

Global Trend

Strategic perspective of South Asia: Meeting the challenges

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 new era of stability in the region, what is certain that the nuclearisation will result in arms proliferation, particularly of conventional weapons? The whole rationale of nuclearisation centres on the argument of asymmetry in the conventional strength matrix of Pakistan. The same arguments will be brandished, as in the past, for acquisition of conventional weapons on the grounds that since nuclear weapons are for deterrence only and not for actual use, Pakistan would have to resort to acquisition of conventional weapons to offset India's conventional superiority. India's argument will be likewise, thus completing the vicious cycle of proliferation. India's defence deal with Russia, amounting to 10 billion US dollars; enhancement of missile range, both by India and Pakistan; India's Sangarikha programme et al are indicative of the proliferation underway. One can only ask whether India and Pakistan are indeed more secure than they were pre-May 1998, or whether it will allow India and Pakistan to achieve their economic and political objectives? Nuclearisation of South Asia, which is a matter of concern to all the non-nuclear states in the region, also entails great opportunity cost for both India and Pakistan.

Meeting the challenges

In view of the foregoing scenario where sources of threat will be multifarious, how to meet the challenges that we are likely to face?
 First, the obtaining development imperatives and strategic developments in the region, that call for re-conceptualisation of the concept of 'security', demand that we redefine our national interests and re-evaluate our security concerns. We have to identify our national interests and craft our national policy. This will allow us also to articulate our security policy and determine our military capabilities. It will be well for us to note that because of our post-Cold War reorientation of 'security' a new approach to strategic planning will have to be actualised, which would no longer be based on entirely military threat.

Second, our future security agenda can be stated as economic, political, territorial, environmental, social and military. President Gayoom of the Maldives has hit the nail on the head with his comment, "It will never be enough, or indeed good enough, for the small states to be just well defended bastions of poverty." (*Security of Small States: A Framework of Analysis*; M Abdul Haliz and Abdur Rob Khan; UPL, p 13) There must be objective assessment and analyses of threats in order that resources may be apportioned equitably to all the sectors. Overstating any one particular source of threat in order to have a larger bite at the 'national cake' can only have deleterious consequences for the state. Likewise, soft-peddling on any one issue is sure to have similar consequences.

Third, our military posture should exhibit our defensive orientation. Our military has been organised from the very beginning on the strategy of strategic defence. It goes very nicely with the current concept of 'non-offensive defence' (NOD), which is based on the assumption that security is best served by taking into account each other's genuine security interests rather than exploiting those. The idea is propounded on the notion of 'co-operative security'. "By making the defence of domestic territory the sole and clear objective of national military policies, NOD aims to strike a balance between imperatives of ensuring national military security and of avoiding provocation." (*UNIDIR Brief No 3/1998*) Although the concept of NOD is not without its shortcomings, this is an idea that the countries of South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, should seriously consider.

Fourth, it is important that we accept the concept of comprehensive security sooner rather than later. If globalisation seeks the economic prosperity of humanity as a whole, it follows that globalisation would be more than relevant to the matter of security of world humanity as a whole and not to the security of any particular state or people. Some experts ascribe this to the changing



Much-hyped diplomacy fails, subsided hostilities flare up: Hope for peace shatters in the region time and again

Economically greater regional integration is being pursued through the implementation of SAPTA and eventually SAFTA. Hopefully the aims and objectives of these two regimes would eventuate sooner than later. The concept of sub-regionalism has come into our reckoning; and India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka have moved considerably towards making this concept workable within the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). This has been demonstrated most recently in the conceptualisation of the GMB initiative. However, the region as a whole is falling short of availing the opportunities offered and meeting the challenges posed by the contemporary international economic relations.

nature of the modern age where, because of the too restrictive definition of conventional security, demands are issued for a broader understanding of whose security is at stake - for an effective account of the security of people in general, not just for the inhabitants of particular states. Hence concepts such as collective, common, and world security emerge. These demands are usually reinforced by accounts of the transformative character of the modern age, especially of the increasingly interdependent character of something that may be appropriately called world politics rather than just inter-state or international relations." (Walker RBJ, quoted in *Globalisation Dynamics: Impact on Bangladesh*; Khan, S. A and Humayun Kabir; May 1999)

Fifth, time has come to assess whether or not SAARC needs to be invested with more potency so that its relevance as an institutional mechanism to address bilateral issues and issues of security concerns are firmly established.

Sixth, the idea of sub-regionalism will have to be carried forward and concepts crystallised to make development policy manageable and implementable.

Seventh, more and more confidence building measures need to be designed at the bilateral and multilateral levels in South Asia. This is, of course, more relevant to India and Pakistan as much depends on them for regional peace and security. Therefore, the security architecture in South Asia for the decades to come would need to address both conventional and non-traditional threats.

Conclusion

It was heartening to note the paradigmatic shift in the conceptualisation of the term 'security', not only in the context of the region but also in the global context. This was the inevitable and obvious result of the end of the Cold War. The state-centric perception, which viewed threat exclusively in the physical and external context, gave way to a non-state-centric treatment of the term where the main focus and referents were the people and not the state. The

concept of 'Comprehensive Security', first formulated by the Japanese, gained currency, whereby the traditional military connotation of security was de-emphasised and threats to the people in its entirety was brought into consideration in the discourse of security. This has caused the role of the military, as the sole guarantor of security, to be relegated to the background. Unfortunately, in the context of the region, particularly apropos India and Pakistan and in spite of the transformed perception, the threat perception, real or perceived, still remains the domain of the military and the management of security issues still follows the traditional path.

Experts, particularly the optimists, see the end of the Clausewitzian way of settling interstate disputes. Primarily, there are three compelling reasons for war no longer being made an extension of politics. First, it will no longer be the norm for civilised nations to take to arms to solve intractable matters between one another. Second, the cost benefit criterion will impose restraints on prospective antagonists. For the victor, if there be any at the end of the day, the victory would be at best Pyrrhic. Third, war may not necessarily bring peace. What however cannot be discounted are the possibilities of mistrust and misunderstanding finding expression in the form of 'violence' and 'conflict' between states rather than large-scale wars, as we have seen in the case of India and Pakistan. Experts also foresee the possibility of intra-state war caused by internal dynamics and festered by external linkages and sponsorship. In the case of South Asia we need positive disposition of minds and the concern for greater good of the people, for us to embark on the path of development and growth, through a regime of interdependence and co-operative peace. It may seem a tortuous path. Should we not dare to venture?

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Development assistance: Some conclusions



KAPFCO experience: Dark patch in development partnership

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ing. The present governance and poor ability to utilise resources would have serious consequences at having aid cut off. The whole VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) programme would break down. Buying food grain for VGD would be difficult too. About Tk. 200 to 300 crores worth of food grains are required. The surplus food crop may be able to take care of that partly, but that is not enough. A lot of sacrifices have to be made in terms of less defence expenditure etc in order to sustain the VGD programme which is essential for development.

Infrastructure wise, donors are not giving aid any longer. Once they did to build power plants, but thereafter there has been foreign investment. The issue, therefore, is not whether aid will be cut off, but get foreign investment to build roads, bridges, develop the gas sector, telecom sector etc. The donors are indicating to Bangladesh that you will be getting less foreign aid and you are advised to see foreign investment for the future.

Right now we should concentrate on what we have. You do not need assistance to build more schools or hospitals. Instead, you should see to it that the present schools and hospitals are doing their job. That should be a priority before seeking more resources to build new schools and hospitals. The rear problem in these sectors is not lack of resources but inefficient use of resources. Hence the rate of return is low. Ideally, you need to improve governance.

Advice from donors is often bound by conditions. Most of such advice is not useful; it does not reflect changes. Effect of donors has often been to influ-

To make development assistance meaningful, we must have our own development strategy and design a portfolio of projects that fit in to that strategy. It is for the donors then to ascertain where within that strategy they have a role to play and which are the projects they would like to fund.

Wahiduddin Mahmud

ence decisions. That was not always bad but it took away the responsibility of the government. It made the government feel as though they are not responsible of anything goes wrong.

Abu A Abdullah (Director General, Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies): Development assistance is lessening and will continue to lessen throughout the world although aid to Bangladesh has been quite steady.

In Bangladesh, foreign aid compensates for personal savings and foreign exchange.

For one US dollar in aid to our country, the donor country gets back four US dollars. The terms of trade goes against developing countries because of such form of assistance. We can definitely do without development assistance.

Muzaffer Ahmad

Economically, a cut-down in foreign aid would be beneficial to the people of Bangladesh in terms of improvement of quality of government and policymaking. Instead of a complete cut down, reduction of aid is the answer since it would force us to do things that we are not doing today; things we should be doing.

Rehman Sobhan

phase-out process of development assistance, in which case, we would be able to adjust, provided that we have the will and desire to do so.

Wahiduddin Mahmud (Chairman, Bangladesh Economic Association): Bangladesh has been one of the major aid-receiving countries in the world, but our dependence on foreign aid both for financing the fiscal and external deficits has been reduced very significantly over the years. The economy has been able to adjust to a much lower level of aid availability without experi-

ing any adverse impact on the overall economic growth performance. Amidst our many economic failures, this is definitely an encouraging development.

Our accumulated outstanding foreign debt and the annual debt servicing obligations are substantial, but we are not classified as one of the many heavily indebted poor countries. Ironically, that excludes Bangladesh from getting the benefit of debt relief under the ongoing IMF initiative. In striving for sustainable development, dependence on foreign aid can be at best only a partial solution and at worst like drug addiction. Availability of aid may only delay undertaking difficult economic reforms and aid may substitute rather than add to domestic resources. I do not think foreign aid as such to be the problem; it is the syndrome of 'donor dependence' mentality that has been the major problem of our development planning. This donor dependence is manifest in the absence of sustainable institutional capacities and in the rise and fall of development institutions with donor-funded project cycles. We have readily accepted whatever aid is on offer, irrespective of whether we have the capacity to productively utilise such aid. A large

our own development strategy and design a portfolio of projects that fit in to that strategy. It is for the donors then to ascertain where within that strategy they have a role to play and which are the projects they would like to fund. We must have our own strategic vision of

including the implementation of aid-funded projects. In the past, there has been a huge wastage of aid funds due to the poor quality of project implementation and the allegedly large leakage of funds. We are witnessing an increasing criminalisation of the tender-

Mashiur Rahman

the country's development potential, we cannot depend on foreign donors for that.

We must find means of ensuring democratic accountability and ownership of our development agenda. The overall poor quality of governance affects all aspects of economic management in Bangladesh.

ing process for public works. Corruption and inefficiency are problems that generally afflict our development administration, but it is particularly unfortunate when there is wastage of foreign funds that add to the debt liability of our future generation.

Muzaffer Ahmad (Professor

of Economics, Institute of Business Administration): Of the total aid that we receive 60 per cent is wasted. Even if we utilised the 40 per cent that is left, then the state of poverty would not have been so bad. Although we take soft loan, it is fast taking form of a debt burden. The government is not careful in using aid properly.

For one US dollar in aid to our country, the donor country gets back four US dollars. The terms of trade goes against developing countries because of such form of assistance. We can definitely do without development assistance.

One respect in which we are totally lagging behind is technology. If all the developing countries got together and invested in technology, then the gap we have with the advanced countries in technological terms would lessen. But we cannot depend on foreign aid. Today, we are not strong enough to say 'no'. And that is why we could not reap the benefits. We have been dictated. Also, accepting development loans we are burdening the poor as we are charging higher taxes to repay loans. This would cause poverty to deepen.

We could do without aid and it would not affect us too much if aid came to a stand still if we become self-sufficient.

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