CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion
With the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar world, the United States, is the sole superpower, there is yet no sign of global demilitarization despite world-wide détente and the upsurge of democracy all over the world, including the South Asian region. It is unlikely that the supremacy of the United States would be politically challenged either by Asian economic giant Japan or a more unified European Economic community in the foreseeable future for the obvious reasons that they are political allies and in reality they all belong to the elite ‘North’ group. But the challenge may come later. China may also have the potentialities to become a superpower in this century.

The security of the South Asian region is interlinked with the above developments. The South Asian strategic environment, before the overt nuclear posture of Indian and Pakistan in 1998, had not shown much change and regardless of the global, regional and internal changes that had taken place within the South Asian countries in the 1990s, the security preoccupations of countries in the sub-continent more or less remained the same. The same regional issues continued to absorb the interest of policymakers and analysis without any sight of a long-term approach to resolution of these problems. Moreover, despite changes in the international environment and political regimes in some countries the same core issues also continue to dominate, if not dictate, the basic structure of intra-state relations.

It would be incorrect to attribute such persistence in outlook to consistency in the foreign policy of each of the South Asian nations as their policies have gone through metamorphosis as well. In the 1950s, much
before the non-aligned movement became a fad, India championed the cause of non-alignment as a means of cultivating self-reliance and in the process alienated itself from the United States. This opened the door to the Soviet wooing of India which initially began with a major arms deal in 1962 and further culminated in the twenty years peace and friendship treaty between the two countries in 1971. Till the demise of the Soviet power, India had not only drifted away from the axioms of non-alignment, but also remained the principal recipient of arms and licensed production facilities from Soviet Union.

On the other hand, India’s relations with both the United States and China remained coal for much of the last five and a half decades. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, followed by the inability of the new Russian rulers to live up to the traditional “tested friendship” between the two countries by their failure to deliver the rocket-engine parts to India under American pressure, left two-decade old framework of Indian foreign policy in a lurch. In the post-Cold War context, India is again seeking to redefine its policies towards the lone super-power, whose global influence it can no longer take for granted, and China, whose growing economic and military power it can no longer hope to contain. As a secondary regional power, Pakistan’s policies have also seen similar changes, which have been influenced largely by its ability to capitalize from the propitious international environment, and from India’s predicament at a given moment. From 1954 to 1965 it joined the American alliance system against communism in order to extract the cheap flow of American arms in order to augment its position against India. When the Americans cut off their arms supply to both India
and Pakistan after the 1965 conflict, Pakistan looked towards China taking advantage not only from the rift between the two principal communist powers but also from the mutual suspicion and hostility between India and China. However its balancing strategy proved to be insufficient in preventing the secession of its eastern wing in 1971 although it had the support of its allies against the prospect of defeat in the western part of the country.

Until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Pakistan's importance in the Western containment strategy diminished drastically when the euphoria of detente saw significant improvement in America's relations with both the Soviet Union and the China. It regained its importance for a decade after participating as an ally in the west's war of attrition against the Soviet Union's occupation forces in Afghanistan, but was again left in the cold on ground of its nuclearisation programme some years after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Today, in order to re-orient itself to the post Cold-War environment, Pakistan continues not only to cling to its "enduring entente" with China, but also to cultivate assiduously its Islamic option both in the Middle-East and in some of the former Soviet Muslim dominated republics by seeking external support to offset the relative weight of India's regional influence.

On the other hand, the variation in the foreign policy of the smaller states of the region within the last few decades have had less to do with military preoccupation than with their desire to augment their bargaining capabilities in their dealing with India. Throughout much of the Cold War, these countries were able to extract economic assistance not only from the
super powers due to their global search. For influence, but also derive whatever benefits they could from security complexes that had given rise to the triangular entanglement of India, China and Pakistan within the region. Like India and Pakistan, the smaller regional powers are today attempting to redefine their position in the subcontinent by taking into account not only the fluid state of relations of the extra-regional powers, including their diminishing interest in the region, but also the yet indeterminate positions of India and Pakistan in the new setting.

It would also be inaccurate to attribute the persistence of regional tension to incompatibility of ideology among the political regimes in these countries. Although personal ambition of political leaders and the inner dynamics of power struggle among political forces within countries have at times had regional ramifications, there are no concrete evidences to suggest that the political regimes are alone responsible for perpetuating the tensions.

For instance, Indo-Pakistani conflicts have less to do with the nature of political system in the respective countries, than their perception of political and military threat emanating from one another. The establishment of Pakistan under theological lines contrasts sharply with the secular character of India, which has to harmonize the co-existence of not only various large religious groups within its borders, but also among its more than 60 million Muslims. The very principle of India, therefore, threatens Pakistan's reasons for existence, and offers ample ground for the latter to fear its absorption into the larger Indian Union. Likewise, the principle of Pakistan also raises the specter of a breakdown of the Indian Union into a
number of independent, single-religion, and successor states. The tension between the two remains neatly institutionalized in their dispute over Kashmir, which, regardless of regime changes in Pakistan or political leadership in India, lingers on as a contentious issue.

This continuity of policy, regardless of the nature of political regimes, is best illustrated by Pakistan's nuclear programme that was started as a response to Indian nuclear test at Pokharan in 1974. Although a popularly elected government under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto initiated the programme, successor governments despite their political preferences or method of rule continued it. A nuclear Pakistan retains such a priority that not only the military under Zia-ul-Haq was willing to risk, American military and economics aid to his country in the late 1970s, but also elected leaders like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have unhesitatingly continued the programme and had to face the consequence of a cut-off in American assistance as required by the Presseler Amendment. After Press reports had indicated that the caretaker government of Moeen Qureshi had "capped its nuclear programme... at the point where [it] had reached," a clarification was later issued denying, a change in Pakistan's nuclear policy and finally became overtly nuclear in May 1998. The fact that military conflicts between Pakistan and India need not necessarily take place under military rule in Islamabad is exemplified by two incidents which took place under popularly elected governments in the country: first, during the administration of Ms. Bhutto, the two countries were on the edge of a nuclear confrontation over Kashmir in May 1990; and, second, while Mr. Sharif was in power, they were again close to a war after a
spate of "terrorist" bombings in Bombay and other Indian cities in early 1993.

The primacy of national interest over the narrow interest of political regimes in South Asia is also reflected in continuing dispute between India and her smaller neighbours. Although relations among the South Asian neighbours have improved significantly during the 1990s, no settlements have been possible on some of the major contentious issues involving these countries despite changes in governments, or political regimes.

Bangladesh, for one, continues to be plagued by some of the same problems faced earlier by Pakistan its Eastern territory. The problem of refugees from the Chittagong Hill Tracts continues to haunt Indo-Bangladeshi relations, with neither side giving them a refugee status. Similarly, Sri Lanka's relations with India have come a full circle after the inability of both governments to come to terms with the problems of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. The initial enthusiasm with which Indian intelligence trained the Tamil groups and the self-assurance under which nearly a hundred thousand Indian "peace-keeping" forces became involved in the Sri Lankan civil war under the Rajiv-Jaywardene Accord, have faded today with both governments unable to bring justice to the Tamil insurgents who allegedly assassinated their respective Prime Ministers.

With a change in the political system of the country, Indo-Nepal relations have taken a turn for the better in recent days. The fact, however, was achieved not by resolving some of the contentious issues that had aggravated the relations between the two, countries, but by (temporarily) shoving them aside. Nepal agreed to lift the "work permit" requirement for
foreign nationals in Nepal; fully respect Indian’s security concerns and not to allow any activities on its soil prejudicial to Indian security; and, to consult each other on reaching mutual agreement over defence related matters. Nepal also tacitly agreed to shelve the Zone of Peace concept, a point that had been an irritant for New Delhi.

At the cost of appearing pessimistic, it would not, therefore, be off the mark to say that regional disputes in South Asia have a tendency to self-perpetuate because they seem to possess logic and dynamics of their own. As a successor state of the British empire, India behaves as a status quo power which is essentially interested in reinforcing the three traditional concepts of security: safeguarding the north and north-west frontiers of the country; preventing the subcontinent from falling under the control, or influence, of foreign powers; and, maintaining command of Indian Ocean and its environs. Translated in modern, parlance, this has a skewed logic of its own. For instance, since India lacks the political, economic and military clout to fend off the involvement of external powers in the region, it has had itself to court the support of other external powers to augment its own status within the region. This has led to a continuous cycle of attempts by India and other regional powers to attract external support, which the extra-regional powers at times, have not been adverse to exploit to their own advantage. Similarly, India’s pre-occupation in competing with China in the technological and military field has not only sparked off an arms race with Pakistan, but also precipitated the nuclearisation of the region as well. Moreover, as the IPKF debacle in Sri Lanka shows, attempts by India to assert its pre-eminent role in the region against other smaller powers have not always been a
success. The paradox of Indian power – between its vision of a regional role and its inability to exercise its influence effectively – has to some extent worked against regional stability as well.

A corollary to the Indian position in the subcontinent is the insecurity of the other powers, which has often led them to develop a "persecution complex" in their dealings with India. Ever since the partition, Pakistan's fear that India is out to undo the state has led its leaders to opt for a game of one-up-manship in its dealings with New Delhi. Aside from the inevitable arms race, Pakistan has left no stone un-turned to exploit the dissension in Kashmir and Punjab in order to match Indian support for insurgents in Sindh. The continuous struggle over the strategic Siachin glacier and the highly intimidating Indian military manoeuvre under the code name Brass Tacks at the end of 1986, which some analysts conclude were as large as some carried out in Western Europe by NATO, have not helped to dispel Pakistan's suspicion of India's intentions. Smaller countries, on the other hand, worry over what they consider to be India's tendency to often interfere in their internal affairs and its less than magnanimous gestures in attempting to deal with common development concerns (e.g. the sharing of the water resources of the region.

In the post-Cold War context, the problem of redefining the security needs of the South Asian countries and working out mechanisms for resolving some of the regional problems have to be viewed from this background. For the most part, it is difficult to foresee a revolutionary change taking place in the basic structure of relations among the South Asian
countries despite the radical shift in the international environment and the considerable influence which the international community has been known to exert in the past.

One of the basic reasons is that although the extent of the change-taking place, in the international arena cannot be denied, it is still not clear what the change itself means to the World at large. In a perspicacious article on global security, Michael T. Klare uses the "tectonic motion and the fractured glass" metaphors to suggest how the surface events at the international level today may be the product of deeper socio-historical forces whose implications may not be clearly understood off-hand. For the fractured glass analog, he sees a piece of glass laid over a map of the World that is then struck by a large: heavy weight: "the result would be an intricate web of cracks across the world, with heavier concentrations in some areas but with none left entirely unscathed." The profusion of ethnic, tribal, religious, and national conflicts is seen as epitomizing this trend. On the other hand, the upheaval created by the current insatiable drive for democracy and human rights along with the havoc wreaked by the break-up of large empires and federation, and the dismantling of the alliances systems is seen as causing massive shifts beneath the surface. In both instances, however, it would be some time before the long-term implications of such developments would be totally clear for individual countries and the region as well.

Second, there is also the problem of how the changes will impact on the region itself. As Rehman Sobhan argued regarding the Structural Adjustment Reforms in South Asia during the Second South Asian Dialogue,
despite its early start in the late 1970s, the region has not been able to benefit fully from the scheme due to its failure to address the central problem of governance and develop "a consensus within each country for development design which can address the themes of rapid, sustainable and more equitable development." Instead, he warns that, since governments in the region have been characterised by "an absence of transparency, the erosion of administrative norms, the lack of coherence and vision in the direction of policy, the low motivation of its employees, the lack of emphasis on efficiency and above all the lack of accountability in the system," the structural adjustment programmes could possibly lead to reversal of reforms and destabilise the democratic process in the region as well. This economic analogy could also be equally applicable to security issues as well.

Third, there is the very nature of disputes themselves. Although regional disputes vary from one issue to another, there are, nevertheless, some that tend to be long lasting in character. Territorial disputes, for one, are usually not only non-negotiable because of their emotive content, but are also highly resistant to external pressures as well. Kashmir is such an issue, which remains intractable despite efforts by the United Nations and even attempts by both India and Pakistan to resolve it bilaterally through the Shimla Agreement in 1971. Disputes concerning the sharing of natural resources are another area, which has been equally susceptible to protracted controversy. For instance, despite the potential of the Ganga Brahmaputra Basin for alleviating the economic condition of the people in the region with its vast expanse of alluvial plain, abundant groundwater and hydroelectric potential in excess of 130,000 MW, mutual cooperation has
been stalled largely because of political mistrust than by technical differences.

And, lastly, it also needs to be recognised that the concept of "security" itself has different meanings for each of the countries of the region. For both India and Pakistan, it has a strong military connotation. Pakistan's preoccupation has been largely to strengthen its military position vis-à-vis India in order to meet any likely threat from its larger neighbor, while India has projected its needs not only in terms of, meeting the likely threat from both Pakistan and China but also keeping other extra-regional powers at a safe distance from the region. On the other hand, for the smaller countries, who can harbor no hope in strengthening their position through the military" option, security usually means reinforcing their freedom of maneuverability in their dealings with India. This may include for Sri Lanka freedom of choice in handling the Tamil problem in a manner of its choosing; for Bangladesh, internationalising the dispute over water resources; and, for Nepal, strengthening its bargaining position on such issues as trade and transit arrangements, which has been its soft under-belly in its dealings with its larger neighbor.

What then are the possibilities for improving the security environment in South Asia?

From what has been discussed above, the prospects for ameliorating the political and security environment in the region has to be evolutionary, rather than revolutionary in content. Grand schemes, local or imported, can never serve as a panacea to the complexity of problems faced by the region.
today. If attempts are to be made in tackling these problems, then attention must be diverted away from the usual practice of operating under a damage-control model and concentrating more on addressing the source of tension itself.

Some of the issues, which deserve serious consideration in this regard, are the following:

1. Role of India -- If India is the undisputed power in the subcontinent, it is also the key to most of the problems of the region. A powerful India, which is both confident and secure, can invariably contribute to a greater sense of regional security. In the post-Cold War era, India must, therefore, attempt to demonstrate that it cannot only be part of the regional problems, but can also be a constructive instrument in resolving these problems.

Given the current regional environment of mutual suspicion, this is a tall order considering the pejorative connotation, which a hegemonistic relationship has for most of the countries in the region. But, it is equally important to recognise that a hegemonic arrangement is not antithetical to asymmetrical relationship, particularly when the hegemonic power searches for mutual interest with its neighbours and makes some adjustments itself in addition to demanding that others conform to its design. To a large extent, this will require some degree of attitudinal change among the regional countries. In as much as the smaller countries will need to concede substantially in their economic and political stance to the predominant Indian influence, it will fall upon India more to convince its smaller neighbours that India will be worthy of such an acquiescence for a common cause.
2. Going beyond confidence-building measures— it is also important for regional leaders to think beyond the rhetoric of confidence building measures for future stability and progress in the region. Although after nearly thirteen years of regional cooperation; South Asian diplomats are prone to argue that communications between policy-makers have been further enhanced by the SAARC experience, it is also equally true that such experiences have brought the region no closer to resolving some of its more pressing problems. It is, therefore, time to recognise that regional problems cannot be solved by excluding them totally from the only forum where regional issues can be discussed. As such, a regional organisation like SAARC must be energised to review even the contentious issues, with a view towards ameliorating the regional tensions.

3. Acceptance of the principle of mutual deterrence for regional stability - For all practical purposes, it is also necessary to accept that despite the laudable nature of such long-term objectives as disarmament and de-nuclearisation of the region, it may not be possible to do so in the near future due to the complexity of the problem. So long as reasons which aggravate regional tensions continue to persist, Such moves often take the shape of tactical ploys in a game of one-upmanship., rather than a commitment to lofty ideals. The long history of negotiations between India and Pakistan over the "No War Pact" offers such a testimony.

Until the political environment becomes conducive for serious negotiations of such issues, the principle of mutual deterrence between India and Pakistan should be accepted as an inevitable step in furthering regional
stability. In this regard, attempts to seek adherence of both India and Pakistan. To the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty seem self-defeating, because they not only see the treaty as "discriminatory" but also because they are already a nuclear power with technology, resources and delivery system to pose a serious nuclear threat to their adversary. Other nuclear powers should be encouraged to help the two states learn the rules of the nuclear club so all can get along safely. This must include assisting these countries, which still lack a clear nuclear doctrine, to build safe, survivable, and stably configured small arsenals with centralized and efficient command and control systems.