



Issues And Outlook of Post-Cold War Era

# South Asia's Security in the 1990s

## 'India Cannot Really Dominate'

Dr. Gowher Rizvi, interviewed by S. Bari

The Daily Star: Which changes in the international power structure is South Asia concerned with?

Dr. Gowher Rizvi: First, we have the end of the Cold War. The old bipolar world, on which international relations have been guided, is no more. Then there is the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the integration of the European Community.

The Third World, at best marginalised, is now further marginalised. We are currently indulging in a nostalgic feeling for the bipolar world so familiar to us, a world in which we felt we could balance the two superpowers and get out of one what we could not get from the other. In reality, the Third World never could manoeuvre; it was more manoeuvred. The US and the USSR only allowed us to bargain to the extent that it suited them.

DS: With the superpowers rivalry gone, what chances are there of intra-regional tensions easing? Is the dominating position of one country likely to increase disagreements?

GR: I think that with external backing gone, India and Pakistan are more likely to disengage. Chances of finding a solution are higher. Both sides recognise that they have been used.

India cannot really dominate. Look at what they did in Sri Lanka: India got badly burnt in that seemingly successful operation. Or take the trade and transit fiasco with Nepal. Legally, India had the right to cut off entry points, but it was very bad for its image. In forty years of independence, India has never received such bad press.

So long as no other powers are present in the regional set-up, India could assert itself. But when it does so, it obviously loses both face and prestige. If it engages itself in local rivalries, India loses the chance to play a constructive role in international relations. Besides, there is a limit to how far coercion will work. Force will not get India anywhere, and New Delhi knows that. We should definitely be less nervous about prospects of a local bully.

DS: Let us turn to Eastern Europe. How is South Asia to react to the economic upheavals to come?

GR: Unfortunately, our economic policies have been predicated on aid. Our chances receiving aid are vastly diminished. We now have to share it with Eastern Europe.

As for foreign investment, that will also be diverted away from us. I was told by a high-ranking Canadian official that given the choice between financing an educated Hong Kong Chinese, who is a fellow Commonwealth citizen, and an illiterate Lithuanian peasant, a Canadian business' money would go to Lithuania. Investment, training, and technology will go to Eastern Europe.

We also face competition in



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trade terms. Our produce goes to the West. When Eastern Europe can compete, they will encroach on our market. Conversely, India once had a special relationship with the Eastern bloc; many South Asian countries therefore had a good market there. Now that Western goods are reaching Eastern Europe, we are in competition with the West as well.

DS: What steps can South Asia take to protect its economic security and future?

GR: We all talk about regional co-operation. Well, this really is the time to bury hatchets and get together. We can form a trade bloc to counter-balance the other blocs around the world. We have raw material, and we offer a huge market. If we play our economic cards right, we can make our own demands and deals. When one billion people get together, they have much more clout. This population has to be used to our advantage.

There is a club or a cartel of rich nations; they sit together and talk about how much they are going to give the Third World. Why not make a debtors' cartel? In concerted effort, we stand a far greater chance of being listened to.

DS: What political stability can the region as a whole hope for?

GR: It is obvious that the old western style of development hasn't worked. In the past two

decades, we have become poorer in power, in technology, in human development, and in money. It is absolutely clear that aid has led to dependence, not development. Only a small elite has profited.

Our problem is that we have no ability to implement the economic policies we develop. Those policies that are implemented rarely benefit the people for whom they are intended.

The problem is not so much economic as political. We must improve governance; create a civil society with a sense of social responsibility, a strong parliament and political parties, and a very very sound educational system.

In order to distribute the benefits, you have to have economic entitlement. People die of hunger not because there is no food, but because they cannot obtain food. They must politically establish their right to that food. Take the Industrial Revolution in England. Great wealth was generated, but the living standard of the average man dropped disastrously. Through voting rights and political assertion, power was taken into the hands of the people.

Similarly, we must force our governments to give us our dues. And this can only happen if the people are educated, if the political structure is strengthened, if governments are really held responsible. And this applies in varying degrees to all South Asian countries. Otherwise, democracy is just a useful mechanism for the elites to hold on to power.

DS: Is there a danger of a one-sided world order in which no other power is present to check the spread of American influence?

GR: I do not believe in this unipolar theory. The US is the sole remaining power, but it has plenty of domestic problems at the moment. Its ability to squander money abroad is limited. Allies of the US are also its trade rivals. There are therefore areas in which they cannot agree. The US will have to work very hard to carry these countries on its side on international issues.

I see more of a multipolar world, with trade groups and economic interests. We as a region can profit from this by choosing our partners in trade and investment carefully, not allowing one influence to dominate over others.

Dr. Gowher Rizvi is a MacArthur Fellow in International Relations Nuffield College, Oxford

## After the Cold War

A brief handshake in 1986 marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War. The leaders of the two superpowers sat down at a table in Geneva, and a multitude of fears and prejudices began to dissolve. Along the way, the Iron Curtain rose and the Berlin Wall fell. Eastern Europe came to life, while the republics of the Soviet Union scattered into independence, and Germany was once more united.

As the rest of the world is busy redrawing its maps, South Asian countries are gearing up to face the new balance of power and the economic realignments in the offing. What is at stake is the region's political and economic future.

The strategic roles of India and Pakistan are shifting ground. With the withdrawal of superpower interest, Kashmir has a chance of breathing new life. The end of the Afghan war and the negotiations in Cambodia are harbingers of more sweeping peace accords in South Asia.

However, intra-regional disputes abound: everyone has a grudge against someone. Much of the disunity stems from the jitters of small countries nervous of a large, dominating neighbour. Instability reigns in internal politics. The rise of fundamentalism and the exploitation of religious sentiments has created fault lines across the map of the subcontinent. Autocratic and pseudo-democratic regimes have corroded the political process.

On the horizon looms Eastern Europe: aid and investment now have a more exciting place to go than South Asia. Not only is the old Eastern bloc closer to home for the donor governments; its nations also have a better infrastructure.

Regional co-operation is a word that has been banded about for a long time. But the time has come for South Asia to pull up its socks and face the world with a united front. To cope economically, the region needs clout and bargaining power; power much more available to a South Asian bloc than to individual nations. In political terms, there is far greater scope for compromise and discussion now that external influences are at low tide.

Recently the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies held a seminar on precisely this issue. The Daily Star spoke to a number of the experts present, and the following selection is intended to offer the reader a variety of views on the internal and international dimensions of South Asia's future after the Cold War.

—By S. Bari



Mujahideens have got their latest installations of their arms from the United States — as late as November 1991. That is why I quite see the prospects where Afghanistan's not continues to boil, though at a lower level than earlier. And the kinds of equipment which have come include the shoulder to air missile, surface to air missiles. There is a fear that these may be passed on to the terrorist and militant group all over the sub-continent, including Kashmir. And we have in India the evidence of K-47 supplied to Afghan Mujahideens landing up in Kashmir.

Therefore, the root of the Afghan arms coming to Kashmir through Pakistan is already established. This is now worrying not only India, but also America to some extent. Because now the Americans want to have a good relationship with India. And this will definitely come in the way.

Americans are asking Pakistan to stop the training camp, to not supply arms to the militants, and to seek a solution to the Kashmir problem. Pakistan, in my view, suspects that the Americans are doing it on behalf of India.

DS: How do you see the South Asian countries in this post-Cold War period?

SDM: From what I feel is, the post-Cold War world does not offer hopes and better prospects for the vast majority of the Third World countries. In the strategic and security field, the Third World countries may have to confront a formidable challenge of living with conflicts and tensions externally and grappling with turmoil and instability internally.

In pursuing approaches to regional cooperation, the Third World countries will also have to shed their traditional stigmas vis-a-vis each other and build bridges of confidence. They will also have to take hard economic and strategic decisions at home to streamline the general performance of their economic and socio-political systems. Failure on these domestic fronts will reflect strongly in their failure to cope with post-Cold War transformations.

Dr. S. D. Muni is a professor of International Relations, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

## The Domino Effect

Dr. Shelton Kodikara, interviewed by Aasha Mehreen Amin

Daily Star: How do you see the structural changes in the international system after the cold war affecting the balance of power?

Dr. Shelton Kodikara: The recent structural changes in international politics including the unification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union have all led to the transition from bipolarity to unipolarity. The collapse of the Soviet Union has left many question marks about nuclear parity. This, together with the leader ship crisis in Russia, has resulted in a one man show with Bush as the star. The term Pax Americana is sometimes used to portray the transformation which has overcome the world order. Even though the US itself has repudiated any hegemonic aspirations, and even through current budgetary constraints might inhibit US involvement in, say, another Gulf War type of military operation, the fact remains that it has as of now, no military competitors and no real adversaries in strictly power terms. America may not succeed in pulling off a deal in the Middle East, but it was America which was able to get Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table in the first place. The American action in Iraq could not have taken place without the help and support of its multinational alliance partners but it was the resolve and the persistence of the US which made it possible at all. More recently, we see the US calling the tunes on questions such as Cambodia and there seems to be an element of agreement between Russian and American leadership. All this has obviously led to countries getting more and more isolated. But it is also well within the realms of possibility that the balance of power will reassert itself and that the contemporary unipolar world will give way to a multipolar world. China for example has ceased to trust America ever since 1989. The recent visit of Li Peng to India has been seen as a meeting of minds. It is possible, therefore that this kind of multipolarity may be based on either a united Europe or a military powerful Germany, a militarised Japan, with China and India as independent power centres.

DS: Considering just the South Asian community, it is obvious that one or more members have the ball in their court. How is this, together

with the global changes you have just talked about, affecting South Asian security?

SK: There has always been a natural tendency for smaller states to gang up against a bigger nation. If we are talking about India, of course there is a dilemma — while India considers certain peripheral states like Nepal, Bhutan — strategically important for its own security, the same states



Kodikara

think that India is a threat to their security.

From a global perspective, both the US and USSR regard India as a preponderant power. Both erstwhile superpowers were agreed that there should not be another Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir, and the US has changed its position on Kashmir to the extent that it does not now support the Pakistani demand for a plebiscite as the solution to the Kashmir problem. India's friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971 has been renewed for a further 20 year period and Pakistan's alliance with the US, signed in 1959 still subsists. But both these treaties have been devalued in the context of the changing global order. India can no longer expect the new commonwealth to support them in any conflict in which India was involved with China. Pakistan's value as a strategic ally of the US has been greatly reduced with the end of the Afghanistan war.

One of the products of the new winds of change, as I call it, is a trend of democratisation in South Asia with one country or the other reverting to or initiating parliamentary government. India and Sri Lanka have had long standing democracies. The trend began with Pakistan, then Bangladesh. Even Nepal has a very advanced constitution and there are stirrings in

Bhutan. This kind of domino effect, no doubt, has been influenced by events in Eastern Europe. Despite intractable problems in India and Sri Lanka, it is certain that there can never be a military takeover in either country and democracy is here to stay.

Daily Star: Ethnic relations have often created great tension between two countries as in the case of India and Sri Lanka. What role does India have in attempting to smooth out such tensions?

SK: There is an ongoing war between the government security forces and the Tamil Tigers. The government has expressed its desire to hold an open dialogue with the Tigers on condition that they give up their demand for independent Tamil state and lay down their arms. There was an impending visit to Sri Lanka from a Tamil minister for purposes of mediation but such a visit is now on hold. In fact it may never take place if India declares the LTTE a terrorist organisation for its involvement in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and demands LTTE's leader Prabhakaran's extradition.

There are proposals for a federal solution but in my opinion a merger of the northern and north eastern provinces will lead to a lot of bloodshed between the Sinhalese and Tamils. This is because such a merger will result in the Sinhalese becoming a minority and be made to feel unwanted. They may be pressurised in various ways to flee. As for the proposed referendum to decide the issue, the Tamils want it only within the northern provinces where there is a Tamil majority, and the Sinhalese want it in the entire country where they will get more support.

Daily Star: Both India and Pakistan have potential nuclear power how much of a threat is this to the security of other smaller states especially as regards to the spillover of tension between them?

SK: I don't really think this poses a threat. It is more probably a deterrent to war. The US and USSR have always had nuclear potential but have they fought with each other? The same thing applies to Pakistan and India who will obviously not make moves that will inevitably lead to mutual destruction.

Dr. Shelton U. Kodikara is Professor of History and Political Science, Colombo University, Sri Lanka.

## Military Interference

Dr. S.D.Muni, interviewed by Rahat Fahmida

Daily Star (DS): Talking about 'security', what is the security from and where is the threat? Is there an external threat or are the South Asian countries threat to a one another, taking in view the post-Cold War situation?

S. D. Muni (SDM):

As the Cold War is over, it has consolidated the Western powers. There will be various ways in which the global system will put pressure on South Asia. The new system has a number of in-built pressure points for South Asian countries, and conditions for their assistance.

The series of disarmament agreements concluded between the superpowers and in Europe and the possible promises of further reductions in conventional arms and armed forces, have created an atmosphere conducive to world peace and security.

The Third World, though not directly involved in this disarmament process has not remained unaffected. The reduction in tensions and rivalries between the superpowers and their military blocs has had a direct impact on the resolution of some of the intense and long-drawn regional conflicts in the Third World such as in Afghanistan, Kampuchea and the horn of Africa. There is now a growing hope that there would be no revival of the Cold War inputs from the superpowers or their allies into the Third World to perpetuate various regional and bilateral conflicts there. There are also signs on the part of the superpowers to exert their influence on many of the traditional Third World rivals to moderate their conflicts and seek mutual cooperation. Some movement in this direction may be discerned between India and Pakistan, India and China, countries of Indo-China and the ASEAN, etc. Hopes have also been aroused among a number of developing countries that at least a part of the

savings made from the wide-ranging arms cuts may be diverted to them for meeting the challenge of poverty and underdevelopment.

DS: India is one big country in South Asia. What role do the smaller countries have in maintaining the regional security?



S.D.Muni

SDM: None of these countries are small, in terms of population. And that is what counts politically. Everyone in a way has a cooperation and irritation with India. Small countries have more stake in improving regional cooperation. They will not be benefited by any conflict. Hence they should act as positive influence.

What we observe instead is most of the time there is a tendency to enjoy the conflict between the big boys, instead of revolting. The small countries, as you like to call them, should continue objectively and with moral strength. This will, in the long run, smoothen the relations of the two big countries of South Asia — India and Pakistan.

DS: As an Indian do you think there is any solution to the Kashmir issue without Pakistan?

SDM: Solution to this problem is within the Simla Agreement, where it clearly says to 'sit down and talk on

the table.' Pakistan agreed with the Simla Agreement, but never cared to follow it. Independent Kashmir is not acceptable to Pakistan, which does not have Jammu and Ladakh.

India should talk to Kashmir militants to satisfy their legitimate demands through political process. But Pakistan has no legitimate claim on Kashmir. UN has a resolution that states clearly that, foreign troops should withdraw from Kashmir.

Pakistan has a revengeful attitude towards India since its interference in Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. And so, they do not want to solve this problem. As this will then leave them with no issue as a grudge against India. This is their volatile policy. They want this fire to burn on.

DS: What role do the outside powers have in the Afghanistan issue and why and what is India's role?

SDM: The outsiders still have a role in Afghanistan. As you know the two major powers — Soviet Union and USA have now decided that they would no longer interfere in Afghanistan. The independent ex-Soviet republics do not have any capacity or political built to play any role in Afghanistan. But that does not stop the role of the external powers. Because there are other factors in Afghanistan. Pakistanis are still active in Afghanistan. That is why they probably cannot keep out of the Afghan situation. I think Pakistan may also want to have a regime in Afghanistan, which is favourable to Pakistan with a Muslim ideology. Those who have come to power in the central Asian republics are still former Communists or socialists. So I don't think it is a religious conglomeration which is taking place there — or that religious ideology is predominant. I came across a report that mentioned that the Afghan

## Separatism and Fundamentalism

Dr. Partha S.Ghosh, interviewed by R. Fahmida and A.M.Amin

The Daily Star: Is the potential or perceived threat to security due to external or internal sources?

Dr. Partha Ghosh: Security in conventional terms means that one country is being threatened by the military power of another country. Now it is being felt that a state can feel insecure due to various sources, many of which could be internal. Say for example, there is a food shortage and we have to depend on another country which will have the power to bargain with your country. It may demand a naval base in your country in exchange. You are therefore exposed to this kind of extortionism.

Then there is politics related security. Suppose, it is due to ethnic reasons. Somehow or the other your development and political processes are such that you are not able to accommodate all the various groups that constitute your state and after a certain amount of time there is alienation of a particular group which feels it is not getting enough recognition or not sharing enough of the national cake. This is when the question of becoming independent arises. And if the particular area in question has an international border it is much easier to raise a voice because external support can be guaranteed. Moreover it is the fault of the state if a group's identity gets marginalised leading to such conflicts of interest.

DS: In your view what role is SAARC playing in this context?

PG: To put it bluntly, SAARC is a failure. First of all, we have certain inherent problems which have been impinging on our outlooks and we have not been able to get over this psychosis. Everyone takes advantage of the other's weakness and all the countries of SAARC suffer from this. Of course, a lot of credit goes to President Ziaur Rahman who floated the idea of SAARC in 1977. It took years to build even the skeletal

form of the organism which shows how much mistrust there still exists. But despite such pessimism the positive element is that the leaders at least get an opportunity to see each other. When two enemies sit next to each other, part of their anger subsides.

But I also think that by not discussing anything contentious which is one of SAARC's rules we do not deal with the real issues. The agricultural and scientific research SAARC claims to promote are being done outside of SAARC. Academics in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been interacting even without government patronage. Therefore the challenge is to get rid of the hackneyed idea that political issues cannot be discussed. The crux of the matter has to be dealt with otherwise nothing substantial will be accomplished.



P. Ghosh

DS: With the emerging Islamic fundamentalism in certain countries surrounding it how is this affecting India internally? For example, does this have anything to do with BJP's success?

PG: India has a Muslim population of about 11 per cent. And this is larger than that of Pakistan and more or less equal to that of Bangladesh. I do not know how much the Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan or Bangladesh is con-

tributing to the type of politics that India of late has entered. Pakistan believes in an ideology which it claims as necessary for its nation building and that is as old as the state itself. The very concept of Pakistan was based on this ideology that the Muslim population needs a separate state. In Bangladesh the situation is slightly different. But after Mujib's fall in 1975 we have an upsurge of pro-Islamic politics. But if we take Bangladesh from 1971 onwards and Pakistan from 1947 onwards this necessarily did not have an impact on India all these years. The type of pro-Hindu politics that we see in India is of a little recent origin. But I do not want to link this to Islamic resurgence. As I see it, it is more a political competitiveness in India which has arisen. This is because the oldest party — the Congress Party created in 1885 has reached an age when it is going to die a natural death. Now a political vacuum is being created where there is rancouring from all parties to enter the frame. BJP, which was already there as an aspirant for power, has an opportunity to come as the number one or two party. And it has used its Hindu card right from the beginning. With the decline of the Congress this vacuum has to be filled. With this as the internal situation we also have various things happening in, say, the Middle East which many Indians, many Hindus may not like. For example, the growth of terrorism in the Middle East or the Arab money coming in to India in certain pockets to build, say, mosques gives Hindu parties the opportunity to use this to say that Saudi money is being pumped into India to promote Islamic fundamentalism. Another very important point to be noted is that the BJP can use this opportunity because it is a rightist party and with Communism on the decline in Europe the communist parties in India are becoming less popular. Both these factors

contribute to the emergence of BJP as a political force. I think it will be misplaced to think that it has regional relevance. Rather, it has extra-regional relevance and local Indian relevance. But I must say that if at all BJP aspires to be the national party and an alternative to Congress, it will have to make compromises with its avowed position on Hinduism. It still does not have the maturity to have a national image which can appeal to the Sikhs in Punjab or the Christians in the North-east of India or liberal people like the Bengalis in general.

DS: What is your assessment of democracy in Bangladesh?

PG: It is an enigma to me that Bangladesh has not been a democratic country. I find Bengalis in general to be highly democratic and progressive. I find it very puzzling that such a country can be ruled for so long by dictators and military personnel. But I must say, when I came in 1989 when Ershad was at the height of his power nobody questioned his position. But even then I had the opportunity to attend a big gathering in Dhaka University led by a human rights organisation. There were 9 speakers and I must say I never felt that they were talking in a dictatorial regime. They openly criticized the Ershad government. Also there has not been any communal violence. I still feel that Bangladesh is a democratic country and the period of dictatorship can only be regarded as an aberration.

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