

South Asia, like other regions, must find ways to attack root causes of regional tensions. The nuclear weapons programs of India and Pakistan are largely a symptom of ancient distrust and rivalry. Proliferation of nuclear weapons is the most important security issue on the international agenda. We must be prepared to confront its implications in South Asia, as we are determined to do with respect to North Korea.

Until recently, there has been no intensive effort to deal with urgent security problems, and there is no regional framework. Such a framework would have to include China, Russia and the United States, and perhaps others as well.

In addition to these sub-regional problems, we must address a series of common issues affecting many countries of the region.

The proliferation of conventional arms sales, unresolved border disputes, civil and ethnic conflict, and increased military capabilities are not yet being addressed successfully, within an established framework for discussion or negotiation.

The region now consists of a number of countries with substantial economic weight -- and that number is growing every day. They must now play a political role commensurate with their new economic stature.

Only a concerted effort by the major powers -- the U.S., Japan, Russia and China -- can ensure the development of rule-based systems that will foster long-term stability in the region. But their efforts must be matched and encouraged by others.

We recognize that security structures and mechanisms are no panacea. Witness the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia continuing despite the UN, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But co-operative dialogue can result in avenues for co-operation, the acceptance of shared obligations, and the resolution of conflict. So then, where do we go from here? How do we move forward?

Let me express my own vision.

I see an Asia Pacific in which there is a web of interdependence at different levels, motivated by a common recognition that our individual futures are linked.

It would be a region committed to habits of dialogue and co-operation. It would have a series of interlocking, mutually supportive, formal and informal mechanisms to expand dialogue as political circumstances required: