximating that in western Europe.

Once again, the South Asian case is very different with two functioning democracies (India, Sri Lanka), two military regimes (Pakistan, Bangladesh), two traditional monarchies (Bhutan, Nepal) and an authoritarian one party state (Maldives). What makes mutual empathy among regimes even more difficult is the apprehension on the part of the authoritarian regimes of the demonstration effect on their countries of their democratic neighbours, especially India, and the tendency among India’s rulers to ascribe anti-Indian sentiments among its neighbours to the non-democratic nature of their regimes. The diverse, in fact opposed, nature of South Asian regimes and political systems therefore detracts from the already dim prospects of regional cooperation within the subcontinent.

The next factor contributing to regional cooperation arrangements was identified as the similarity of foreign policy orientations, particularly on issues relating to the global balance of power and to its regional manifestations. Here again the EEC, GCC and ASEAN fall in one category and SARC falls in a quite different one.

The EEC, as has been pointed out earlier, was conceived in the context of the cold war and within the security umbrella of NATO. Composed of America’s major alliance partners, its members’ basic stands on issues of the global balance are similar, if not identical. In the case of both GCC and ASEAN, despite shades of difference among their members, the basic pro-western orientation of the two groupings is beyond doubt and, therefore, their perceptions of the US are benign and those of the Soviet Union far from friendly. In fact, in the case of both these organisations the general pro-western orientation of their mem-
bership cements the intra-organisational bonds. In the case of GCC, its members, especially Saudi Arabia and Oman, are a part of the United States global security network and the West, led by the US is the major supplier of sophisticated weaponry to the GCC countries. In the case of ASEAN, Thailand and the Philippines have bilateral security arrangements with the US and and Philippines also provides strategic bases to the US. Malaysia and Singapore have military links with Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Indonesia, although officially non-aligned, also depends heavily on the West, particularly the US, in security matters. With the collective deterioration of ASEAN’s relationship with Vietnam, which is considered a Soviet surrogate in most ASEAN capitals, the latters’ perceptions of the global balance and its regional manifestation have shifted even further in Washington’s favour.

As opposed to this consensus on issue of the global balance found within the EEC, GCC and ASEAN, South Asia present a very fragmented picture. The smaller countries, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka seem to lean towards the US in their foreign policy orientations while India seems to lean towards the Soviet Union. Pakistan’s links with the US are qualitatively different from those of the other South Asian countries since it had been in an alliance relationship with the US in the 1940s and 1960s, and despite its membership of the Non-aligned Movement, has once again moved back towards that position since the late 1970s—a movement that has been accelerated by the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979. India’s main strategic links have been with the Soviet Union from 1960s onward. This has been the result of many factors, including the US-Pakistan alliance, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 coupled with the Sino-Soviet rift and later with the Sino-American rapprochement, Nehru’s perception of Moscow as the weaker of the two poles of power and his decision to tilt towards it in order to increase Indian manoeuvrability, and the differences in US and Soviet attitudes in the 1950s towards non-alignment in general
and Indian' non-alignment in particular. Above all, the Soviet readiness to accept the primacy of India's regional objectives in South Asia through most of the post-war period has led by and large to a harmony of the two countries' strategic perceptions as far as South Asia is concerned, a condition not present in the US-Indian relationship.

There is, therefore, a wide divergence within SARC in terms of its members' assessments of the global balance of power, of the two superpowers, and of the effect of superpower rivalry on the subcontinent. In this spectrum of views, India stands at one end and Pakistan at the other with the others falling in between mostly bunched up near Pakistan's end with the exception of Bhutan whose stand is closer to India's for obvious reasons. Since all regional arrangements have to function in what is by and large still a bi-polar world in strategic and political terms, this discrepancy in the members' perceptions is bound not merely to detract from the efficiency of SARC's functioning but from its sense of common identity and interests as well.

The last major factor that needs consideration is related to the consensus regarding the role of the pivotal power within the regional grouping, a consensus that is shared by the pivotal power itself. This consensus, as I have argued earlier, provides the basis for cohesiveness within the grouping and sets the limits beyond which neither the pivotal power nor its partners may stray in intra-regional and intra-group relations.

This consensus by and large exists within the European Community, ASEAN and GCC. In the larger Euratlantic security system which provides the security umbrella for the EEC, the US is, of course, the pivotal power. Despite the minor differences about the American role in the alliance, there is a widely shared consensus about that role within western Europe—a consensus that is determined by America's superpower status. Within the West European segment of the Atlantic alliance, it is clear that West Germany is the pivotal power—because of its geostrategic
location, its industrial capability, manpower and GNP. However, given the historical background of the two World Wars, a consensus has existed within Europe that German military, if not economic, power be circumscribed and this is a consensus that West Germany has also come to accept as a part of the deal by which it has been integrated into the Euratlantic security and economic systems. This is also a consensus that western Europe shares with its eastern half, particularly with the USSR; and thanks to the postwar division of Germany, the circumscribing of German power has become a feasible task. The ECSC, the defunct EDU, the WEU and NATO have all worked on this assumption. Short of a major breakdown of the European order, it is difficult to imagine how this consensus could be transformed—and such a breakdown can occur only as a result of a war in Europe involving the superpowers or a deal between them that acknowledges one of them as the hegemonic power in all of Europe. Since either scenario is extremely unlikely to occur, the consensus over West Germany’s role—and West Germany’s acceptance and sharing of this consensus—is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Saudi Arabia is obviously the pivotal power in GCC. In fact, it would not be wrong to view GCC as an instrument for the institutionalisation of Saudi supremacy in the Arabian Peninsula. Despite some residual suspicions and unease among the smaller GCC members, the revolution in Iran and the destabilising potential of Iraq have forced them to conclude that they cannot preserve their identities and their regimes unless they accept Saudi dominance on the western shores of the Gulf. This consensus is, therefore, the product of external threats and Saudi size and capabilities.

In ASEAN, Indonesia is the pivotal power in terms of its size, demography and resources. The lack of consensus on Indonesia’s role in Southeast Asia (outside of Indo-China) had, in fact, prevented the success of attempts at regional cooperation,
such as ASA and Maphilindo, before the overthrow of Sukarno. The post-Sukarno Indonesian regime has been very circumspect in demonstrating its primacy in Southeast Asia. This is the result both of the internal and external threats and the pro-western orientation that it shares with its ASEAN partners, and of the realisation that Indonesia’s economic performance falls far short of its resource-potential. Indonesia has also realised that Indonesia’s internal problems are of the same magnitude as its size and population. A consensus, shared by Indonesia, has, therefore, evolved within ASEAN that while Indonesian primacy will not be challenged within the grouping, Indonesia itself will adopt a low profile so as not to exacerbate intra-ASEAN tensions. This consensus has worked relatively smoothly so far since it has suited all the concerned parties.

When one turns to South Asia, one finds that there is no such consensus regarding the role of the pivotal power, India, either in terms of the acceptance of its predominance (GCC) or the circumscription of its power (European Community) or its voluntary decision to adopt a low political profile (ASEAN). While its preeminence in terms of size, population, resources and industrialisation is clear, India has been unable to translate this preeminence into predominance—the latter has been resisted politically by all the smaller SARC countries and militarily, more than once, by Pakistan. On the other hand, neither is India willing to adopt a low profile a la Indonesia nor is it feasible for the other South Asian countries to circumscribe its power a la Germany after 1945. So we are left with a situation of objective preeminence which cannot be translated into predominance because this is subjectively resisted by the smaller South Asian states who have to subscribe to the consensus that would institutionalise or legitimise such predominance. This anomalous situation, while partially reflective of India’s failure to adequately mobilise its human and material resources, is in large measure the result of South Asia’s geostrategic environment, which falls half-way between Europe and the Gulf for this particular purpose. In Europe superpower presence was of such a high degree that it
formed a major input into the evolution of a European consensus circumscribing Germany's role. In the GCC region (a Western preserve) US interest dictated the acceptance of Saudi primacy by other GCC countries. In South Asia, the superpowers, while present, are not committed, individually or collectively, either to impose (or underwrite) Indian hegemony or to circumscribe Indian power. In fact, either inclination on the part of one superpower can be, and has been, neutralised by the policies of the other. In particular, Pakistan's ability to borrow American power and invoke US support (extended to Pakistan largely in the context of America's Middle East/Gulf rather than South Asian strategy) has allowed Islamabad to militarily challenge and prevent New Delhi's predominance. This has psychologically sustained the opposition of the other smaller countries to Indian predominance.

On the other hand, India, unlike Indonesia, is unwilling to accept a low political and strategic profile and this attitude is particularly salient in its resistance to external intervention in subcontinental affairs. This is the result both of the greater disparity in Indian capabilities on the one hand and those of the smaller South Asian countries on the other as compared to Indonesia and the rest of ASEAN, and of the divergent strategic perceptions and linkages of India and most of the smaller SARC members, particularly Pakistan. India's commitment to a non-aligned foreign policy dictates that external political and military intervention in the subcontinent remains at the minimum. This, of course, suits India both ideologically and in practical terms since it enhances India's chances of managing South Asian relations. However, such an outcome is unacceptable to many smaller South Asian countries, and Pakistan in particular. Therefore, the divergence in the perceptions of SARC members regarding the role of the pivotal regional power further detracts from the possibilities of meaningful regional cooperation in South Asia.

This paper has, I think, demonstrated quite conclusively that the four critical political-strategic variables necessary for successful
regional cooperation are either not present in the South Asian case or are present in very feeble form. An additional aspect of regional cooperation arrangements, as evident in Europe, Southeast Asia and the Gulf, further complicates South Asian regional cooperation. If one looks at the European Community, ASEAN and GCC it becomes clear that they are the result not of a region-wide consensus on regional cooperation but of its exact opposite, viz, the polarisation of the regions of which their members form a part. The European Community embraces the western half of Europe in a region that is polarised between East and West. ASEAN is again a sub-regional grouping that pits non-communist Southeast Asia against its communist half. Similarly, GCC is the result of the polarisation in the Gulf between revolutionary Iran on the one hand and the conservative Arab monarchies on the other (with Iraq supporting the GCC and vice-versa because of Baghdad's own apprehensions of Iran's demonstration effect on the Iraqi population). One can conclude from these examples that a situation of polarisation within regions is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for sub-regional cooperation to succeed—and all the three examples of regional cooperation are actually sub-regional in character.

In the case of SARC on the other hand, an attempt is being made to evolve a cooperative arrangement on a basis that embraces the entire South Asian region. This is one basic difference between SARC and the examples quoted in this paper. Secondly, although there are differences, in fact on some issues wide divergences, among South Asian countries, the situation in South Asia, despite Indo-Pakistani tensions, is not yet polarised in the same sense that it is in the Gulf, Southeast Asia and Europe. This has not happened in South Asia so far because polarisation in the subcontinent can take place only on two bases. It can either take place on the basis of the nature of political systems (somewhat akin to one aspect of the European, Gulf and Southeast Asian polarisations) which would pit the political democracies—India and Sri Lanka—against the rest. This is not feasible both because
of the stage of Indo-Sri Lanka relations and because India's relationship with other South Asian countries goes far beyond the mere affinity of political systems.

The second type of polarisation could come about only if the smaller South Asian countries decide to "gang up" against India in order to neutralise Indian power superiority, although even then they would need massive external help to be able to do so. Partly for this very reason and partly because their individual relationships with India are of a multi-faceted nature and their security, for reasons of geography, is almost totally dependent upon Indian goodwill, the smaller South Asian countries, with the exception of Pakistan, have not and cannot contemplate a situation of total polarisation between them and India. Such polarisation, while it could hurt India's international standing enormously, would certainly become a security nightmare for Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

We, therefore, have a situation in South Asia which is conducive neither to regional cooperation nor regional polarisation—the latter, as the three examples we have dealt with have shown, was essential to the success of sub-regional cooperation arrangements in Europe, Southeast Asia and the Gulf. South Asia, therefore, is destined in the foreseeable future to uneasily occupy the middle ground between regional polarisation and regional cooperation—shifting ever so marginally towards one pole or the other. To expect much more in terms of regional cooperation, particularly in the absence of the four critical variables we have identified, is to fly in the face of evidence.
NOTES

1. The institutional arrangements for SARC were established in a Declaration on South Asian Regional Cooperation signed by the Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka on 2 August 1983. This was preceded by a series of meetings at the Foreign Secretaries level which prepared the ground for such a declaration. The process was initiated by the late President of Bangladesh, Ziaur-Rahman, who proposed in May 1980 that the South Asian countries “explore the possibilities of establishing a framework for regional cooperation”. For a comprehensive summary of the process leading up to SARC, see S. D. Muni and Anuradha Muni. Regional Cooperation in South Asia. New Delhi, National publishing House, 1984.


8. Ibid., p. 58.
