SECURITY ISSUES OF SOUTH ASIA IN THE NEW SITUATION: A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

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South Asia is an important region, for it occupies an important strategic position in the world, its population amounts to one-fifth of the world total, its economy has great potentials and, moreover, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were initiated from here. So long as peace, unity and stability are preserved, we can not only promote security and economic prosperity of this region but also make important contributions to the world peace and development, bringing happiness to the peoples of this region and the world as a whole.

In recent years, the international situation has been undergoing great changes, in which the old strategic pattern has been broken and the new one has not yet been formed. The world is now in a transitional period of substitution of a new pattern for the old one. These changes are characterized mainly by the earthshaking transformations in East Europe, the relaxation of relations between the United States and the ex-Soviet union, the reunification of Germany and the disintegration of the Yalta System and the Soviet Union. The situation in the ex-Soviet and other East European countries is very complicated and turbulent and has constituted great shocks to Europe as well as to the whole world. In the midst of these changes, there erupted the large scale Gulf War. Although the war is over, the Middle East peace Conference is staggering along. It is hard to predict if the conference could yield positive results and help stabilize the Middle East. While facing this new situation full of turbulences, uncertainties and changes and the new era full of tough competitions and serious challenges, how can South Asian
countries maintain peace and stability without being influenced by outside factors and accelerate their economic development? It is indeed of great necessity and significance to study this issue.

While judging from a global angle, the recent situation in South Asia, as opposed to the situation in other regions, is relatively stabler, the economy has achieved some progress and the people’s living standard has got certain improvement. These achievements are derived from the joint efforts of the governments and peoples in this region and are in the interests of the countries and peoples here. However, we should also note that there still exist old and new as well as internal and external insecure factors which might constitute a serious threat to regional security if not eliminated or well handled. These factors mainly include:

a. The biggest external threat to the security of South Asia during the past ten years and more was the Soviet inheritance of the Tsarist southward expansionist policy manifested by its invasion of Afghanistan. The victims who bore the brunt of the invasion were Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the ex-Soviet Union has now pulled out its troops from Afghanistan, the process toward a political settlement is very slow, and to reach an agreement within a short period seems to be difficult. So this “hot spot” has not yet vanished completely.

Since the August 19 incident of 1991 in the ex-Soviet Union, its internal political situation has been changing drastically and the original union structure has been disintegrated. Its republics became independent one after another and the ethnic contradictions are being aggravated, making the economy deteriorate and pushing the turbulent situation toward an uncontrollable situation. As its Central Asian republics are very close to South Asia, the changes of the situation and the development of the contradictions there, especially quite a few of ethnic and religious disputes, would hardly have no effects upon the situation in South Asia, this is an issue that needs to be noted and studied by South Asian countries.

b. South Asian countries were once ruled by colonial powers for a long period and, after their independence, forced
to take over various disputes created and left over by colonialists. As a result, during the past 40 years and more, bilateral relationships among the countries here have been always very tense and disharmonious. This situation has in turn led to arms race and many conflicts, wasted lots of human, material and financial resources, hindered the development of these countries and the improvement of peoples living standard, and damaged regional unity and stability. Moreover, the interferences by the superpowers for their global interests have aggravated and expanded the internal contradictions of this region and, thus made the security of South Asian countries more problematic.

c. In recent years, the political situation in South Asian countries has been turbulent and uncertain with frequent changes of governments. To stabilize the internal political situation and to strengthen their position, new governments often have to cope with power struggles staged by opposition parties as well as different kinds of upheavals caused by ethnic and religious disputes. Moreover, ethnic and religious disputes in some countries even resulted in bloodshed. These internal problems have been in existence for a long time and, repeatedly, they could be relaxed and then became tense again, having seriously affected their relations with neighboring countries either of this region or of other regions. In this situation South Asian countries could not free their hands to promote regional cooperation, to help each other to achieve common development for enhancing their international status and strengthening their role in the international society.

The following are some tentative propositions on how in this region, security could be enhanced and peace and stability be achieved in the new international situation.

I. To Solve the Afghan Issue and to Eliminate the “Hot Spot’ at an Early Date

Although the ex-Soviet Union pulled out its troops from Afghanistan three years ago and the temperature there has been dropping, the Afghan issue has not yet been completely solved and the “hot spot” has not yet been totally eliminated. So there still exists some threat to the security of South Asia. Due to drastic changes in its internal political situation, the
declining of its comprehensive national strength and readjustments of its foreign policy, the ex-Soviet Union has weakened its capability of intervening into other countries internal affairs. This created a favorable condition for a political settlement of the Afghan issue. And the peaceful settlement of the Kampuchean issue can also give an impetus to a through political settlement of the Afghan issue. South Asian countries could avail themselves of this opportunity to reach consensus on a political settlement of the Afghan issue and to help form a broadly based coalition government through promoting friendly consultations among all Afghan political forces, so as to bring peace to this country, and to make it an independent, sovereign, neutral, non-alligned and stable country. This is a common task for all South Asian countries in maintaining peace and stability of this region.

In addition, in handling their regional affairs, South Asian countries should persist in solving their own problems among the governments and peoples of this region and in opposing foreign intervention, for foreign interventions usually would make issues more complex.

II. To Adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Conexistence so as to Solve Bilateral Disputes Gradually

In the bilateral relationships of South Asian countries, there exist territorial, resource, ethnic and religious disputes left over by history. After independence of these countries, not only some old disputes got some development, but also some new disputes rose up due to disharmonious bilateral relationships. The old and new disputes have seriously affected their bilateral relationships, weakened their power and reduced their mutual trust, making their security more problematic. If these disputes could not be handled properly, they would aggravate the contradictions concerned and even lead to war which could destroy peace, hurt both sides and bring catastrophies to the people. The three India-Pakistan wars have demonstrated the harmfulness of this kind of disputes.

To solve these old and new disputes South Asian countries should all adopt good-neighborly and friendly policies to improve country-to-country relationships. I think
these disputes could well be solved and the relationship be improved. The fundamental way is to strictly observe the Five Principles of peaceful Coexistence and to conduct active dialogues with sincere aspirations for friendly cooperation and by taking their long-term common interests as a point of departure, so as to seek common points while reserving differences, to build up mutual confidence, to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation, through which the disputes could be solved one by one with formulas acceptable to all sides, I believe this is the prospect that all South Asian countries and peoples are expecting.

III. National Unity and Stability

South Asian countries are all developing Third World Countries whose population is immense and economy underdeveloped. The former Indian Prime Minister Mr. Chandra Shekhar said nearly half of the world poor people are in South Asia. Every country of this region is facing the serious challenge of developing its economy and improving its people's living standard. However, political stability is a precondition for economic development. Only when political situation is stabilized could economy be developed, national strength be enhanced, people's living standard be increased and, as a result, social order and national stability be achieved.

Political instability is a common problem for South Asian countries. The solution to this problem lies mainly in the abandonment of narrow-minded self interests and the persistence in putting the national and people's interests in the supreme position on the part of different political forces, religious factions and ethnic groups of individual countries, in which their self interests are also included. Then, they can, under this premise, promote patriotism, conduct dialogues and friendly consultations, trust each other and reach consensus, so as to establish with joint efforts a coalition government that could represent the whole nation's and people's interests and to maintain their long-term stability.

IV. To Strengthen Regional Cooperation and to Develop Economy with Joint Efforts.

In the new international situation, economic development
has become the premier task for all countries in the world. Only when economy is developed can the national comprehensive strength be enhanced, people's living standard be improved, social order be stabilized and security be ensured. Tehran Declaration, issued at the ministerial conference of the Group of 77 on 23 November 1991, made the good remark that the basis for peace and security included not only eliminating the danger of a world war or a nuclear war but also developing economy, breaking away from the sufferings of poverty, hunger, diseases, illiteracy and unemployment.

At present, economic and trade groups and political alliances are being established in many regions of the world. Because international economic relations are tending to be closer and competitions are becoming increasingly tougher, all countries need to form groups of alliances in order to support each other, strengthen mutual cooperation, to accelerate development and, at the same time, to safeguard their own regional interests. South Asian countries noted this tendency long ago. They founded South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation in Dhaka as early as in December 1985. Its member countries have enhanced their social, cultural, scientific and technological cooperation in accordance with the Charter of SAARC. Up till now, this association has held 6 summit meetings.

During the past 5 years, SAARC has achieved some results in 12 areas such as agriculture, education, health, prohibition of drug abuses and science and technology, etc. It established a grain reservation system, signed a convention for fighting against terrorist activities and set up an agricultural information centre. These are concrete achievements of the regional cooperation. Mr Bharagava, former Secretary General of SAARC, said that it would take about 10 years or even more time for SAARC to become a common market like the European Community. At the 5th summit meeting of SAARC held in Male in 1990, leaders of the 7 member countries expressed their dissatisfaction with the status of South Asian cooperation. They thought that the process was too slow and the ranges were too narrow, and that they should enhance cooperation. According to an analysis of some experts, the reason for the slow process lies
mainly in bilateral disputes in this region and political turbulences in individual countries. One Sri Lankan analyst said that one of the most serious obstacles to South Asian cooperation is the lack of the "South Asian spirit."

I think the "South Asian spirit" means that South Asian countries should take their common and long-term interests as a point of departure, try every means to unite all countries here, solve their disputes through peaceful consultations, improve bilateral relations, give a full play to SAARC and jointly develop regional economy in accordance with the specific conditions of this region. In so doing, this region can strengthen its security and stand firmly in the world. The experiences of the ASEAN may be applicable to South Asia.

V. To Establish A New South Asian Order.

Since last year, to talk about the establishment of a new world order has become a political fashion in the world. Many countries, especially most Third World countries, agree that a new world order should be founded on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles are in keeping with the Charter, goal and spirit of the United Nations, and are derived from the will of the people and the necessity of the times. They have also been proved by many facts during the past 40 years. Only when we replace the old order based upon hegemonism and power politics with a new type of order based upon these principles can we genuinely safeguard world peace and security, guarantee small nation's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is the fundamental approach to the resolution of peace and security problems.

As the world is an integral complex, securities of different countries are inter-related to each other and, as a whole, are a component of world peace and security structure. At present, there still exists hegemonism and power politics. It is quite understandable that small and weak nations are concerned about their own security. Only when all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, have a sense of security by way of treating each other as equals, seeking common points while reserving differences, coexisting peacefully and achieving common development can genuine peace and stability be realized in our troublesome planet. This is the lofty goal that
the international society must make earnest efforts to realize. South Asian countries all belong to the Third World. As they all need peace, security, stability and development, it is quite possible to establish a new order in this region, which is a necessity of maintaining common interests. South Asia is a place where the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was initiated and, moreover, some countries here have maintained friendly relations with their neighbors for a long time according to the criteria of the five principles and played a very important role in regional peace and security affairs. I believe that, as long as the new type of relations characterized by friendly bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and equality and mutual benefits are actively promoted, it is quite possible to establish a new regional order in South Asia and to develop the cradle of the five principles into a place where a new order based upon these principles is first realized. This is mission as well as a glory for South Asia to set an example in establishing a new world order.