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SAARC:

Security with a New Perspective

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The late 20th Century was witness to profound changes in international relations and the concept of security. This period underpins not only the conclusion of the Cold War and the end of major conflicts in several regions, but also encompasses the transition from the Cold War security order to the beginning of a post-Cold War regional security dynamic. Paradoxically, this period has also witnessed greater strategic uncertainty, while at the same time raising hopes for peace and stability achieved through the pursuit of new security concepts and approaches. In other words, in the space that has replaced Cold War imperatives and overlay, new security ideas and institutions have begun to emerge. Modifiers such as "comprehensive", "common" and "cooperative" have been added to the trope "security" and have entered the parlance of regional security planners.

This paper explores those ideas that fall under the expanding rubric of "South Asian Regional Security". It considers them in the light of contemporary developments in the theory of social and international relations, primarily on the approach of collective security. A key objective is to focus on the fundamental restructuring of the pattern of interactions between the countries of the South Asian region against the backdrop of an increasingly complex interplay between geo-economics and geo-politics.

Regional organizations today tend to be regarded as the natural outgrowth of international cooperation. As Bary Buzan has noted, the removal of earlier superimposed configuration of great power influence has encouraged multiplicity and contributed towards an international system in which 'regional arrangements can be expected to assume greater importance'.¹ A coherent theory for the new emerging regions can be found especially in the studies of Hettne.² The focus of new regionalism now appears to be on the political goals of establishing regional coherence. As Hettne and others have argued, several features distinguish the 'new regionalism' from the old. Current process of regionalism occurs more from below and 'within' than before, while not only economic but also ecological and security imperatives push states and communities towards cooperation within new types of regional frameworks. The actors pushing for new regionalism are more varied, including both states and non-state institutions, organizations and movements. Above all, a definite characteristic is that it takes place in a multi-polar global context (compared to the bipolarity of the Cold War world), making it extroverted and open,




which is one way of coping with the global economy.³

Even in regional security matters, regional organizations are playing an active role. The Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS), action in Liberia's civil war, ASEAN's involvement in Cambodian peace process and Russia's attempt to establish a buffer zone in the territory of South Ossetra are but a few examples.⁴

In the Asian continent, one notices the new regional consciousness which has emerged due to changes in traditional security attitudes and frameworks. There are new diplomatic ties amongst the countries in the region. Thus, since 1990, we have seen Russia, South Korea and China establishing diplomatic ties with Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam. India has also strengthened its diplomatic ties with South-East Asia, while Japan is providing financial help to Russia. These new developments seem to imply an emerging consensus among Asian states on the eventual disengagement of the US military in the region.

The South Asia region of the late 20th century was characterized by an incongruous blend of increasing political instability, on the one hand, and a cautious yet resolute fostering of regional consciousness, on the other. For example, the return of military rule in Pakistan, limited war between India and Pakistan, rise of religious fundamentalism in India, one-party authoritarian rule in Bangladesh, civil war in Sri Lanka, political chaos in Nepal, and possession of nuclear weapons overtly or covertly by India and Pakistan, appeared to have stifled any future optimism of internal or inter-state security in the sub-continent.⁵ Coupled with this, the post-September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the USA gave rise to political extremism and religious fundamentalism in the domestic politics of the smaller states in the region. This led to a spectacular deterioration of relations among the countries in the region. Yet these negative developments carried within them the seeds of a radical transformation in the South Asian region. The regional effort of knowing each other and getting together got a strong push, both from the developments within and outside the region. The post-Cold War political and economic imperatives provided the momentum for regional cooperation in South Asia.

However, two main obstacles lie in the path of cooperative security




in the region. The first of these is a lingering of mutual distrust among the South Asian region countries. With the self-declaration by India and Pakistan as nuclear weapon states, the climate of suspicion, fear and mistrust among the smaller states of the region has become more pronounced. The second obstacle is the asymmetrical balance of power, i.e. India vis-a-vis other South Asian countries.

The problem in the South Asian region is one that is general to regional security: The picture is quite complex, whether the region is conducive to, or ready for new approaches to security is a matter of debate. Often the security dimensions of the issue are intimately associated with broader areas of international relations. These include debate over the most appropriate paths to economic development, the issue of regional identity, role of regional organizations etc.⁶ In the context of South Asia, the questions are... How to create a new regional security-community where none existed before? How can one make the leap from confrontational alliances to cooperative arrangements between states used to regarding each other as actual enemies or possible opponents?

The concept of Security Community is often defined as a group of states that has achieved a condition, as a result of flow of communication and the habit of cooperation, where members share "expectations of peaceful change" and rule out "the use of force as a means to problem-solving. States that belong to a Security Community come to see their security as fundamentally linked to other states, their destinies bound by common norms, history, political experience, and regional location. A Security Community exists when states reach the level of confidence that ensures that security can only be attained if they cooperate with each other. A Security Community is also characterized by a) the absence of a competitive military build-up among the regional actors; (b) total absence of armed inter-state conflict; (c) the presence of formal and informal institutions and practices which serve to reduce, prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and disorder; (d) a high degree of economic integration; and (e) the absence of territorial disputes among the member states.⁷

The Security Community concept was originally defined by Karl W. Deutsch and colleagues in 1957. Deutsch's work represented one of the earliest challenges to realism's belief in the necessity and inevitability of war. During the Cold War era, when international theory was virtually dominated by the realist paradigm, Karl Deutsch



defined integration in terms of turning “previously separate units into components of a coherent system’. He foresaw that the objective of integration could be realised when a high level of international communications and transactions characterizes the ‘political community’ consisting of an international system of developed nation-states. Closer diplomatic and commercial contacts foster “a sense of shared community and trust” which makes war between members inconceivable.”⁸ Scholars like Adler and Barnett regard communication as the ‘cement of social groups in general and political communities in particular’, which consequently enables a group to think together and to act together’. In this regard, cooperative security is predicted as central to the research program on Security Communities.⁹

Significantly, Bary Buzan had introduced the concept of ‘Security Complex’ to study regional security or what he calls, ‘regional pattern of amity and enmity’.¹⁰ For him, a security complex is ‘a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot be considered apart from one another’.¹¹ This is the kind of ‘we-feeling’ identified by Deutsch, as a key feature of management of regional conflict.¹² Thus, peaceful change is the most significant aspect of this concept.. For instance, in the introductory chapter of the book dedicated to Karl Deutsch, titled “From National Development to Global Community,” the authors, Richard L. Merritt and Bruce M. Russett, equate expectations of peaceful change to security communities.¹³ Thus, it logically follows that peaceful change is conditional; that is, not merely acquiescent, that there has to be a spirit of accommodation of other people’s requirements, not just the continuation of the past. The extent to which the regional institutions and sub-regions have continued to adjust and adapt to changes in the environment is evidently a crucial factor.

The main challenge facing the South Asian countries is how to move from confrontational alliance politics to cooperative arrangements that include putative opponents - in other words, cooperative security. The aim of this article is, therefore, to analyze the origins, dynamics and consequences of regionalism(s) in South Asia in various fields of activity and combined, through a multi-level perspective. In doing so, I shall draw upon the concept of Cooperative Security which has proved to be a useful, albeit open-ended, analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of active engagement in negotiations and in the establishment of peace and




security in the South Asian region.

It revolves around the liberal view that there should be greater inter-dependence in the regional level in South Asia, to avoid or end bilateral, regional and even domestic conflicts between the states. I also wish to recast the security perspectives of South Asian states by exploring whether the emergence of a sense of security in common dealings between former antagonist states in the region could lead to the development of a Security Community.

The Concept of Cooperative Security:

The term ‘cooperative security’ is a relatively new one in the debate on international relations, in the post Cold War scenario. The term has been used to outline a more peaceful and idealistic approach to security. Cooperative security essentially reflects a policy that introduces measures to reduce the risk of war, not merely by abstention from violence or threats but by active engagement in negotiation and search for practical solutions, and with a commitment to adopt preventive measures. It is a much narrower concept, denoting a specific, inclusive type of relationship: cooperation on security issues between putative opponents. To be precise, Cooperative Security can be understood as policies of governments which see themselves as former adversaries or potential adversaries, to shift from or avoid confrontalist policies.¹⁴

In addition to addressing the role of force and military competition, the concept of Cooperative Security now entails economic and environmental security concerns as well. Economic performance rather than military capability is increasingly seen as the measure of a state’s power in the international community. Moreover, states define threats to their security in economic, environmental and demographic terms. However, concerns about non-traditional security challenges have not eliminated traditional military worries. The two sets of issues combine to foster an important perception in many countries of a heightened sense of vulnerability. Perceived military deficits, a heightened sense of civilian population vulnerability, and concerns over the fragility of the national infrastructure are all part of this changed perception.¹⁵ Before applying this concept in the context of South Asia, let us first have a glimpse of the essential conditions of Cooperative Security. These pertain to building an analytical community, addressing



transnational threats, preventing or resolving conflicts, and building civil societies.

Moreover, the concept of Cooperative Security demands the enlargement and consolidation of democratic structures and institutions; political capacity of leadership; regional economic integration; reduction of the interventionist role of extra-regional forces; and primacy to the resolution of outstanding bilateral problems. Of course, in the South Asian region, one need not wait for all the essential conditions to be fulfilled, for cooperative security among the states. What is required is to work towards building the structures of Cooperative Security and undertaking corrective measures to strengthen the institutions which are integral parts of a cohesive national fabric. In the South Asian context, let us have a cursory look to the overall situation in the region.

Cooperative Security in South Asia

South Asia, described by Peter Lyon two decades ago, as a 'region without regionalism, was not immune to the 1980's trend towards regional association. This area has been

categorized by Björn Hettne as one with a very low level of "regionness",¹⁶ because of the antagonism between the two major powers, India and Pakistan. Unlike West Europe and South-east Asia where the Cold War dynamics forced stronger forms of cooperation, in South Asia it incited the inter-regional security problems. The two powerful states in the region joined the opposite coalitions camp of the global Cold War standpoint. India bonded with Soviet Union and Pakistan did stick together with U.S. and China. Although these alliance appear to provide some kind of stability at one level, they also created the conditions for long term instability in the region. India-Pakistan hostilities created a blockade for any kind of cooperation program among south Asian neighbors.¹⁷


It may be noted that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were once part of a single political entity - British India. The disruption of the economic as well as the political unity of India in 1947 followed by India-Pakistan hostility over Kashmir and other issues forced the two major powers in the region to build divergent economic links with each other. The severance of political links between India and Pakistan in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the result of political

decisions based on political and security calculations and not on economic considerations. As a result, the regional trade had dropped drastically. In 1948-49, the first full year after partition, 32% of Pakistani imports came from India while India bought 56 per cent of Pakistan's exports. Fifty five years later, the situation is dramatically different. In 2004-05, India imported only 0.42 per cent of Pakistan's exports and provided only 0.13 per cent of the latter's imports.¹⁸

Likewise, Bangladesh, except in the immediate years after its liberation, was not interested in enhancing economic cooperation with India. Even, railway and road network that once united British India, were subject to severe economic and political barriers after partition. The North Western Railway that linked Karachi with Delhi and the fabled Grand Trunk Road that connected Peshawar with Calcutta through Delhi, was detached. Natural ports were cut off from their hinterlands as Chittagong from India's North-East and Kolkata from the western part of East Pakistan. Twin commercial cities like Mumbai and Karachi have become distant neighbors. In fact, border trade has never been encouraged by the South Asian states after partition. The primacy of the political factor thus displayed in the early years of independence has continued to irk in all succeeding endeavors which were aimed at promoting economic cooperation within South Asia.¹⁹

Moreover, since 1947, there was continuous tension and conflict between the two biggest countries in the region, which led to 3 major wars, two of which were centered on Kashmir in 1947-48 , 1965 ,one around the Bangladesh liberation issue in 1971. There were also near-war situations in 1984, 1987, 1990, reflected in numerous clashes between India and Pakistan. Added to it, in the summer of 1999, India and Pakistan fought a 73 day military conflict in the upper reaches of Kashmir at Kargil, located 120 miles from the capital city of Srinagar. The conflict was a clear manifestation of a 50 year-old sub-continental rivalry that has portents of a nuclear conflagration affecting global peace and security.

Against the background of minimum regional backup, the then Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman mooted the idea of setting up an ASEAN-like organization in South Asia. The initiative of the President has been seen as a landmark effort in moving the South Asian countries towards a more cooperative relationship and in giving the South Asia region a more visible and influential presence in world affairs. The birth of the South Asian Regional Organization (SAARC) in 1985 indicated a new beginning for the seven South Asian



countries of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. For the first time, these countries made an institutional effort to forge multinational cooperation among themselves²⁰.

A careful study of the objectives and principles reveals that South Asian Regional Organization (SAARC) was envisaged as being complementary to and not a substitute for bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The basis of this co-operation is to be guided by the accepted international principles of inter-state relations, namely the sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of the other states and mutual benefit. The primary emphasis was on the welfare of the people of the region, to improve the quality of life, through the acceleration of economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the region, providing all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity, and promoting collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia. The objectives also were defined to go beyond the sphere of socio-economic development and encompass the area of mutual trust, understanding of each other problems and co-operation in international forums on matters of common interests.²¹

Yet if one assesses the role of SAARC in the last 21 years, its success has been quite limited when compared to ASEAN, primarily because bilateral conflicts between individual South Asian states (very often between one of the smaller countries and India) prevented either the initiation or the implementation of multilateral arrangements which

would benefit all of the members. SAARC was evolved at a time when relations between India and most of the member countries had been characterized by mistrust and suspicion. The single most important issue for all of India's neighbors was how to relate to India, the focal point of their threat perception. This perception dominated issues on inter-state relations in the region, especially India's apprehension about the intentions of other nations in the region towards it, and the other nation's fear of India's hegemony. Further, it was the fear of India that compelled the other nations in South Asia to search for their own separate identities, in this process, ignoring affinities that existed with India.

Again, India-Pakistan political and military conflicts are the most important ones, in this context, with Pakistan being reluctant to deal with India on the kinds of economic matters to which SAARC has

mainly confined itself so far.²¹⁵⁴ Moreover the sheer territorial size and the centrality of location of India in South Asia, have given the region a certain distinctiveness of character, and have mostly determined the inter-state affairs in the region. The size, population, resources and power potential of India make for its implicit predominance in the prevailing asymmetric power structure in South Asia. The Indo-centric nature of the region has been a major source of dissonance.²²⁵⁵ The fact that most of the less powerful South Asian countries are geographically close to India but not to each other, means that they are more likely to have disputes with India than with each other. For example, Bangladesh does not have cooperative ties with India, and India's relationship with Nepal, which shares a porous land border of over 1,800 kilometers together with some of the cultural values based on the Hindu religion, remains trouble-prone. Sri Lanka has its own bag of problems, including the Tamil issue, keeping it suspicious about India's motives in the island nation across the Palk Straits. Bhutan's worries are several, but a 1949 friendship pact prevents it from publicly airing its grievances against New Delhi. The Maldives' position is not strikingly different from that of Bhutan, except from the fact that Bhutan is a landlocked country and the other is a nation surrounded by water from all sides.

Also, over the years, tension has been mounting between India and Bangladesh over the sharing of waters of their common 54 rivers. India, lying upstream, controls the main waters flowing into Bangladesh and Pakistan. And any withdrawal of water (for irrigation and, in the case of the Hoogly River, for shipping) affects Bangladesh's agriculture, fishery, shipping and ecology. Again, for a country like Pakistan, which relies more on irrigation and has built the largest irrigation system in the world, water surely could become *casus belli*. However, as a rare example of political farsightedness, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Water Treaty in 1960, providing for the allocation of the waters of the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) to Pakistan, and those of the three eastern rivers (Ravi, Sutlej, Beas) to India.²²

Thus, India's latest initiative to interlink some of the major river systems running through its territory has set off a regional controversy, raising the level of concerns in both Nepal and Bangladesh. Once implemented this Indian mega project could deprive both of its neighbors of their natural resource: water. Nepal would be prevented from making consumptive use of river water as

it would affect the flow downstream in Indian territory, and Bangladesh would find a itself dry if India goes ahead with its plan to dig deep canals on the upper reaches for diverting rivers which have traditionally been the main source of water for Bangladesh.

Again, Nepal is completely dependent on India for its economic development, covering foreign assistance and crucial imports, including oil, petroleum, cement, and coal. More than 700,000 Nepalese are employed in India in addition to some 20,000 Gurkha armed personnel in the Indian army. In 1989, when India cancelled the supply of essential commodities to Nepal as a result of serious disagreement between the two countries over the trade and transit issues, the limited nature of Nepal's economic autonomy was exposed.²³

Moreover, the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 and India's role thereof, India's peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974, its annexation of Sikkim in 1975 and its intervention in Sri Lanka in 1987-90 and Maldives in 1988, have only added to the insecurity as well as India's hegemony among its neighbors. It was because of inherent threat perceptions against India and causes of conflicts like demarcation of borders, sharing of water flows from international rivers, and so on, that differences arose in the orientations of foreign policies of the countries of the region. Their foreign policies accord more importance to extra-regional linkage, which has been responsible for inviting super power rivalry in South Asia, thereby contributing to inter-regional hostilities.²⁴

A study of the trends of regional cooperation in SAARC points toward two contradictory phases of its evolution. The first is the formative phase - from its creation in 1985 until the end of 1990s when one notices initial uncertainties, skepticism among the countries in the region in coming to some kind of agreement in regional cooperation. It also coincided

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with serious internal conflict in the region, such as the LTTE problem in Sri Lanka and the Sikh separatist movements in India. This is also a phase in which an effort was made

to formulate the basics of regional cooperation and the first tentative efforts at widening the scope of cooperation are made.

The initial euphoria and enthusiasm to formulate a framework of cooperation appears to have lasted through the first two or three summits. For example, in the Dhaka Summit of 1985, a three-year agreement over the Ganges water sharing was reached between the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, and the then President of Bangladesh, General H. M. Ershad. In the Bangalore (India) Summit of 1986, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met to discuss and clarify some misconceptions on nuclear issues and border tensions. A growth of confidence was visible in the Kathmandu Summit of 1987 in which the delicate issue of Siachen Pass in Kashmir and the crucial issue of cross-border drug trafficking and terrorism were taken up by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan.

However, in 1989, at the time of the proposed Colombo Summit, trouble started brewing when Sri Lanka stated that it was not in a position to hold the Summit until the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) on the island. The differences of opinion between India and Sri Lanka over the issue of the presence of IPKF resulted in the postponement of the Summit. It may be noted that India's relations with all its neighbors had reached a dead end during this time. India's tough stance of imposing trade embargo against Nepal and its intervention in Sri Lanka made a tremendous adverse impact in the region. Coupled with it, the increase in China's influence in the subcontinent and its environs over the last decades - in the form of deepening strategic relations with Pakistan, and expanding links with Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, took place at a time of increasing complexity of India's own relations with its immediate neighbors in the subcontinent.

A second phase in the history of SAARC came about at the end of the Cold War and resultant changes in the global order. The phase witnessed an attempt by the SAARC member states to redefine its role. The post-Cold War economic imperatives provided the momentum for regional cooperation and cooperative security in South Asia. On the one hand, as a part of the globalization trend, regionalization has become a very influential phenomenon of integration among countries of specific regions. The policies of economic liberalization and the unleashing of the private sector is nudging the South Asian states to integrate the regional market. It has also called for greater and more sustained efforts to promote better bilateral relations among neighboring countries which could help develop a congenial atmosphere for financial development, joint ventures expansion of market facilities, transfer of technology,


liberalization of trade regimes, etc. at the regional level. On the other hand, there are internal pressures from within the region itself, forcing the states to act more purposefully.²⁵

Cooperative Security is premised on the assumption that states will act in their own self-interest. After a series of low intensity crises and real wars, India and Pakistan have finally acknowledged the significance of upholding bilateral engagements that would involve both bilateral cooperation and conflict resolution. Moreover, the South Asian countries have finally accepted the fact that the civil wars or low-intensity conflicts in the region have to be approached diplomatically and politically, rather than through hostile methods. Through the 1990s, relations between India and its smaller neighbors improved dramatically. This period posed new challenges for India's foreign policy. There was a pressing need to recast India's approach towards its neighboring countries.

The quest for a new approach to the neighbors was the centre of the foreign policy debate throughout the 1990s, and was more explicitly articulated in the famous Gujral Doctrine, through which India tried to formulate a perspective on its relations with its South Asian neighbors. The doctrine essentially promoted the accommodation of the interests of the neighboring states, without expectation of the reciprocity.

At the bilateral level, in 1998, India and Sri Lanka signed a Free Trade Agreement in the process of pursuing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, to integrate their economies as closely as possible. This is a landmark treaty which was aimed at removing customs tariffs on all but a relatively few items traded between the two countries. Meanwhile, in 1996, treaties on river waters were signed between India and Nepal and India and Bangladesh. The Government of India had also permitted transit movement of Nepalese cargo to Bangladesh by road via Kakarbitta-Phulbari-Banglabund route in September 1997.

The change of attitude was reflected in the Sixth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in 1991. It was decided to establish a multilateral trade arrangement structure known as SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement).. This agreement was envisaged primarily as the first step towards the transition to a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) leading subsequently towards a Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union. Subsequently, the SAFTA agreement was signed during the 12th SAARC summit held in




Islamabad in 2004. . The signing of this Agreement established an umbrella framework of rules providing for step-by step liberalization of intra-regional trade in such a manner that countries in the region would share the benefits of trade expansion equitably.²⁶ The agreement of SAFTA is indeed a turning point in the evolution of South Asian regionalism and has restored the intuitional credibility of SAARC. It has also discussed the important issues like trans-border energy cooperation and even bolder concepts such as common currency.

There was a spill-over effect of this on the political front. India and Bangladesh signed a historic 30-year treaty on sharing the of Ganga waters. The resolution of the Ganga water

dispute opened up fresh opportunities for the management of water and environment related issues in the region. In 1997, the Chakma leaders and the Bangladesh government concluded an agreement for the repatriation of an estimated 50,000 refugees from India belonging to the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh. It may be noted here that the influx from Bangladesh to the northeastern states of India had caused serious ethnic problems in the area.

Earlier, in 1996, India had achieved an important breakthrough on the issue of the sharing of river water resources, by signing the Mahakali River Treaty with Nepal. Various river water sharing projects as well as development of barrages between India and its neighbors were aimed at linking the states in a network of interdependence, to pursue developmental objectives in the area of agrarian production.²⁷ Apart from linkages through the rivers, India supported an initiative to establish a road link between Nepal and Bangladesh. This would enable Nepal to trade through the Chittagong port of Bangladesh. Similarly, India has also been looking for a route via Bangladesh to its northeastern states. There were, however, a few unresolved issues that existed between Bhutan and Nepal and Pakistan, on the one hand, and Bangladesh and Pakistan on the other, but that never created a major irritant issues in the region .

Nevertheless, a scrutiny of the intra-regional trade data in the SAARC region reveals that, contrary to expectations, there is hardly any improvement in volume of trade. So far, the improvements seen in regional trade have been marginal. In fact, the success of SAPTA to create a free trade area in South Asia was hampered due to several factors like the economic and political impediments that




existed in the region at that point of time.

In fact, the major stumbling blocks in the progress of SAARC and SAPTA have been the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998, followed by events in Kargil and the creation of a new war-like situation in mid-1999. According to a defence analyst, the alarming point of the tensions between the two countries on the Kashmir issue is, 'it could lead to a limited war as it had triggered three wars in the past and the potential for such a war to escalate into nuclear exchange'. In this regard, the Kargil Review Committee Report is significant. It states that 'Instead of seeking stable relationship on the basis of nuclear options capabilities, Pakistan used nuclear deterrence to support aggression. Kargil indicated that armed with nuclear weapons, Pakistan had increased confidence that it could raise the conflict thresholds with India. It demonstrated a willingness to take greater risks in conflict escalation. Instead of seeking nuclear stability, Pakistan demonstrated greater propensity to sustain instability, by seeking military conflict.'²⁸

Coupled with this issue were others that intensified already existing tense relations in the region and contributed to blocking the "political side of SAARC " from functioning. These included the return of military rule in Pakistan in late 1999 and India's aversion thereof, the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight from Katmandu and the involvement of the Pakistan Intelligence Agency in it. The fallout of these combined factors resulted in the deterioration of the security environment, which eventually led to the indefinite postponement of the 11th SAARC Summit scheduled to be held in 1999. Subsequently the return to power of Khalida Zia in the Bangladesh elections of 2001, in alliance with fundamentalists Islamic groups, domestic mayhem in Nepal which erupted after the assassination of the royal family in the region, further complicated relations in the region.

A particular objective of Cooperative Security is to allow the regional institutions to provide a forum for continuous dialogue, even when bilateral talks break down. As long as this dialogue goes on, there is hope that a major war can be avoided. It is here that SAARC could have play its role, providing a forum for continuous dialogue between its members at various levels - from heads of state down to the technical committees.




Finally “the conflict resolution through the pursuit of common programs for the future without referring to the quarrels of the past”, propagated by Mircea Malitza,²⁹ is a useful reference point in the case of establishing cooperative security paradigm in the South Asian region.. ‘In practical terms’, as Sridharan articulates, ‘the approach means finding a common project that can produce common interests, overlap diverging interests, and have minimal culture, value of belief consideration.’³⁰ In South Asia, the energy sector is definitely a possibility for enhancing the issue of cooperative security. For example, a gas pipeline and export of electricity, preferably in the context of a South Asian electricity grid, would probably enliven economic cooperation and act as a catalyst in the formation of a security regime in the region.

With the economic agenda of SAARC countries gaining importance, there is a plan to build an energy grid in the region, to ensure a two-way flow of power, natural gas and oil. The strategy is to offer economic benefits and open a gateway for trade with ASEAN countries and also look forward to a more congenial environment for the prospect of cooperative security in the energy sectors. To facilitate the plan for an energy grid, SAARC set up its first-ever senior and technical energy committees in late 2003. The seven Heads of State signed off an energy ring and harmonized energy efficiency standards for the region in the Islamabad Summit in January 2004.

As a major initiative in this process, the South Asian Centre of Policy Studies SACEPS organized an important seminar in Dhaka in May 2004, on the follow up action of the 12th Summit held in Islamabad, concerning SAFTA and Energy cooperation. The main purpose of the seminar was to highlight the different aspects of cross border power trade which would lead to effective utilization of the natural resources and eventually would bring about large scale transformation in the sectors contributing to economic growth.³¹

Similar workshop on the topic of “Improving the availability of power in South Asia : Search for Optimal Technology Options” organized by the Federation of Engineering Institutes of South and Central Asia (FEISCA) and Institute of Engineers Bangladesh (IFB) was held in 1998 at Dhaka. In this workshop, the issue of power sharing and the importance of setting up a regional power grid at the SAARC level were discussed threadbare. This would comprise the north eastern part of India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Added to it, there would also be a Southern Grid connecting South India with Sri Lanka, as well as



a Western Grid which would connect both sides of Punjab (India and Pakistan), across the border. The Dhaka declaration, held at the end of the workshop, suggested the creation of a SAARC Power Grid to ensure quality power supply in the region.³²In 2005, one witnessed a noticeable improvement in India-Pakistan relations, with confidence building measures from both sides the border. One of the major breakthroughs that might be witnessed between the two estranged neighbors is the laying of a 2,600 km gas pipeline originating in southern Iran, traversing through the 700 km stretch of Pakistani territory, before entering India. There was also optimism that this 'peace pipeline' diplomacy might augment regional cooperation in the form of India-Pakistan collaboration, along with India-Iran and Iran-Pakistan collaborations, which could potentially influence bilateral relationships between the involved countries, on the key issues and conflicts of Afghanistan, Kashmir, and overall national security.

The proposed pipeline would be expected to transport 90 million standard cubic meters of gas every day from Iran's South Pars fields to India from 2009-10 onwards, while Pakistan would receive 60 million standard cubic meters. Moreover, Pakistan could earn as much as \$500 million in annual royalties from a transit fee, and save \$200 million by purchasing cheaper gas from this pipeline project.

However, in spite of an eagerness for the project, the debate on pipelines in both the countries suggests that the proposed pipeline may eventually turn out to be a pipe dream, because of the persistence instability in Afghanistan, the geo-political quagmire in Iraq, and the possibility of international sanctions on Iran. Moreover, USA's active opposition to this pipeline project has further complicated matters.


One of the reasons for USA's interest in this project and the recent shift in its policy towards close cooperation with India, are a part of its tactics in countering both China and Iran in South Asia, and thereby ensuring that it retains its global energy supremacy. As a part of this scheme, the US-led South Asian Energy Initiative (SARI) program was set up to expand and improve access to economic and social infrastructure in the energy sector. The program promotes effective policies and agreement for cross-border cooperation on sustainable energy in South Asia. SARI aims to build mutually beneficial energy linkages among the South Asian region, including Afghanistan.

Moreover, regional politics also plays a major role in defining the game. As international gas pipelines have to transit through many countries, their construction depends on multi-country agreements for smooth and continuous supply of gas. The disagreements between India and Bangladesh have cropped up over the issues of India's accusation over the issues that Bangladesh is fuelling terrorist movements in India's northeast, in the backdrop of rising Islamic fundamentalism and anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh under the Bangladesh National Party-led coalition government, illegal migration between both states, and Bangladesh accusing India of re-routing the Ganges and Brahmaputra river systems that traverse both states. These disagreements have slowed the progress for discussions on a natural gas pipeline from Myanmar to India, which will have to pass through Bangladeshi territory, forcing India to look into the expensive option of creating a deep-sea pipeline through the Bay of Bengal that would bypass Bangladesh.³³

Here again, SAARC can play a key role in defusing tension between nations, and help them negotiate frameworks within which the governments concerned could agree on the measures relating to risks like political differences, terrorism and natural disasters. A joint mechanism could be formed at the behest of SAARC, to supervise project implementation and operational matters, including project operation, construction and environmental matters. Energy is a crucial matter as this issue ensures regional political stability, economic growth, sustainable development and security in the area of nuclear power. Although energy is not a highly technical field, but it bears far reaching political implications especially in regards to South Asia.

The year 2005 was also witness to an interesting development in Indo-Pak relations during the SAARC Summit, held at Dhaka. Both India and Pakistan backed the issue of Afghanistan's membership in the organization, albeit from different perspectives. Pakistan supported the issue in anticipation of controlling trade and other economic activities of Afghanistan, while India's backing stemmed from its policy of supporting the post-Taliban government in Kabul, and probably from its view of Afghanistan as a key link to energy rich Central Asia.

Moreover, the inclusion of Afghanistan as a new member of SAARC has far-reaching consequences. Afghanistan, at the nascent stage of nation-building, has many expectations as a member of SAARC. Surrounded by uneasy neighbors, Afghanistan desperately wants to




end its isolation, give a boost to its moribund economy, integrate itself with the region, and benefit from its markets and resources. As a member, Afghanistan stands to benefit from the various SAARC development programmes as well as from any collective anti-terrorism measures, thereby promoting its own security. Over and above, under the existing free trade agreement for the South Asian region (SAFTA), it has a better chance to negotiate a land route to India via Pakistan and a seaport facility in Pakistan. It may be noted that Pakistan has so far denied Afghanistan and India overland access to each other, saying the policy is linked to the broad matrix of India-Pakistan relations.

To conclude, it may be said that integration and supra-nationality, in the sense in which the terms are used in the European Union, were never a designated goal of SAARC. Nor was it intended to make regionalism as a 'state-led project'. Rather, the goal was to establish a functional network of economic, cultural and political contacts in the field of low politics.

In the South Asian region, the distribution of power is uneven and in a state of flux today. There are multiple territorial disputes, jurisdictional conflicts and ethnic animosities in the region. Not only do the countries in the region lack experience in collective problem-solving, they are suspicious of each other and rarely encourage their citizens to engage with one another across national borders, without their direct control or monitoring. Given the animosity among the South Asian states, it is highly unlikely that respective governments will quickly develop a common political and security agenda.

SAARC can play a key role in defusing tensions between nations, and help them negotiate frameworks within which the concerned governments can agree on the measures related to risks like political and other tensions in the region.

As both India and Pakistan are nuclear power states in the South Asian region, it is imperative to have intra-governmental cooperation which focuses on setting up trust and confidence-building measures, including a maritime and nuclear policy, a crisis prevention centre, and transparency among the SAARC member-states to promote strategic reassurance in the region. The nuclear negotiations going on between the United States and India will surely have its impact on South Asia. Similar tie-ups are seen with Pakistan and China which have an impact on the traditional security issues. While discussing the trust factor in the Indo-Pak context in




the SAARC Summit held in Dhaka, Pakistan Premier Shaukat Ali mentioned that the region suffers from a “trust deficit”. Dr. Manmohan Singh went further, to say that the task is to convert it into a “trust surplus”.

Coupled with the above, there are less contentious issues which have potential to cause a range of wider security threats such as refugee inflows, illegal immigration by sea, small

arms proliferation and drug trafficking. These issues could have been amicably settled among the SAARC’s member-states through informal dialogues and negotiations. For example, the potentially devastating issue of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to India is on the minds of many government officials in the respective countries. However, to date, the issue has not been raised in any international forum, reflecting the very sensitive nature of this problem. Nor is there any informal dialogue between the SAARC member-states on this issue. Promoting cooperation on less confrontational issues might build the trust necessary for productive discussions on security matters at a later stage. It is here that SAARC can help in building up a sense of community among the member- states in the region.

The need of the hour is, therefore, to promote SAARC platform to deal with less contentious issues which have potential to cause a range of wider security threats such as refugee inflows, illegal immigration by sea, small arms proliferation and drug trafficking. These issues could have been amicably settled among the SAARC’s member-states through informal dialogues and negotiations. For example, the potentially devastating issue of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to India is on the minds of many government officials in the respective countries. However, to date, the issue has not been raised in any international forum, reflecting the very sensitive nature of this problem. Nor is there any informal dialogue between the SAARC member-states on this issue. Promoting cooperation on less confrontational issues might build the trust necessary for productive discussions on security matters at a later stage. It is here that SAARC can help in building up a sense of community among the member- states in the region.

If managed consciously, SAARC like ASEAN could develop into a comprehensive Security Community more attuned to the region’s own needs and characteristics, rather than a pluralistic Security Community in a Deutschian sense. While the Deutschian concept of



Security Community is based only on the notion of security in military terms, SAARC stands a much better prospect to become a Security Community in a comprehensive sense: a comprehensive Security Community that incorporates, and attaches equal importance to elements of non-military security. This approach will surely build the trust that is so essential to resolving traditional security issues, so that both governments and the people of South Asian nations see each other as members of the same community, with similar goals of national and regional development, through mutual cooperation.

Footnotes:

1.. Bary Buzan, Peoples. States and Fear, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p208

2. See in his context, Hettne, Bjorn, 'Globalization and the New Regionalism: The Second Great Transformation,' in Bjorn Hettne, Andras Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel (eds), Globalism and the New Regionalism, London, Macmillan,, p123

3 ibid

4. ibid

5. C. Raja Mohan, Crossing The Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy, New Delhi, Penguin, 2003.

6. The debate occurred within the context of different perceptions of the dominant forces at work in the region and the consequent prospects for peace. For Example, see Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, ' Rethinking East Asian Security', Survival, Summer 1994, pg 3-21.

7. Ashton B. Carter, William J. Perry, and John D. Steinbruner, A New Concept

of Cooperative Security, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992, p. 6.

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Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century , Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994;

8. Karl Deutsch, Political Community and North Atlantic Area; International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957.

9. E. Adler and M. Barnett, (eds), Security Communities, Cambridge University Press, 1998

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13. Richard Merritt and Bruce M. Russett, 'Karl Deutsch and the Scientific Analysis of World Politics', in Richard Merritt and Bruce M. Russett , (eds) , From National Development to Global Community: Essays in Honor of Karl Deutsch , London and Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1981 p.8

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18. ibid

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21. ibid

22. A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, 'Security Scenario in South Asia', paper Presented at the Seminar on South Asian Security and Sino-Bangladesh Relations organized by BISS on 2nd March 2005

23. Sridhar Khatri, K' Foreign Policy and Security Perceptions of South Asian Nations in Sridhar Khatri, K (ed), Regional Security in South Asia, Katmandu, CNAS, 1987.

24. See Kanti Bajpai, 'Crisis and Conflict In South Asia After

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25.. Malcom Adiseshiah, S, 'The Economic Rationale of the SAARC', Asia Journal, Vol 1, 1987. and also see S.N. Raghavan, Regional Economic Cooperation Among SAARC Countries, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1995.

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