Pakistan saw the end of 1991 - one of the most momentous years in recent history - with a combination of hope and an upbeat note. On the whole, there is reason to be optimistic about the future with events providing Pakistan for a greater sense of security and inculcating national self-confidence.

The three key events in 1991 that will impact on South Asian Security, as viewed from Pakistan, are the Gulf War and its aftermath, the demise of the Soviet Union and for the first time since 1947, an India without the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. After its victory in the Gulf War against Iraq, the United States put forward the concept of a so-called ‘New World Order’. As far as South Asia is concerned, a new American strategy for the region that begins at Israel and ends at India was unfolding in the context of the end of the superpowers, “special relations” with South Asia’s two adversaries; the Soviets with India and the Americans with Pakistan. This new American strategy, based on a permanent US military presence in the Persian Gulf sought to promote triangular goals:

- “containing” Muslim military might;
- recognition of Israel by the Muslim countries; and
- preserving the political status quo in the Persian Gulf.

In furtherance of this goal, the US targeted Muslim countries like Pakistan and Iran on the pretext of curbing their nuclear programmes, a key aspect of this line being pressure put on China to curb its military sales relationship with five Muslim countries, namely Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Syria and Libya. The US Congress passed legislation to this effect in April 1991. Additionally, the United States also started warming up to India in the economic, political and
military fields, to reciprocate for India's gesture in the Gulf War when, public professions of neutrality and friendship for Iraq notwithstanding, India secretly acceded to an American request for refuelling of US warplanes flying to the theatre of war in January 1991.

Some manifestations of the Washington Delhi warming up in 1991 include:

- Aid-to-India Consortium assistance of a $6.7 billion to India, including immediate disbursal of $2.3 billion; Indian Army Chief's visit to the US expressing India's desire for military cooperation including weapon sales, training and joint exercises;

- India's change of line on Palestine when its 1975 stand on the Zionism Resolution was changed in December 1991 to accommodate American wishes, although Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka stuck to their original positions during the vote. US interests in India include a shared aversion to what is called "Islamic fundamentalism" and the potential to use India as a conduit to destabilise China via Tibet. In the context of South Asia, the end of the Cold War has also meant realignments and reassessments of major external powers in some key areas. Some examples: Russia's change of line on the Nuclear issue with Moscow voting, for the first time, in the UN in support of the Pakistani proposal of a nuclear-free South Asia; America's change of line on Kashmir; while still considering Kashmir a disputed territory and an issue between India and Pakistan, the US no longer supports a plebiscite under UN auspices;

- China's ideological threat from the US necessitating improvement in ties with neighbours like Afghanistan and India and closer cooperation with friends like Bangladesh, Iran and Pakistan;

- US ideological threat from "Islamic fundamentalism" reflected in its desire to strengthen non-Muslim countries like Israel and India in the region. The demise of the Soviet Union brought unexpected strategic gains for Pakistan since the USSR was perceived as the best friend of Pakistan's principal adversary, India. This meant not only the break-up of the Indo-Soviet axis, but also the
emergence of the six new Muslim states in the region to Pakistan's north, namely, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kirghizistan. Apart from providing strategic depth vis-a-vis India in South Asia, these six Muslim republics could eventually also form part of a broad regional economic grouping centred on the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO). Development in India as well were seen as a plus for South Asian security as perceived from Pakistan. The demise of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty contributed to the creation of a positive regional ambience since the Nehru family was viewed by the rest of South Asia as having an "historical hangover", as inheritors of the legacy of the Raj. And then the election of a respected politician like Narasimha Rao who is not from Hindu-Hindi belt was an added plus. In any case, the end of the Cold War and the demise of the USSR was detrimental to India since India had been more dependent, politically and militarily, on the Soviet Union than Pakistan on the United States. And in the wake of the Soviet demise, there was talk of India being the "second Soviet Union". India also suffered two other diplomatic setbacks;

- The Organisation of Islamic Conference Summit in Dakar, Senegal, in December 1991 became the first international forum to unanimously support the Kashmiris struggle for self-determination under UN auspices and also India's massive violations of human rights there were condemned;

- The initial attempt to sabotage the SAARC Summit in Colombo failed when the majority of SAARC leaders rushed to express solidarity with Sri Lanka, including the three Muslim states of South Asia; Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Maldives.

In fact, India's only notable diplomatic success in the South Asian context was the induction of a new government in Nepal that pledged not to buy any more arms from China like previous government did in 1988, so as not to offend India. An added reason for Pakistan's sense of security and national self-confidence was the fact that Pakistan managed to successfully stand up to American pressures on the nuclear
issue, despite the stoppage of all American economic and military aid. Then Pakistan’s nuclear capability was accepted and recognised without Pakistan having to detonate a device as India had done in 1974. This nuclear parity in South Asia will help to offset, to a great extent, India’s overwhelming superiority in the Conventional field. Consequently, notwithstanding the rhetoric on both sides, the bottom line in South Asia rules out war in the near future between India and Pakistan. That an informal South Asian version of the “balance of terror” is operative was evident when war over Kashmir in May-June 1990 was prevented precisely because of fears that a conflict might develop a nuclear edge as well.

For the future, South Asian Security will depend on three key factors:

i. Indian attitudes towards smaller neighbours:

India has to be large-hearted and broad-minded in its dealings with neighbours rather than being petty and niggardly, literally counting every paisa and penny, as its track record has shown so far. For instance, such pettiness extends to such areas including weather it is the Tin Bigha Island issue with Bangladesh, Nepal’s purchase of arms from China, or the reneging of the commitment regarding the Jinnah House in Bombay, which India promised to let Pakistan use as its Consulate-General but later went back on its word. There is also a double standard in the Indian approach when India has been doing precisely with the dissidents in Bangladesh and Tamils in Sri Lanka what it accuses Pakistan of doing with the freedom fighters in Kashmir or the Sikhs in Punjab. An Indian change of attitude is, therefore, essential for South Asian Security.

ii. Settling Kashmir:

Like the Americans in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan, India has to accept the reality that it has lost Kashmir and it cannot hold the territory and its people through a brutal occupation army and other security forces who are committing crimes against humanity against the Kashmirs including gang-rapes. India has spurned all Pakistani suggestions for talks on Kashmir, which both the United Nations and even the Simla Accord accept is still
disputed territory. India has to cross the psychological hump to talk to Pakistan because talking to a smaller neighbour does not necessarily mean lowering its own stature, as India seems to believe. For instance, when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif gave his 5-power proposal on the Nuclear issue in June 1991, India quickly turned it down but when the same proposal was coming from the Americans, India was veering towards accepting it.

iii. Nuclear issue:
Ambiguity has served its purpose, Both India and Pakistan must come out of the closet, lay their nuclear cards on the table and then sign a bilateral accord to halt the nuclear arms race in South Asia. This is an essential first step before any conventional cuts and defence reductions on both sides.