PROBLEMS IN NATION STATEBUILDING:
PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

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1947 initiated the process of nation state building in South Asia and the process is not likely to be finished for several decades to come. The various nation states in South Asia are at different stages of development in their evolution towards nation statehood depending on their colonial and precolonial history and institutions and political processes initiated during the colonial period and internalised at that stage. When we talk of security issues or regional cooperation we are dealing with the interaction among these nation states still in the process of evolution. Their external interaction depends to a large extent on their internal cohesion, sense of vulnerability and the elite perceptions of positive and negative aspects in the international environment in the neighbourhood favouring or inhibiting their respective evolutions into stable, cohesive nation states. These factors are responsible for difficulties in promoting regional cooperation and the sense of insecurity prevalent among these developing nations. In contrast the developed nation states have been relatively successful both in respect of security as well as economic cooperation. The OECD, EEC and CMEA testify to the latter and the NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the Helsinki Declaration to the former. On the other hand various attempts at similar cooperation in Latin America, Africa, Arab states, Islamic countries etc have not been successful to the same extent. Even
ASEAN is more of a common forum for projecting certain political policies than for interstate economic interaction in terms of transnational movement of capital and labour or a common market.

Evolution into nation statehood has generally been a violence prone process in Europe and Northern America. It has been so for the last three centuries ever since the idea of nation state developed. The process resulted in two World Wars. Today there is an uneasy peace in the industrialised world enforced by possession of nuclear arsenals by two rival blocs of nations. At the same time there are problems like Quebec, Northern Ireland, Basque, Corsican and Croatian separatisms.

Developing nations which have been sovereign for several decades before 1947 - in western hemisphere and Thailand, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia in the eastern hemisphere have not yet solved their problems of integration into stable nation statehood. Such problems exist for the Soviet Union and China too.

A nation state rests on a sense of shared historical memories, shared interests and values and a sense of belonging together. It is not determined in all cases by religion, language or ethnicity either operating as individual factors or collectively though these factors do help in social communication and bringing people together. In that sense most of the nation states are results of historical evolution. It is difficult to codify a set of natural laws of evolution for nation states.

The idea of a nation state originated in western Europe in the sixteenth century and slowly spread to the rest of Europe and North America. The evolution of the nation state was accompanied by the development of a middle class and the rise of the spirit of secularism. That period was marked by a series of interreligious and intersectarian conflicts. The consolidation of a nation state was possible only in the 19th century with a nation’s ability to mobilise large armies, and industrial structure providing a range of weapons with necessary infrastructure which only the state could normally afford and individual barons could not. At that
stage of evolution the nation state was not necessarily based on the consent of the majority of the population nor was economic development its purpose. The state protected law and order and left it to the private sector to attend to development. That was the way the nation states of Europe, North America and Japan evolved till the Bolshevik revolution. The socialists preached that economic, social and political development was the main purpose of the organised society and as the society increasingly concentrated on these tasks the territorial parcelisation into states would slowly become an obsolete concept. Interstate war was considered by socialist doctrinaries as an inevitable outcome of the capitalist state system. During this period the industrial development of most of the West European and North American states and Japan took place under conditions which would be considered very oppressive and exploitative by present day standards. Though democracy as a concept and system was gathering strength yet even where some kind of democracy existed it was by today's standards very limited. Democracy on adult franchise basis, trade union rights, around 90 percent employment, human rights etc are benefits of a society which had passed through industrialisation under conditions of imperfect representational structures with inherent violence and exploitation and reached a stage of productivity which could afford minimum needs for all.

Adoption of socialism, we now know, does not do away with national interests and eliminate conflicts even among socialist states. Nor does introduction of socialism satisfy aspirations for political autonomy for large sections of populations differentiated through language, ethnicity or religion which have a real or imaginary sense of lack of participation in decision making in the state as a whole. In one party states there is also a sense of oppression because of absence of freedom of dissent. The socialist transformation has also been so far accompanied by exercise of massive violence by the state.

Even in the current day world of Reagan and Margaret Thatcher the most conservative person is not in a position to suggest that
the state can do away with all its responsibilities for development. Whether it is financing R&D for high technology or the issue of diffusion of technology the advocates of laissez faire are not prepared to leave those to market forces. Whether it is the western or socialist world today the state is identified with management of the further development of national economy.

The developing world is to a large extent ex-colonial world. At the time of decolonisation the vast political mobilisation process was carried out by identifying freedom with economic, social and political development. It was trumpeted that decolonisation did not mean replacing the white rulers by the brown or black rulers. Decolonisation process, in many parts of the world and particularly South Asia where Gandhi initiated the techniques of mass mobilisation and mass action, involved mass politicisation. Once initiated the process was further fueled by the expansion of mass media.

The process of national integration and building up of the nation state started in the developing world with the decolonisation process. But the global environment in which the developing nations have to build their states is vastly different from the one faced by the European nations in 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. At that stage the states of Europe did not face extra regional intervention. They did not have to worry about the destabilising impact of much higher standards of living elsewhere projected through mass media. The masses were not as politicised as they are today in the developing countries. The population to resources ratios were more favourable than they are today. At that stage the state was not charged with the responsibility of ensuring minimum needs for every citizen. There were no UN adopted declaration of human rights and no Amnesty International.

Today the developing nations have to carry out their task of nation building in far more difficult circumstances telescoping the development of three centuries in the industrialised world into a fraction of that period. With the rise in political consciousness of populations the state structures are under immense pres-
sure. In the post colonial era the political mobilisation process in
the developing world are based on the following themes:
(i) removal of poverty (ii) religious, linguistic and sectarian
identities including tribal and caste ones and (iii) representa-
tional government. When the nation state is in a developing
stage these three processes pursued concurrently invariably
come into conflict though in theory it could be argued that they
need not. Let us analyse how the three sets of factors operate
in the real world of developing nations - especially in South Asia.

It should be obvious to any reasonable person that poverty is
not going to be removed from South Asian countries for several
decades to come. With the introduction of health technology,
life saving drugs, control of epidemic diseases, relatively
better availability of food the death rate has dropped and
population growth rate has doubled. With the development pro-
cess initiated only three decades ago, the average annual growth
rate is only 3-4 per cent. This compares well with the growth
rate of industrialised nations in 19th and early part of 20th cen-
tury but their population growth rate was lower due to higher death
rates. After providing for growth of population, marginally
increasing saving rate for further investment, a certain dispro-
portionality in appropriating the benefits of growth by the top
two deciles of the population it is obvious that hardly half a
percent of population can move above poverty line in a year. For
a nation where 50 per cent live below the poverty line it will take
hundred years to provide minimum needs for all and pull the poor
above the poverty line.

Usually the Marxist alternative is cited as a solution to redis-
tribute poverty and start on the development process on an
egalitarian base. This has happened as an indigenous process
in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Vietnam and
in some other cases it came about when the Red Army overran
those countries towards the end of World War II. In a few cases
such regimes have evolved as a result of prolonged national
liberation wars—Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Mozambique and
The major Marxist revolutions thus took place in the immediate aftermath of world wars and prolonged national liberation wars. In conditions less abnormal very few Marxist revolutions have taken place—Cuba being the most notable exception. There is not enough evidence available for a model of Marxist revolution evolving indigenously in a large sized developing country on the basis of uprising by the working class and peasantry.

The Marxist nation state building in the Soviet Union and China involved enormous violence and millions of casualties. Whether a Marxist nation state can be built without a great deal of violence in a large populous state is yet to be proven. It is also not clear whether the Marxist nation state building on a self reliant basis and its overcoming the poverty barrier is feasible in the current day Asian, African and Latin American context. Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique are experiments to be watched with interest. Excepting the Soviet Union which built itself up at enormous cost to its population during the Stalinist period, the other Marxist states including China to some extent benefited by massive Soviet inputs and it would appear that today the Soviet Union is somewhat overextended in this respect with their programme of assistance to Cuba, Afghanistan and the Indochinese states. In these circumstances it is reasonable to assume that poverty will be a persistent problem for several decades to come in the developing countries. At the same time given the number of people that will be below poverty line the issue will readily lend itself to mass mobilisation in the hands of political parties with none of them being in a position to implement an effective programme for attenuation of poverty in near term.

Till the spirit of secularism became pervasive in the wake of industrialisation and mass literacy Europe too was plagued by religious and sectarian strifes. The refugees from religious persecution founded the American colonies. Being a catholic meant death in the 17th century Britain and the Hugunots were massacred in France in that century. The Thirty Years War between
the Protestants and Catholics decimated nearly a third of German population. The pogrommes of Jews continued down to the holocaust of the Nazi Germany.

In developing countries with lower literacy rates, and rising potential for mass mobilisation religion lends itself readily as a political instrument especially where there is an organised clergy. As political consciousness rises religion or sectarian belief becomes an effective social communication channel. Among the Hindus where there is no organised clergy, the caste plays that role. In Europe secularism made headway at a time when the state was concerned essentially with external and internal security and development was in the hands of the private sector. As the state gets increasingly identified with development, communities try to mobilise themselves to get as big a slice of the developmental cake as possible and for this purpose they need political power. Where adult suffrage exists without adequate literacy base, appeal to sectarianism becomes an effective way to reach political power. Clergy as a political mobilising force becomes inevitable in developing countries which do not have either constituency parties based on economic interests or cadre parties based on ideology and politics is amorphous. Religion based politics very often helps to divert attention away from class adversary. In most of the developing countries which proclaim established state religions the clergy and the state have a close mutually supportive relationship which in certain instances tend to give certain stability to the state at least in the short run, especially if the concerned nation state had a homogenous religious allegiance among its population. Where this is not the case such close relationship between the state and religious establishment may prove a disruptive factor. Clergy are generally notoriously intolerant, especially outside the Christian world where there is currently a spirit of ecumenism prevalent. An intolerant clergy trying to dominate entire life styles of population is bound to generate minority dissent—both from other religions as well as dissident sects within the same religion.
Not all religions permit easy separation of spiritual and temporal affairs by agreeing to render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and rendering unto God what is God’s. Some religions claim that they encompass every aspect of a human being’s life. According to some religions sovereignty is with the Lord and not with the people. Thereafter some self-appointed people claim the right to interpret the will of the Lord. In such cases religion becomes a convenient cover for authoritarianism. The modern nation state in the industrialised world is largely based on the concept that relations between man and man are to be regulated by men and relations between man and God are to be regulated by religion. The catholic church which does not favour abortion does not question the right of legislatures and the state to make laws on it but only the ethics of such a law. But in the context of the developing world where population explosion is an acute problem the clergy of certain religions assert their right to regulate such issues on the basis of their interpretations of certain texts drawn up several centuries ago in societies which did not have a significant density of population. Similar considerations apply to women’s rights too.

This mixing of religion with politics has gone to such an extent that in one case the state tells a particular denomination of believers that they are not entitled to call themselves the followers of a particular religion. Another developing country considers it necessary to legislate to prohibit one religion-based political party propagating that other political parties consist of sinners.

Religion tries to fill in a vacuum in politics when political parties have no credible and meaningful economic, social and political content to their programmes. This can happen both in situations of poverty and affluence. In either case it is a destabilising factor in the building of a modern nation state.

Religion-based political approach divides people within a country unless it is totally homogenous in respect of religious following. It breeds sectarianism as clergy fall back upon various schools of interpretation of religious texts. It limits the soverei-
gnty of the state and the people. It creates mistrust of neighbour­
bouring countries with peoples following different religions. 
It provides cover for authoritarianism of various types either by a 
ruler manipulating clergy or the latter having undue importance 
in matters of state. Very often it comes in the way of measures like 
female education—a major prerequisite to population control and 
stabilisation.

The issue of tribal identity too is a major factor in national 
consolidation. The tribal society by its very nature is inward 
looking and looks at the external world with hostility and sus­
picion. Usually tribes have been able to sustain their separate 
identity since geographical barriers have come in the way of 
their interaction with the external world to the extent it is 
possible among populations not so divided by natural barriers— 
hills and forests. The tribal societies cherish their traditional 
ways of life and do not readily adapt themselves to nation state 
system though there are exceptions to this generalisation. 
The traditional power structure within the tribal societies has a 
vested interest in resisting absorption of tribes into a nation state 
with centralisation of authority at state and federal capitals and 
introduction of state appointed bureaucracy into the area. Hence 
tribal insurgencies have become part of common experience in 
nation state building all over South Asia—in Afghanistan, Pakistan, 
India, Bangladesh and Burma.

One view, empathetic to tribals advocates that they should be 
left alone and protected. The alternative view considers that 
this would amount to treating them like specimens in a zoo 
and is contrary to norms of democratic functioning. Therefore 
they should be sought to be integrated with the national main­
stream with their interests fully protected. The Indian system 
of tribal states is a venture in this direction. But all problems aris­
ing out of large number of tribes, each assertive of its own identity 
and rights have not been solved.

Another facet of the identity issue is the language problem. 
It is difficult to say as between religion and language 
which is a stronger bond in projecting a common identity.
At the same time neither factor is a total determinant in defining a nation. There are many Arab, English, French and Chinese speaking nations just as some four or five major religions encompass the entire international system of 160 states. But within a nation state system the language is a major factor in determining identity as it is the primary communication link. The literature in a language shapes historical memories, self-perceptions, view of the world and world view. Currently it serves as the most potent instrument in political mobilisation and the emergence of electronic media has ensured that even illiterates could be reached and motivated. The use of the local language for administration brings the rulers and the ruled together and thereby becomes a symbol of local autonomy. Hence the language issue fueled the Bangladeshi agitation for secession and still does the current Tamil agitation in Sri Lanka, and the alienation of Sindhis in Pakistan. Some people trace the origin of trouble in the Indian Punjab to the nonacceptance of Punjabi written in Gurumukhi as the local language by the non-sikh population of that state. On the other hand the dispensation of linguistic states system in India has gone a long way in neutralising the demand for Tamil secessionism. Since the medium of instruction in schools and colleges are keys to economic, social and political advancement, disabilities arising out of linguistic barriers, cause a great deal of resentment and administrators not able to communicate in local language are viewed as colonial masters. If in a composite nation there is a large linguistic majority and that majority were to impose its language and at the same time seem to dominate major instrumentalities of the state (armed forces and administration) and also control large sectors of economy then invariably it leads to alienation of minorities. In India there is a basic stability because the Hindi speaking people, though the largest language group do not constitute a majority and they do not dominate the instrumentalities of the state nor industry nor agriculture. The position is different in other composite states of South Asia, such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
Caste is yet another divisive factor in the building of a nation state. One could perhaps view it as a watered down form of tribalism. While basically caste is a contribution of Hindu civilisation today its impact is not restricted to Hindus alone. Even after conversion to Islam, Sikhism and Christianity, people tend to preserve their caste identity. The policy of reservation of educational and job opportunities for weaker sections of the community in India, aimed at enabling the socially and economically disadvantaged people to move up rapidly has now given an incentive to perpetuate the caste identities. While caste perhaps plays a role in electoral politics and sometimes aggravates local tensions it is not a factor in secessionist politics as no area can be dominated territorially by a single caste. Hence caste in India may be compared to the ethnic, religious and sectarian division in a composite nation state like the US where the Irish, Polish Jewish and catholic factors have significance in electoral politics.

Interacting with these factors is the demand for increased participation in decision making by the growing middle classes in the developing countries. This factor is more responsible for insurgencies than poverty. When the oppressed rise in revolt in most cases they are only the instruments in the hands of middle class intellectuals who seek power for themselves and use them as effective means to replace those in power. This has been the history of most of the revolutions. Not that there has not been upward mobility in the revolutionary or post revolutionary states but it has not been markedly different from similar upward mobility in many non-revolutionary societies. An expanding middle class in a country without representational government and without opportunities for ever increasing participation by that class in decision making spells trouble for a nation state. Unfortunately this happens to be the case in a majority of the developing nations and this phenomenon of growing dissatisfaction of an expanding middle class by denial of representation in decision making is often sought to be countered by military rule. Hence nearly 40 per cent of the developing nations have either mili-
tary or military dominated governments. There are also attempts at converting the armed forces into a kind of cadre party in an environment where there are no cohesive and viable all-nation political parties which happens to be the case in most of the developing nations. Military rule is obviously not an answer to problems of nation building, especially in populous states. The thesis of military being modernisers has not been substantiated in practice. By organisation and decision making culture military is not suited to any role except to sustain the status quo. Consequently military rule is particularly unsuited to developing nations where the need is for evolutionary, orderly and continuous change.

At the same time democratic politics have posed very serious problems for developing countries where there are no strong organised economic interests, trade unions or cadre based parties. Competitive party politics need money to be sustained. In stable democracies the resources for this come from trade unions or economic interests (both industrial and agricultural). In developing countries in the absence of such resources, sustenance of competitive party politics leads to political corruption and certain linkages between political parties and organised crime. At certain stages of their evolution some at least of the western democracies have passed through similar experience.

In the absence of significant socio economic base sustaining large and cohesive political parties the parties degenerate in the clusters of followers around certain dominant personalities and politics itself becomes personality oriented and extremely fragmented. This makes it difficult to have stable party politics based on alternative ideological formulations and politics is reduced to interaction of political chieftains trying to arrive at mutually acceptable sharing of spoils. Since such fragmented personality based politics cannot result in stable governments it inevitably leads to the armed forces as the relatively disciplined organisation available taking over power or an authoritarian regime emerging based on the support of the armed forces.
This state of affairs compels many to search for alternatives, the assumption being that for some reason democracy does not suit non-European populations. Often this search for alternative degenerates into personality cults woven around individuals which portray some of the authoritarian leaders as modern day philosopher-kings. In some other cases there are atavistic throwbacks to prophethoods of yore. Some others argue that there is no need for the developing nations to tread the path traversed by the industrialised nations and one should look for an alternative model of development, without outlining what that alternative model could be. These attempts at alternative model seeking reminds one of prescription of utopia by Thomas More, the Luddites of 19th century who were against introduction of industrialisation and those who advocated the conditioning of the masses to produce the New Man.

It is today not possible to feed and keep alive the vast populations of the developing world and provide them minimum needs without industrialisation and introducing modern technology into agricultural practices. It is no doubt necessary to avoid damage to ecology and minimise pollution of air, water and soil. It is however totally unrealistic to talk of fulfilling minimum needs of high densities of population without industrialisation and modern agriculture. These cannot be undertaken without the instrumentality of modern nation state as a necessary organisational structure for development.

During the period of national struggle anti-colonialism provided the inspiration and there was an all pervading spirit of nationalism directed against the foreign ruler. Once the colonial occupation ended and the power passed into the hands of the local elite the problem of developing a national identity began. In this respect elites in different nations faced varying categories of problems. Where there has been a continuing civilisational tradition and a sense of history it was relatively easier to develop a national identity—the examples being Egypt, Iran and India. In other cases where the concept of a particular nation is recent,
there is not homogeneity in language, ethnicity and religions of the constituent population nor a unifying historical memory it has been far more difficult to develop a national identity. Where new nations have been created out of a larger entity which has had long continuous civilisational traditions the development of new national identities becomes imperative and at the same time presents complexities. Again discontinuities between the anti-colonial struggle and subsequent developments in national politics also add to the complexities in evolving national identities. Where development of a national identity has been retarded there is greater sense of insecurity among the elites.

Let us now turn to external factors impinging upon nation building. Three major factors are insecurity arising out of current international strategic environment and interventionism of major powers, interaction with immediate neighbours and aid needed for development. At present the international system consists of about 160 nation states. But 60 per cent of these states are new states which became sovereign after 1947. Most of them are also small mini and micro states which cannot ensure their own security and which have to rely on norms of international behaviour to continue as sovereign states. Most of these states rely on the major industrialised nations for their economic, food and energy security. There is a pervading sense of insecurity among the developing nations and this encompasses larger developing nations as well. The creation of a large number of small, mini and micro states in the wake of decolonisation has stirred up the ambitions of various ethnic and linguistic groups for sovereignty. It is argued that if there are already many sovereign nations with just a few hundred thousand populations why other ethnic and linguistic groups of similar and larger size should not aim at sovereignty.

In India there were similar aspirations earlier among some Kashmiris, some Tamils, the Chogyal of Sikkim, the Nagas and Mizos and now among Khalistanis. In Pakistan such ambitions are entertained by Pathans, Baluchis and Sindhis and in Sri Lanka by
the Eelam Tamils. Such small, nini and micro states hope to survive as sovereign nations by trading tourism facilities, their minerals, their strategic locations and their votes in the General Assembly with major powers. The exclusive economic zone created by the Law of the Sea makes every island and every inch of the coast valuable since title to a large sea surface goes along with it. It is not the intention here to pass judgement on the decolonisation process of late '60s and '70s or on the Law of the Sea but to highlight certain unintended consequences of those developments.

It is commonplace to point out that since 1945 out of around 150 and odd instances of major inter and intra-state violence that have taken place in the world all but 8 or 10 have taken place in the developing world. What is not so well known is in nearly two thirds of such instances there were interventions by major powers, especially the industrialised nations. Unlike the times when the European nations evolved as nation states the two superpowers have now dedicated instrumentalities for intervention which are justified, in the words of William Colby, the former Director of CIA, as being necessary to give the concerned national leadership a range of options vis a vis other nations between sending a protest note and landing the marines. Many of the CIA intervention exploits - such as Guatemala, Iran and Chile have been publicised. The exploits of the other superpower are less publicised but no doubt they are being pursued subject to limitations of capabilities and opportunities. That the subcontinent has been subject to such interventionism is not in doubt. The military coup in Pakistan in 1958, according to some scholars, had the tacit support of the US. According to Bhutto his own overthrow had support from external sources. Lawrence Lifshultz views the events of August 1975 in Bangladesh as an instance of external intervention. The Naga and Mizo insurgents received arms supplies from China and training outside Indian territory. Again it is not our purpose to pass any value judgements on such interventionist operations.
but to highlight this fact of life and its impact on the sense of insecurity of developing nations.

In regard to vulnerability to interventionism one has to distinguish between nations which have a broad based elite participation in respect of foreign and security policies and nations where such a broad base for decision making does not exist. It is obvious that the base is much broader in democratic countries and where some from of representational government exists. There are many one party states where a form of representational system operates though they cannot be categorised as democracies. But majority of the developing nations of the world does not fall into either category, and the decision making structure has a very narrow base. In such cases the very narrow based leadership can be eliminated, coerced, or cajoled to get a 180 degree turn in the alignment of a nation. This is not easy in nations with broader decision making base where change in leadership may not mean discontinuity in policy and there is likely to be greater resistance to coercing and cajoling. Therefore nations with leaderships with narrow base are relatively more vulnerable to intervention. Military and other authoritarian regimes generally fall into this category.

The developing nation state for reasons outlined earlier is bound to have various kinds of dissident groups some of which with adequate encouragement and arms support may become insurgents. Insurgencies may in some cases start indigenously and thereafter look for various kinds of support—arms, sanctuaries, training camps etc—across the border. In many of the developing nations some of the peripheral areas are not administered effectively due to difficult nature of terrain and lack of communicational infra-structure, and often such areas become fertile grounds for insurgencies. The borders inherited from the colonial empires may have been arbitrarily fixed dividing homogenous ethnic groups into different nationalities. In such eases insurgents in one nation are likely to be supported by their ethnic brethren across the border. This has happened
in a number of cases in the subcontinent. The inadequately administered areas become convenient conduits for external powers to funnel in arms to insurgents across the border. Such areas alongside soft borders are also used for drug manufacture, storage and trading and smuggling. In turn this may create within the state vested interests which benefit out of such organised crime.

Most of the developing countries—the exceptions being the oil and mineral rich ones—are in receipt of economic aid from developed countries, from international financial institutions, oil exporting Arab countries and the socialist countries. Some developing countries like India and China have also extended limited amounts of aid. The aid from the socialist countries are tied to specific industrial projects and not available for balance of payments support or to finance consumer goods or food imports. Even their assistance in terms of energy imports is limited to socialist developing countries. The western industrial ventures invest in developing countries on purely commercial considerations. Private loans have been extended on a large scale to selected developing countries. In South Asia such western private commercial investments have not been significant. India has been the largest beneficiary of the socialist bloc assistance. In aggregate western assistance also India is the largest beneficiary though in per capita terms India comes very low in the list because of its vast population. Nepal and Bhutan are significant beneficiaries of the Indian aid. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka receive substantial western aid and the former two also obtain aid from Islamic countries though Bangladesh gets much less attention from the Islamic bloc than Pakistan.

Where the foreign aid forms a significant portion of developmental investment of a nation the aid given is bound to have influence on the foreign policy of the nation, its alignment in international relations and to certain extent on domestic orientation as well. The western economic aid—with excep-
tions of a few countries—especially the Nordic and the Low countries—is part of their foreign policy and intended to attenuate Soviet and further the Western influence. The Soviet bloc aid too has similar purpose in view though it is in no position to match the western general purpose aid and food aid. The Arab countries extend aid mostly to other Islamic countries and furtherance of Islam is one of the avowed purposes. Yet another factor of influence is the access to the labour market of West Asia.

India constitutes 75 percent of South Asia. While no two other South Asian countries share a common border four of them have common land borders with India and two maritime borders. While all of them are developing countries, India ranks as twelfth industrial country in the world, has a significant scientific and technological capability and is seen locally as a significant military power. The conventional wisdom inherited from 18th, 19th and first half of 20th century leads the smaller nations in the subcontinent to fear the larger India. Other larger nations—the US, the USSR and China—are also feared by their neighbours. Britain, France, Germany and Japan in the heyday of their power were feared and suspected by their respective neighbours. Therefore it is but natural for the smaller neighbours of India to entertain some misgivings about India’s size and capability. Any realistic attempt at promoting South Asian Cooperation has to start with recognising realities and neither by denying it as some Indians tend to do and India trying to pretend to behave like a small nation nor by resenting the Indian preeminence nor wishing that India would break into smaller nations and its capability would go away helps in analysing the issue meaningfully. As some Indians try to project India as a small or medium power more distrust is generated among other nations since such an image is contrary to reality and blatantly hypocritical.

It is therefore essential to face current day realities. India is in a stage of transition but not to coalition politics, loose fede-
eralism, break up into smaller states, inter-religious, inter-sectarian civil wars or creeping military dominant role in politics. It is in transition towards a new polity which it is difficult to visualise through the fog of conventional wisdom, doled out by tired old politicians, academics and journalists repeating themselves and each other. One thing the Indian public has again and again demonstrated through eight general elections. They do not want a hung parliament and instability in government and state. During the short period India had a minority government in 1970 the government was supported in office by the party which earlier had an ideology with secessionist overtones (the DMK). The Indian unity today is stronger than ever before. India has proved that it is relatively the more stable state in the region.

The Indian nation state has also stridently asserted its commitment to sustain the secular, federal, and supra caste and tribal polity—accommodative to various local identities. No doubt in all these respects the Indian state has far, far to go. But when the choice is put to the Indian population on their preference between the secular, democratic, federal and linguistically autonomous set up with all its glaring imperfections or other pie in the sky vague formulations they have clearly expressed their choice in the present climate and circumstances.

Here it is necessary to point out that the strategy chosen by the Indian people to develop and build their nation state is not necessarily one that appeals to elites in India’s neighbourhood. In fact the neighbours have chosen different paths and their choices cannot be questioned except by the peoples of the respective countries.

While that is so, in discussing the regional cooperation the impact of these divergences in the paths for nation building chosen by the largest country of the region and others on perceptions and in psychological terms has to be understood to have a better appreciation of the limitations imposed on such cooperation by
this factor of divergence and for initiating meaningful measures to overcome them.

The whole of South Asia is a common civilisational area with long enduring civilisational traditions, common memories, shared attitudes towards life, and rich composite cultural heritage. Hence the attempts by some constituent units to find an identity in groupings outside South Asia have not succeeded. Inspite of divergent paths for development of nation statehood adopted by different countries the happenings in one country affect others in South Asia. Some populations sharing a common language are divided by international boundaries. Islam has a tradition where the concept of 'millat' is considered to transcend national boundaries. Not long ago during the time of the British rule there was considerable movement of populations from one area to another followed by their settlement in the new areas. Some of these were arranged movement of labour and others natural movements of populations from relatively high density to low density areas. Some major population movements took place as a result of massive violence accompanying the partition at the time of decolonisation. Therefore even while endorsing the wholesome norm of nonintervention in each other's affairs as between two countries it is unrealisatic to overlook that what happens to a population in one country is not totally without its impact on their kindred populations across the border. Given these emotional linkages among populations it is also natural that elites of countries on different paths to evolution to nation statehood are likely to view with suspicion and unease the interactions among populations divided by frontiers. What potentialities for causing destabilisation in nation building there could be among such interactions are matters for subjective perceptions among national elites. Those who rely on religion based systems worry about secularism and the secularists worry about impact of revivalist religious appeals on their minorities. Those who prefer unitary states and unilingual dispensation view with suspicion interaction with federal and multilingual systems. Less stable
fear more stable and the latter fear spread of infectious instability into their countries from across the borders. Superimposed on such fears is the record of extra regional powers to intervene in the developing world and particularly in South Asia in pursuance of their global strategies and the vulnerability of South Asian states to such interventionism.

Very often this sense of insecurity arising out of these factors inherent in nation state building and divergences in the paths chosen by constituent nation states of South Asia is expressed in terms of fear of aggression across the border in the 19th and early 20th century classical fashion. The military and political establishments all over the world are yet to understand the limitations in the use of force in international relations in the post colonial era where the consciousness of people have risen to unprecedented levels. In today’s world it is easy to carry out a military intrusion but very costly to occupy an area inhabited by people who will not acquiesce in such occupation. Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan not so much because of the military action by the Indian Armed Forces as the total alienation of the Bangladeshi people from the Pakistani regime. Except micro states like Grenada it is not easy to overrun and keep under occupation against the will of the people large and medium sized popular states. The 18th and 19th century colonialism was possible because the colonial people generally accepted the colonial occupation. This situation no longer exists.

The subcontinent consists of one very large nation (India), two large nations (Bangladesh and Pakistan, the 8th and 9th most populous countries in the world), two medium sized nations (Sri Lanka and Nepal) and two small nations (Bhutan and Maldives). Except the last two the other nations, by international standards come within top 30 percent of the nations of the world. With the integration of Sikkim in India the process of delineation of nation states in the subcontinent which started in 1947 is over. All boundaries within the subcontinent are settled boundaries except certain portions of the line of control in northern
portions of Kashmir. The demarcation of these state boundaries has firmed up as evidenced by the return of territories by India to Pakistan at the end of the two wars, the prompt vaca-
tion of Indian forces from Bangladesh and Indian sponsorship of UN membership of Bhutan. The finality of the Radcliffe awarded boundaries has been upheld in two wars. Even during the time of British paramouncy when Burma was treated as part of Indian Empire, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan had their independent identities separate from India. In these circumstances there is no reasonable justification to fear that the present land boundaries in the subcontinent are likely to be altered by use of force.

Inspite of India’s large size and higher capability there are also significant constraints on India’s power in the region. India unlike China and the Soviet Union is a nation with high degree of interaction with the external world and relies on external inputs both in terms of aid and technology. Consequently it is extremely unlikely that India would risk her international interaction and benefits she derived. Secondly in India there is an acute awareness that any action that would increase the sense of insecurity of her neighbours is likely to result in those neighbours bringing in the countervailing power and influence of extra regional powers and this is not in India’s interests. In fact the Indian effort has generally been directed towards balancing such extra regional influences and capabilities through counter defensive measures at minimum possible cost.

During the period of evolution of nation statehood the developing nations do need certain military capability to ensure that the process of nation state building is not in any way hampered by internal factors and external interventionism. Britain became a nation state behind the shield of the Royal Navy. France, Germany and Japan at the time of their evolution as nation states were militarily powerful. So were the Swedes. The Soviet Union and China too maintain large armed forces to safeguard their revolution. The United States was powerful
during its build up as a nation state compared to its neighbours—Canada and Mexico. The size of the armed forces of a nation is determined by a number of subjective factors. There has been a fashionable trend to forget all history and bemoan the need for armed forces in the developing nations. While the obscenely large arsenals of industrialised nations are totally unjustifiable, developing nations need the armed forces to safeguard the process of evolution into nation statehood. It is also necessary for them to equip their armed forces with the current equipment so that their forces are credibly deterrent. Among stable nation states purchase of equipment by one state is not necessarily seen as directed against the security of its neighbour. That capabilities count enduringly while intentions may change is a military approach. That arms themselves do not cause a war but politics relating to them do is the reality one sees among alliance partners. By world’s standards South Asia is underarmed and not overarmed. Twenty percent of global population surrounded on all sides (China, USSR, south and west Asia, southeast Asia) by ridges of higher defence expenditure is spending only 1.2 percent of global military expenditures.

Viewed in the above perspective a sound basis for South Asian Cooperation can emerge. The basis is that all constituent nation states of the region have a collective self interest in promoting the consolidation and evolution to stable nation statehood. India has repeatedly declared that she has a vital interest in a strong, stable, united and prosperous Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In turn it should be obvious to any observer that the stability of India is of paramount interest to all its neighbours and any set back to Indian unity and integrity will send seismic shocks all over south, southeast and south west Asia and will probably break up some of India’s neighbours as well.

Secondly all nations of South Asia have a mutuality of interest in restraining and countering the interventionism of
extra regional powers in the area. Such a common perspective need not necessarily come in the way of individual nation's relationship with extra regional powers in respect of aid, trade and even arms transfers. It is the nature of political relationship between countries of the region and extra regional powers with reference to the cold war confrontation which is likely to affect the security of states in the subcontinent.

Thirdly the perception that there are security threats from within the subcontinent to the territorial integrity of states arising out of actions of the constituent states has to be analysed dispassionately and the factors underlying the perceptions identified and countered. An analysis would show that such factors arise largely out of different paths adopted by different constituent states in regard to the strategy of development to nation statehood. Some of these factors are capable of resolution and some of them are not at least in the short term.

Fourthly, if the above three aspects are taken together the security of the constituent nation states of South Asia has to be viewed at two levels. Those general considerations that affect the security of the region as a whole, and security of the developing nations during their period of development into nation states. Secondly those intra-regional factors pertaining to the different strategies of development into nation statehood. It should be possible to evolve certain basic commonality of approach in regard to the former and identify areas in regard to latter where confidence building is specifically called for.

In the absence of such an approach to the basic issue of survival, integration, cohesion and development of the constituent countries as stable nation states individual conflictual issues in inter state relationship tend to loom large and since five of the states have common border only with India and not with each other the entire problem tends to be blown up as India versus other states. The unarticulated underlying security perceptions have tended to inhibit development of regional cooperation in various ways. Hence the reluctance to expand trade,
movement of people, exchange of newspapers and periodicals etc within the region.

South Asian Cooperation cannot be progressed meaningfully unless these basic issues are tackled and certain shared perspectives are developed. Nor can security issues in South Asia be viewed exclusively as international and interstate issues. A start needs to be made to look at the problems of nation building and nation state development in different states and the linkages between security and development during the period of evolution as nation states.