

## ABSTRACT

Since gaining independence in 1947 India and Pakistan have fought three conventional wars and this highlights the bitter rivalry that prevails between the two nations. In May 1998 India conducted a nuclear test which was quickly responded to by Pakistan and these tests demonstrated the success of their secret nuclear programs and their continued rivalry against each other. It is obvious that in their attempts to meet the threat of external forces, India and Pakistan both have developed nuclear technology as their most preferred method to counter each other. The tests shocked the world. Being the two largest and most powerful member states in the SAARC it also conveyed the perilous situation regarding peace in the SAARC region.

Among many reasons for continued tension in the SAARC region, a core issue is the Indo - centric nature of South Asia. Since most of the less powerful South Asian countries and other member states of the SAARC are geographically closer to India than to others they have many bilateral issues with India than with any other. The SAARC region is also part and parcel of South Asia in respect of its geography, culture and history and any single gesture that any member state makes with any of the super powers is a very sensitive issue to India, Pakistan and also to China and Iran. Due to the porous nature of borders between nations in the subcontinent, cross national ethnic and religious problems too cause serious inter state problems. Therefore to build a conscientious, both internal and external problems need to be addressed together.

The SAARC lacks a region wide comprehensive and stable security mechanism to regulate potential rivalries, build relations with powerful nations and to limit their influences. The process of regional cooperation has had some positive effect and if India and Pakistan can agree, the SAARC forum is a good platform to tackle any conflict in the region through international cooperation. Considering the geopolitical realities in the region it is perceived that states will be happy to accept a security doctrine that would view the entire region as a single strategic area. On the positive side the recent inclusion of Afghanistan as a member of the SAARC has increased the advantages such as the region's geopolitical weight, bargaining position and regional stability. The negative is that it is now more diversified in terms of its development levels, their relationships with super powers and ongoing internal uncertainties. With the recent developments in the international environment like the 9/11 attacks in USA and the subsequent war on terror, and also the hitherto unprecedented relations between India and Pakistan and also their relations with the USA, perhaps, it is not optimistic to hope that peace will now prevail in the SAARC region.