Eurasia and South Asia in Their Global Context

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South Asia is surrounded by high ranges on its north and west, deep forests in its east, and by sea to its south. Beyond the Himalayas to the north was the Chinese Empire extending its suzerainty to Tibet and the Himalayan kingdoms. In the northwest were the Hindu Kush and the Khyber Pass through which traders and sometimes conquerors from Central Asia flooded into the region. These natural barriers did not block trade relations across the frontiers, but they were formidable enough to separate the political system of South Asia from its adjoining areas, although the northwest connection had more potential to affect the fate of the region.

South Asia's isolation from the rest of Asia was reinforced by British colonial rule. When the British left South Asia in 1947, there was good scope before the people of the region to restore its deprived relations with its north, northwest, and west, which were at that time represented by the modern states of the Soviet Union and China. It is true that in the course of time the newly emerged states of India and Pakistan developed intimate relations with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China respectively, but those relations were rather a natural outcome of their main foreign policy concerns: How they were placed in the US-centered international system.

With the end of the Cold War, and with the new developments after the 9/11 attacks that made Afghanistan, the neighboring country to South Asia, a focal point of military operations against "terrorism," India and Pakistan are now maintaining delicate but cooperative relations with the

United States. The presence of the American military in Afghanistan functions as a guarantor for India and Pakistan not to fight with each other.[1] Deepening economic and technological interdependence between the United States and India also brought a new dimension to India's strategic calculation, and has helped India secure the status of the regional dominant power. However, having the second- and the third-largest Muslim populations in the world, Pakistan and India may have difficulties maintaining their current relations with the United States, which carries some anti-Islam outlook in its "counterterror" operations.

This article sets out to study South Asia has for projecting the new foreign relations its geographical north and west. I will first look at the postcolonial history of South Asian foreign relations to consider how the opportunity created at the end of British colonial rule for restoring the ancient links in the contemporary context was lost. Then, the characteristics of strategic alliances between India and the Soviet Union and between Pakistan and China will be analyzed to show their secondary or reactive nature, and thus the limit of South Asia expanding its relations to its north and west. And lastly, I will explore the paths that two South Asian powers may take at present and in the future, keeping in mind such newly emerged factors as American unilateralism and some alternatives to it such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Post-colonial Setting

The end of the Cold War had the potential to change the strategic setting of South Asia with a view to expanding its scope toward Central Asia. Pakistan hoped for a better arrangement for its western border with Afghanistan whose government was then controlled by the Taliban, a Pakistani creation. India could not hope very much for any improvement in its fate in this part of Asia, as its ally, the Soviet Union, was replaced by

[1] There are unextinguishable arguments that some forms of US military presence remain in Pakistan even after the most critical phases of Operation Enduring Freedom had ended. See, for example, Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Militants' Commander Warns of Wana Fallout," *News International* (Internet Edition), August 1, 2004. The official position is that "the Pakistani government has taken such a strong position that US military personnel will not enter Pakistan." Gordon Corera, **"**US 'Impatience' in Bin Laden Hunt," *BBC News*, June 20, 2005.

smaller Muslim states in Central Asia, all of which, however, opposed the Taliban.

Geographically, South Asia is open to its north and west. This location is a region rich in culture and tradition, but was vulnerable to invasion through the Khyber Pass. The British colonizers were obsessed by the fear that someone, including the Russians, might come and threaten their precious jewel from across the Himalayas or the Hindu Kush. They did their best to defend colonial India by placing buffer states on the north and by extending the border westward through three wars with the Afghans. By doing so, British imperialists not only united the whole Indian subcontinent for the first time in its long history, but also separated this region from the rest of Asia.

The end of colonial rule in 1947 brought some hope to reshape Asian relations. Thus, delegates from eight countries within the Soviet Central Asia were invited to Delhi to participate in the Asian Relations Conference that Jawaharlal Nehru had convened shortly before the partitioned independence of India and Pakistan was achieved. But the new situation caused by the denial of Marshal Plan assistance to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc caused them to be preoccupied with their own economic reconstruction so that they were economically more integrated with each other to the point of constituting the socialist economic system. Consequently, very little effort was made to vitalize the relations with newly emerged noncommunist countries outside their system.

The death of Stalin and the subsequent end of the Korean War changed the tide, and official economic assistance relations between India and the Soviet Union began. These donor-recipient relations were, however, totally different from the relations Nehru had envisaged between India and other Asian nations, including those in Soviet Central Asia, when he convened the Asian Relations Conference nearly a decade before to depict the resurgence of Asia. But this became the rule that had regulated bilateral relations between India and the Soviet Union until the latter collapsed in 1991.

It is ironic that the most vocal critic of Cold War antagonism and advocate of nonalignment saw this opportunity of improving relations with the Soviet Union from the viewpoint of the Cold War. And it is quite accidental that India's encounter with the socialist superpower was timed when the United States decided to provide military assistance to Pakistan on the premise that a threat existed in the Cold War context. India thought

that the weapons provided would be directed not against the Soviet Union but against India. Naturally, this development put India in a position to repudiate the reasoning of the US. The agreement on the five principles of peaceful coexistence with China at the expense of the earlier stand of India that had recognized the internal autonomy of the Tibetans was the first of this kind. By criticizing the Cold War strategy of the United States, India was itself entangled in a similar thinking of power balance. Better relations with the Soviet Union or with Yugoslavia were considered in the same vein, although the former had more to offer with its technology- and capital-providing capacity and the latter with nonalignment in the later years.

India's antipathy against the Cold War in its early years, however, took the outlook of Asia-ness as the more militarization of the Cold War in Asia developed with SEATO being formed to include Pakistan. The idea of holding a conference of Asian and African nations proposed by the Indonesian prime minister was received skeptically at first, but Nehru had a change of heart and began to see it positively. The conference held in 1955 at Bandung, Indonesia, was for India to introduce China to the comity of nations in Asia as well as for many of the newly independent countries to have the first opportunity to participate in an international forum.

This conference had the potential to promote relations among Asian nations in more concrete terms. While Pakistan took this opportunity to start friendly relations with China, which culminated in a border agreement between the two countries in 1963, it is difficult to discern India's willingness to deepen the connection with its Asian friends through this conference. India's indifference to the actual issues in Asia can be explained by its preoccupation with the Cold War being brought to Asia. Nehru insisted that conflicts in Asia would never develop into wars unless the Western powers intervened in the process on the pretext of the Cold War. Consequently, he attempted to prove that Cold War thinking was irrelevant to Asia. His five principles, or the ten principles agreed upon in Bandung, were to advertise the way Asians would respect others' choices in a social system that Westerners would not tolerate and would fight the Cold War for. But he failed to recognize the difference not in the domestic systems but in the various interests among Asian nations, and thus failed to find a way to settle the conflicts that arose from the Cold War.

Nehru's "world of our own creation" collapsed when Chinese troops crossed the border along the Himalayas to push back their Indian counterparts who had marched forward to realize effective control over the territories India had claimed. But this incident did not considerably change India's way of looking at Asia as the Americans and British came forward with military assistance to help India, which rather reinforced the tendency for Indians to see the issue in the Cold War context. India continued to look to the "Super Powers" and their European allies.

Pakistanis looked more at reality in their search for allies against the threat they felt from India, which was understood not to have accommodated itself to the partition of British India. Afghanistan's rejection of recognizing its common border with Pakistan also constituted a security problem. These threats from both sides of West Pakistan were derived from its colonial legacy so that a negotiated settlement of the problems was inherently difficult as they were deeply entangled with the existence of Pakistan itself. Thus, it decided to approach the matter by strengthening its military preparedness and attempted to obtain assistance first from Britain and then from the United States. In this process, they emphasized their capacity to contribute to the global Cold War against the Communists.

On the other hand, Pakistan's relations with China steadily developed after their first encounter at the head-of-government level in Bandung. Perhaps their agreement in 1958 to construct the Karakorum Highway across the Karakorum Range was the first step toward restoring the old links in the contemporary context by connecting South and Central Asia. But Sino-Pak relations gradually changed their character as China's relations with India deteriorated. They demonstrated their success in temporarily demarcating the unsettled border between Kashmir and Tibet at Siachen Glacier in the spirit of good neighborly relations in 1963 where the line of actual control after the first Indo-Pak War ended without any clear indications about the belonging of the area extending from that point. Thus, restraining India's maneuverability in foreign relations came to be the main concern for them with a small hole possibly leading to the new dimension of South and Central Asian relations.

Diagonal Development of Relations between South and Central Asia

India's failure to settle the border problems with China actually brought the Cold War into the region. The United States came and provided India with American arms. Americans saw the border war between India and China as an integral part of communist aggression, and John F. Kennedy was determined to project another Asian giant as an alternative to the Chinese example of the Asian development path. India was looming large in US foreign policy and occupied a central place in its new development assistance to fill the "economic gap" that might otherwise result in security holes for communist infiltration.

Pakistan was not comfortable with this development and lodged a protest against the military build-up of its enemy by a formal ally. At the same time, Pakistan moved closer to China as the enemy's enemy, at which the United States showed its displeasure. The Second Indo-Pak War and its ceasefire process revealed that Pakistan could not have hoped for US help in the event of war with India. The Soviet Union emerged as the only possible mediator between India and Pakistan and invited the two heads of government to the capital of a Soviet Central Asian Republic, Tashkent, for peace talks.

American preoccupation with the Vietnam War in the second half of the 1960s kept the United States away from either India or Pakistan. India's ill feeling against American pressure for its economic reform made it escape to the world of second-class goods production and trade, i.e., the socialist economic system that the Soviet Union and its East European subordinates maintained at the time.[2] Pakistan was also approached by the Soviet Union but when forced to choose between the latter and China in 1969, Pakistan decided to go with its old friend, to which suggestions

[2] India from the late 1960s tried to reduce the volume of imports from the West to save its foreign exchange reserve. This policy victimized India's technological development to the extent that its economy became autarchic and that its products had a hard time finding markets outside India except for those of its political allies like Eastern Bloc countries and nonaligned nations. See YOSHIDA Osamu, "Indira Ganji seiken no jiritsu-ka senryaku to In-So kinmitsu-ka no haikei" [Indira Gandhi Regime's Strategy for Self-reliance and Underlying Factors toward a Closer Indo-Soviet Relationship], *Kokusai seiji* [International Relations], no. 127 (2001): 33–49.

from the new US government under Richard Nixon for Pakistan to mediate its normalization process with China contributed considerably.[3]

Thus, India's border conflicts with its northern neighbor as well as its rejection of a US-sponsored economic integration made the distant Soviet Union its ally, while Pakistan looked to China as a more reliable partner in its antagonism against India, even if cordial relations with the Soviet Union might have changed the conflictual setting between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This dually diagonal relationship prevented the two countries from developing regional connections as they were blocked on their north by hostile states except for the narrow pass through Karakorum that was opened up in 1978.

Paradoxical enough was the pivotal position that the United States occupied in this situation. Although the United States kept itself away from most political issues in South Asia from toward the end of the 1960s,[4] the US stance along with its economic and technological potential to affect the fate of the South Asian states made India and Pakistan compete with each other to persuade the Americans: India wanted them to recognize its dominant position in the region and to treat India as it was, while Pakistan attempted to take every opportunity to impress on the Americans its strategic importance for them. No decisive tilt in the balance between Indo-Soviet and Pak-China alliances created this situation, but decisive action from the United States, whatever a distant possibility it might be, did.

It seems unusual that such a regionally dominant power like India was so obsessed by the mere possibility of a superpower changing the regional balance, but assistance given to one of the regional powers without any commitment made by the US to regional stability was the largest problem for India. Failing to set clear strategic objectives for South Asia, an indecisive United States had always been an additional factor which either of the two contenders in this region might happen to benefit from.

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[3] See Golam W. Choudhury, "Reflections on Sino-Pakistan Relations," *Pacific Community* 7, no.2 (1976): 262-265.

[4] The US "Tilt Policy" in 1971 was exceptional in outlook but in reality, there was no concerted effort within the US government to help Pakistan suppress the Bangladeshi rebels supported by India. See Christopher Van Hollen, "The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (1980): 339–361.

The End of the Cold War and a New Dimension for South Asia

The end of the Cold War brought a new situation to South Asia. The US presidential waiver to exempt the application of the Pressler Amendment to Pakistan was not extended in 1990, the year following Soviet completion of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and assistance from the United States had been withdrawn since then as Pakistan was officially suspected of developing nuclear weapons. But the setback suffered by India also looked great as the Soviet Union disappeared and a succeeding Russia did not give India the same strategic importance as its predecessor had done, while Pakistan could continuously expect China's support in its strategic setting.

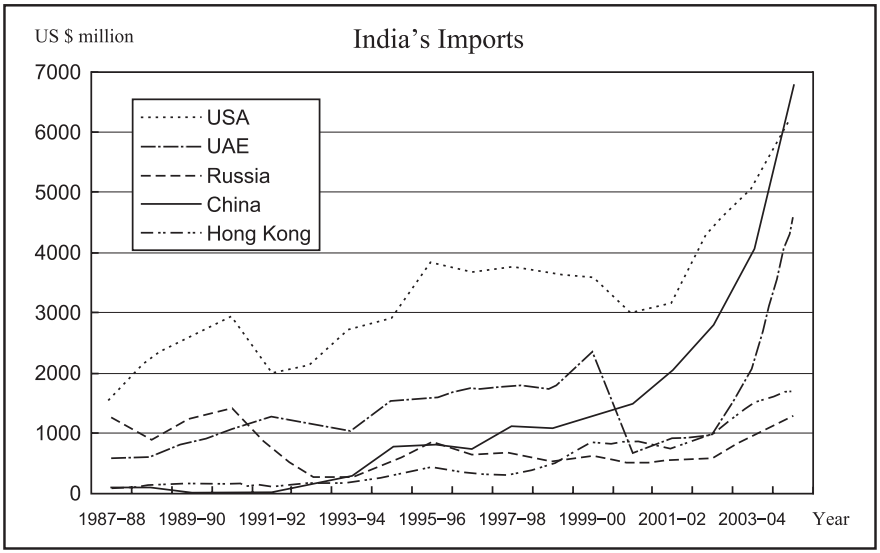
The Gulf War, however, created a new context, and the subsequent economic crisis of India forced it to make its economic policy more adjustable to globalization. After accepting conditions of the IMF's structural adjustment loan, India's balance of payment position was quickly recovered through rapidly increased foreign investment. India's economic power now received the attention it deserved in accordance with its size. In the international market, India loomed large in the calculation of world exporters of goods and capital. Thus, the Clinton administration was about to make a visit to South Asia to strengthen US relations with the region when India and Pakistan tested their nuclear devices, which further delayed the US return to South Asia.

On the other hand, India and China have been slowly but steadily normalizing their bilateral relations since Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988. China even supplied nuclear fuels to India's US-constructed Tharapur Power Station from 1993 to 1998 after the restricted period was over.[5] Sino-Indian trade relations soon caught up with those between

[5] Tharapur Nuclear Power Station was constructed by the US under the bilateral agreement of 1963 that stipulated that the nuclear fuel would be supplied only by the US for the first thirty years. However, the fuel supply was interrupted from around 1976 when congressional criticism against India's first nuclear test in 1971 gained momentum during the presidential elections. US Congress further passed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Act in 1978 that prohibits the export of nuclear items to those countries without full-scope safeguard including India. Thus, the US, despite its bilateral legal obligation to supply nuclear fuel to India, attempted to renegotiate the terms with India in vain. The strained bilateral relations ended only in 1982 when the two countries agreed that France would replace the US to supply the fuel. France did this until 1993 when the period for which the

India and Russia in 1997–1998. In 2004–2005, China became India's third-largest trade partner next only to the US and the UAE. India imported most from China (excluding Hong Kong), and more than five times as much as from Russia.

The deepening trade relations between India and China jumped up from the turn of the century. The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 and their serious armed conflicts in the following year in the Kargil district of Kashmir may have slowed down the pace. The Kargil crisis was taken up seriously as it might have triggered a nuclear war. Thus, US president Bill Clinton intervened and strongly requested Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw his troops. China did not support



Source: Reserve Bank of India, *Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, 2005*.

bilateral agreement had provided concluded, and China came into the picture to offer nuclear fuel at this juncture. It did it until 1998 when India conducted the second nuclear explosions. China's motivation to supply nuclear fuel to India is understood as being from its commercial rather than strategic interests. See *Nucleonics Week* 42, no. 5 (2001), 339–361.

Pakistan's stand in the Kargil crisis as it had done in 1965 or in 1971. The crisis may have been viewed by the Chinese as Pakistan's adventurism with nuclear capability at its hands and not as something it could be sided with. The Kargil crisis may prove to be the turning point in China's relations with South Asia.[6]

While the United States' capacity to influence the course of events in South Asia was extremely limited due to the economic sanctions of its own imposition on India and Pakistan against their nuclear tests in 1998, China held the first security dialogue with India in 2000 without deteriorating its relations with Pakistan. Lacking an effective American presence in this part of the world, China now embarked on the creation of a new Eurasian setting.

9/11 and After

The 9/11 attacks in 2001 brought the United States back to South Asia, this time with more willingness to commit itself to the region. New US president George W. Bush quickly lifted the economic sanctions on India and Pakistan for their support extended to his "war against terrorism." India's alliance with the US for this war was in line with its own problems as long as Bush's war did not go beyond the war against the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, as it had also posed a threat to India's Kashmir. Pakistan had, on the other hand, many difficulties in deciding to fight against the Taliban that had been created by Pakistani intelligence during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But it did so and even let its own territory be used by Americans and other multinational forces as a base to attack Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

Although it was controversial whether Afghanistan was a proper target of retaliation against the 9/11 attacks, lack of diplomatic recognition given to the Taliban regime by the international community except for three states including Pakistan created the circumstances in which the American appeal was easily accepted, and concerted military operations

[6] See Bahukutumbi Raman, "The India-China-Pakistan-US Quadrangle," *South Asia Analysis Group*, paper no. 1334, April 12, 2005, http://www.saag.org/papers14/paper1334.html; Imtiaz Gul, "Changing face of China-Pakistan ties," *Aljazeera.Net*, October 9, 2003, http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B0F09C03-F107-4078-854D-033701D45879.htm.

were realized with most of the major countries involved. India, Pakistan, China, Russia, and the Central Asian republics were all on the American side.

Pakistan's territory proved to be the most important to attack Afghanistan, but this did not necessarily mean that Pakistan had gained another chance to become a close ally of the United States in the latter's global strategy. The record of Islamization in Pakistan since Zia-ur-Haq's regime as a part of its efforts to assist Islamic fighters against Soviet troops in Afghanistan cast doubt on its readiness to fight with the Americans, although this process itself had been under strong American influence. The attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 by those identified as Pakistan-based militants put Pakistan further under pressure to convince its allies of its sincerity, which on its part intensified anti-American sentiments in the domestic politics of Pakistan. This development made Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf, who ousted Nawaz Sharif in *coup* soon after the latter accepted Clinton's demand to withdraw Pakistani troops from Kargil, assume a more secular-oriented outlook.

India exploited all these to impress upon the Americans that its long history as a secular democratic state would prove that it was a more reliable ally in the war against terrorism than Pakistan. This exceptionally pro-American posture was not domestically stable, and it decided not to officially support the second American war that was directed against Iraq two years later, so that India kept the option open as to whether to remain with the Americans or to be with its critics in Eurasia.

Meanwhile, India's relations with Russia and China were further improved. Russians found in India an outlet for their nuclear and other sophisticated technologies that might stimulate American suppliers' appetites to enter the Indian market for India's advantage. Sino-Indian relations were put on a more pragmatic basis through the visit to China by Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in June 2003 or one month after the end of the main battles of the Iraq war. The two countries agreed to expand their border trade and explore a political framework to settle the boundary problems.[7]

[7] "Declarations on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China," Ministry of External Affairs India, 2003, http://meaindia.nic.in/declarestatement/2003/06/23jd01.htm.

With the steady development of India's relationship with China and Russia, strained Indo-Pak relations were slowly improved. When the National Democratic Alliance government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party was defeated in the 2004 general elections, the United Progressive Alliance of the Indian National Congress and various regional parties in India made a breakthrough in the confidence building with Pakistan on various issues including nuclear capabilities and Kashmir. They also reached an agreement to construct a pipeline for natural gas from Iran through Pakistan to India. Indo-Pakistani bilateral relations showed clear signs of improvement.

Thus, all the four actors formerly confronted diagonally were coming closer for the first time, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's decision in 2005 to grant observer status to India and Pakistan along with Iran and Mongolia was to be viewed as a natural outcome of this development of quadrangle understanding. The SCO has the potential for Pakistan to put its relations with Central Asian countries, which had been strained due to the former's support of the Taliban regime, on a more amicable footing.

However, as their listing up of Iran, the supposed next target of America's war against terrorism, as a state to be granted observer status indicates, the SCO's increased self-definition as a group to offer an alternative, if not critical, approach to the problems of destabilized international community distinct from American unilateralism may pose some embarrassment to its South Asian observers. India may be particularly sensitive to the American reaction as it is now experiencing a first-ever real honeymoon with the United States.

India long hoped for recognition as a dominant power in the region by the United States and, after the second nuclear explosion in 1998, for the commercial purchase of nuclear technologies from the US as a sign of approval to recognize the nuclear power status of India. President Bush's first visit to South Asia in March 2006 finalized the nuclear deal with India so that a special relationship between the two was formally established. This, together with the strong US military presence in the region as a result of the Afghan war, offered an ideal setting for India to act as a dominant regional power. In other words, at the very juncture of four regional powers finally coming together to anticipate more constructive cooperation to pacify the regional conflicts, the United States

intervened in the process by telling India that it would be treated as a Britain or Japan in South Asia.

It will be appropriate to understand the reasoning behind the Indian government's decision not to send its prime or foreign minister[8] to the 2006 SCO meeting in Shanghai in this context. After all, as far as Indians feel that the threat to their security comes from across the border on their west, the best way to keep security in the short run is to control the flow at its origin. In the past, more often than not, Americans expected India to do the reverse or to behave like a bigger brother by showing more generous attitude to Pakistan without their own commitment to the business. But now, they have come to see the problem as their own so that they have their presence in the region to control the situation, which will be the most effective and economical for Indian security. And this does not include any necessity on the part of India to improve and strengthen its bilateral relations with Pakistan.

It is of course too early to say that India chose to go with the Americans, but such a long history of an American shadow over the events in South Asia might have clouded Indian eyes when they believed that that shadow might be cast in India's favor.

South Asia's discovery of Eurasia has just started, and countries in this region have not yet gotten used to this new reality. Therefore, it is understandable that they tend to look to the old master of the Cold War years for stability and regional status, rather than to settle the problems by

[8] India's foreign minister, Natwar Singh, was dismissed on November 7, 2005 after eight months of dual diplomacy by him and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on India's relations with Iran. Natwar Singh, a former professional diplomat who is regarded to be close to former prime minister Indira Gandhi, represented advocates of a nonaligned policy and supported Iranian claims of independent nuclear development. His dismissal was the result of a timely announcement by the UN committee headed by the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board, Paul Volcker, to inquire about corruption relating to the UN's Oil for Food Program for Iraq, that he was among the "noncontractual beneficiaries." Volcker's report provided an opportunity for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to end the dual diplomacy with his foreign minister on Iran and to deepen India's global partnership with the US including the issue of nuclear proliferation in relation to Iran under his leadership. Manmohan Singh retained the External Affairs portfolio himself until October, 2006, which caused India's very small presence at the 2006 SCO meeting in June as Manmohan avoided attending. For Natwar's disposition, see Raman, "The US does not like Natwar Singh," *Rediff.com*, November 7, 2005, http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/nov/07raman.htm.

themselves. But it is this hegemonic influence that has locked them up in this particular region since their attainment of independence.

The SCO and other Eurasian frameworks offer the potential of a completely different kind of interdependent network. Furthermore, American unilateralism may not last long, and there is a possibility of a US return to the multilateral approach of the Clinton years. South Asians should see the issue from a much longer perspective and with the prospect of playing a leading role in international relations in the future.