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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA : CHALLENGES FACING THE UNITED NATIONS

It is unbelievable how many systems of morals and politics have been successively found, forgotten, rediscovered, forgotten again, to reappear a little later, always charming and surprising the world as if they were new, and bearing witness, not to the fecundity of the human spirit, but to the ignorance of men.

Alexis de Tocqueville, 1852.¹

The end of the Cold War was marked by prospects of radical transformations in the international relations which generated high hopes of benefiting from peace dividends in a collectivist and democratized international order. It quickly became fashionable to demand greater role on the part of the United Nations in an 'indivisible' and 'interdependent' world. The United Nations has been viewed to be gaining greater coherence and its actions gathering fresh momentum.² The operation Desert Storm launched with the endorsement of the Security Council has been followed by an unprecedented increase in the UN peacekeeping operations. The setting up of the UNIKOM (United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission) in April 1991 was followed quickly by six other peacekeeping operations within one year (upto April 1992), involving the participation of over 46,000 troops

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in, Adam Roberts, "New Age in International Relations", *International Affairs*, vol.63, no.3, 1991, p.513.

2. Ramesh Thakur, "The United Nations in a Changing World", *Security Dialogue*, vol.24(1), 1993, p.7.

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costing about US\$ 2,895 million annually.³ There was a facade of a movement from unilateralism to multilateralism in the maintenance of international security which prompted the understanding that the United Nations was going to have a critical role in establishing a 'collective security' system. The present paper is an attempt to examine such prospects. An outline is first provided on the problems of international security in the post-Cold War era. The paper then goes on to highlight the implications of the same for the United Nations.

SOME ASPECTS OF POST-COLD WAR SECURITY CHALLENGES

Syndromes of Instability

The outline of the security challenges in the post-Cold War Era is complex and bears several syndromes of instability. War as a means of settling disputes has agreeably been eliminated from Western European and North American theatres. But regional conflicts continue incessantly in various parts of the world including central and eastern Europe, and many of the Third World regions - in many cases with military escalation. Despite significant positive developments in arms control between Moscow and Washington there has been a dangerous rolling back of militarism in various regions of the world including new waves of regional arms race and trade. The international community is gripped with growing tensions and instabilities associated with the resurgence of nationalist assertions which in nearly all cases are generating intra- and inter-state conflicts of ethno-religious, cultural and other types. The way in which escalation of violence is precipitated by the break up of multi-ethnic states - with Yugoslavia as the most graphic example - is a security concern of global dimension, particularly with the prospect of reappearing of the problem elsewhere. While for the vast majority of the post-colonial societies this has been an endemic problem for the greater part of the past four-plus decades, in the

3. *ibid*, see table 1.

republics of the former Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe, the trend is a post-Cold War phenomenon. In either case the process is turbulent, and more importantly, the end-product of the process appears to be the emergence of a large number of the methods small and mini states, which warrants a serious review of the concept of sovereignty and the nation-state system.⁴

The Legacy of Confrontation

With the euphoria around the demise of the Soviet Union over, new sets of problems are being unfolded day in and day out. Keeping apart the continuing problems associated with economic and industrial rehabilitation as well as political instability, the chaos in intra-CIS relations has also challenged the international disarmament momentum including the implementation of the START agreements. Besides, the other sets of unanticipated sources of post-Cold War global instabilities include the critical dilemma related to the huge weapons production capability - both nuclear and conventional - of many states. The problems include nuclear safety, environmental and pollution hazards associated with the destruction and dismantling of weapons and complexes thereof, and problems of domestic unemployment linked with the closing down of portions of defense capability. The dismantling of the Cold War military superstructure may prove to be more complex than initially perceived. The huge stockpile of weapons, skilled labor and technologies that are now rendered redundant may fetch good prices in the international black market and provide the heaven for international terrorism, drug trafficking and electronic piracy. Despite notable progress towards nuclear restraint among the great powers, with increasing number of states already possessing and many more in the threshold and/or aspiring to be so, the prospect of attaining unified control over the weapons of mass destruction remains bleak. The INF and START

4. See, Pierre Hassner, "Beyond Nationalism and Internationalism: Ethnicity and World Order", in *Survival*, vol.35, no.2, 1993, pp.49-65.

are certainly good beginnings, but do not in any manner capture the methods that may be effective in ensuring nuclear disarmament. There are also not too many convincing reasons to suggest that the end of the Cold War has contributed greatly to the elimination of the problem of militarization in the developing countries.⁵ Similar are the limitations of the Non-proliferation Treaty. On the other hand, the new global thrust on international peacekeeping has created a new wave of demand for recruitment and training of men-in-arms justifying in many cases growing defense spending.

Centre-periphery Framework

The events that led to the end of the Cold War were located basically in Europe and the US. But the effects of these took such dimensions that a new era in international relations have been set in. Despite continuing uncertainties about the end-shape of the on-going transition, one possible way to look at the emerging international order would be a centre-periphery approach which constituted a vital aspect of the literature on dependency in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ The centre-periphery approach not only helps capture the new realities but also avoid the confusions in the use of some terminologies in vogue during the cold war period like east-west, third world, non-aligned or even north-south.⁷ In the present context 'centre' is the globally dominant handful of countries that constitute the economic, political, military, technological and industrial superstructure while the 'periphery' is the vast majority of the weaker and disadvantaged states which are constrained to eke out the survival strategy within the rules of the game set by centre. On a closer focus there may be variations in status or even sub-groupings within both periphery and the centre constituting what may be viewed as core of the centre, periphery of the centre, centre of the periphery and periphery of the periphery. One could also classify the vibrant

5. Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twentyfirst Century", *International Affairs*, Vol.67, No.3, July 1991, p.445.

6. The Centre-Periphery approach presented here draws heavily on, *ibid*, pp. 431-51.

7. See for details, *ibid*, p.432. See also Thomas P. Thornton, "The United States and South Asia", *Survival*, vol. 35, no.2, 1993, p.111.

newly industrialized economies like those in East Asia into a category of semi-centre or possibly semi-periphery. In any event, an overall centre-periphery framework captures at least the key features of the global order that shape the present day international relations. With the possibility of the use of force eliminated in settlement of disputes among the members of the centre, with the 'second world' non-existent, with ideological and military confrontation between Moscow and Washington behind, and with ideological divide eliminated as the factor in power rivalry, the question that appears vital is, what security implications the emerging pattern of relationship in the centre may have on the periphery.

Comprehensive Approach to Security

Before taking up this question, it is necessary to have a quick look at what is implied by security in the post-Cold War era. It is already commonplace, if not fashionable, to view security in much broader and comprehensive terms than conventional military perspective. Broad or narrow, security in the end is freedom from threat to one's survival, and operationally, therefore, it is the ability to maintain independent existence and to preserve the core national values. And as the bottomline is survival, security also encompasses a wide range of concerns that are associated with factors conducive thereof.

During the cold war period the conceptual and operational treatment of international security was dominated by the black and white issue of ideological and military confrontation between the two superpowers and their respective blocs. This confrontation was transfused to the rest of the world by the efforts of the superpowers to expand their spheres of influence towards which they used a variety of instruments including massive transfers of arms and involvement in hostilities and conflicts that already existed or that were fueled by such involvements. As an obvious fallout of the end of the Cold War there are notable indications that the security agenda of the centre will be much less dominated by ideological-military

confrontation and instead political, socio-economic and environmental issues are likely to gain in prominence in the international security agenda. This comprehensive approach to security has of course been debated for quite some time and analysts have indeed embarked on a "rediscovery process" for an expanded agenda. As pertinently observed by Edward Kolodziej, "economic and political assurances responsive to social demands, now expressed with pervasive force throughout the international system (albeit with varying weight, intensity and salience), must also be fashioned to ensure stable and legitimate security systems".⁸ Examining the collapse of the Soviet state, he writes, "disillusionment of the Soviet elite and enlarging segments of Soviet peoples with the abject failure of a centralized economy to meet the nation's welfare needs eroded political support for Soviet security institutions, viewed increasingly as a brake on economic growth and development."⁹ It is vividly clear by now, moreover, that the security of the Soviet state, in the end, was mortally affected by its obsession with military might, both conventional and nuclear, as the cornerstone and with the styles of production and illusion of grandeur associated with them which found reflection also in the civilian production sectors. The growing importance of relative economic performance was grossly overlooked and the emphasis was more on building up huge military-industrial complexes and weapons of mass destruction and not on the dynamism of economic institutions. The over-extended nature of the Soviet state also worked behind a rather non-violent collapse of the system¹⁰ which is viewed to be the culmination of decades of tremendous social frustration and pressures for change, dormant though.

8. Edward A. Kolodziej, "What is Security and Security Studies?: Lessons from the Cold War", *Arms Control*, vol.13, no.1 (April 1992). On this comprehensive approach to security see also, Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the post-Cold War Era*, (Boulder, Colorado, 1991) and Yezid Sayigh, *Confronting the 1990s: Security of the Developing Countries, Adelphi Papers*, (IISS, London 1990).

9. Edward A. Kolodziej, *op. cit.* p.4.

10. Adam Roberts, "The United Nations and International security", *Survival*, Summer 1993, IISS, London, pp. 515-6.

The challenges to international security are viewed in this paper in this context of growing recognition of the failures of the narrow conception of security. The imperative is to fathom the inter-connections of military security with various aspects of the national life - political, societal, economic and environmental.

Uni-polarized Multi-polarity

Within the core of the centre, the power configuration has vividly moved from the dominance of two superpowers to several great powers. It may be debatable to suggest that it is multi-polar in true sense of the term since the United States remains the most dominant among the great powers. But the core is undoubtedly more multi-centered than before. The decline of the Soviet power has accompanied the rise of Europe, particularly strengthening of the EC as an economic and political entity. Despite their political and military ambiguities Japan and Germany are formidable contenders for a place at the core, so is China with its unprecedented growth.

The multi-centered core may be more complex and more fluid, but may also be much less polarized, or specifically more united than before. One reason for this is that because of growing stress on economic aspects and because of lower level of direct military threats more and more great powers may opt for becoming militarily less active joining the ranks with Japan and Germany. The defeat of communism as an alternative ideology vis-a-vis capitalism has been so overwhelming (notwithstanding the exception of China and Cuba which are also undergoing significant changes) that with all its well-known critics and shortcomings capitalism has emerged as the indisputable ideology and the most desirable form of economic management and political governance. This means that the centre will be less ideologically polarized within itself although competition in technological innovation, economy, finance and trade is in all likelihood poised to sharpen. On the other hand, because of the absence of ideological confrontation there will hardly be any race between the great powers for

spheres of influence in the periphery, which would also imply that local conflicts and rivalries will become increasingly autonomous with the potential of regional powers like China, India and Brazil becoming more substantial than before.

The other dominant feature is that the group of the states in the centre have been able to eliminate the need to use force or military power against each other in the settlement of disputes. On the other hand, there seems to be a consensus as to how any other security threat elsewhere in the world can be militarily met under the leadership of the United States. The unprecedented military consensus achieved during the Gulf War amply demonstrated how the centre under the leadership of the US utilized the United Nations to take on a perceived security threat. The whole of the centre and even Russia and China contributed though in varying degrees and nature to the consensus to which a number of periphery states also found it convenient to join. The Gulf War may not be an ideal model for the future as has been amply demonstrated already by the failure of the centre to act in case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but it certainly indicated the pattern of security relation in the post-Cold War world which is collective action in selective situations on the basis of a *perceived threat* to international security. In any event, the global power structure can be described as uni-polarized multipolarity in the sense that though several independent great powers are the dominant actors, a single dominant coalition or consensus define the global security structures.

Periphery Losing Leverage

Concomitant with the growing strength and assertiveness of the centre, the international network of institutions, although most of these are products of the cold war period, are by all means growing in clout. These include the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, Group of Seven (or the core of it already coined as G-3 to include North America, Europe and Japan). On the other hand, the institutions, if these at all may be called so, like the G-77 and NAM which the periphery attempted to create have evidently been

losing whatever edge these had during the past few decades. This is associated with the decline in the importance of the periphery as the objects of competition or spheres of influence among great powers. The ideological competition of the Cold War period gave the periphery what was viewed, and often indeed used to be, a useful lever on the centre even though often in exchange of unwelcome interventions in internal affairs. With the end of the Cold War, there is no divided centre and hence hardly any leverage for the periphery.

The collapse of ideological confrontation appears to have coincided with an unprecedented rise of ethno-religious confrontation and conflict particularly at the periphery. Associated with this, the perceived anti-western credentials of Islam seem to be projecting, Islam as a threat to the international security in the perspective of the centre. The centre's obsession with "islamic fundamentalism" not only tends to view it as the source of an impending centre-periphery conflict but also to a great extent accounts for the contemptuous and disastrous complaisance vis-a-vis ethno-religious persecution and cleansing in situations like Bosnia.

Socio-economic Aspects

The disparity between the centre and the periphery is widening not only in terms of the levels and rates of development but also in the way the challenges can be faced. In reality, although the polarization is likely to be sharper, there is no denying that the relation between the centre and periphery is one of mutual dependence and complementarity rather than confrontational. But the reality is that there is hardly any reason to anticipate that there will be any positive movement in the position of the periphery states. These will continue to be in the disadvantaged positions in the global market place where rules of business, finance, trades and prices are determined by the centre. The other important source of future global instability is the growing imbalance in population growth between the centre and the periphery. While the population in the countries of the centre

is already believed to be closing to stabilization, it would be well into the next century before the same happened in the periphery. And by that time the population in the periphery would be as high as about 14 billion which would be about 7 times higher than that of the centre.¹¹ It is hard to imagine how the earth planet can sustain the pressure of such a huge population unless it is truly viewed to be a challenge not merely for the periphery but also for the centre.

Environmental Threats

There is a tendency in the centre to sweepingly blame the population explosion for the devastating forecasts on global environmental degradation which is yet another problem of truly international dimension. There is no denying that growing population is adding to the pressures on environment, but consider the aspect of global warming caused largely by the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for which the centre can hardly escape the blame for having created the problem in the first place. Several of the periphery countries including Bangladesh and Maldives are vulnerable to inconceivable magnitude of disaster to be caused by only a few degrees of rise in sea level or by growing pressures of droughts and desertification. Not simply because these countries have no capabilities to cope with such problems, not only because such eventualities may add mounting pressures of migration, nor because these may also be the source of local conflicts, but the holistic nature of the global environmental problem dictates that it needs a truly international approach. The basic question is whether the international community is ready for all these. The above discussion was intended to highlight the need for upgrading of the management of international security challenges which coincides with the demand for strengthening and improving the United Nations to which we now turn.

11. See for details, Brian Urquhart, "The United Nations in 1992: Problems and Opportunities", *International Affairs*, Vol.68, No.2, April 1992.

CHALLENGES FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

The Agenda for Peace

The demand on the United Nations to assume greater role in international security in the post-Cold War era had its formal beginning in November 1989 when at the joint initiative of the former Soviet Union and the United States the UN General Assembly adopted a consensus resolution (number 44/21), titled "Enhancing International Peace, Security and International Cooperation in All its Aspects in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations". It was for the first time in the history of the UN that Washington and Moscow joined hands in supporting the UN and strengthening it.¹² The resolution also marked the end of confrontation and the beginning of a concert between the two at the global body. This was followed in January 1992 by the first ever summit meeting of the UN Security Council which explicitly recognized the possibilities of expanding the role of the UN and called upon the Secretary General to prepare an "analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening and making more efficient within the framework and provisions of the Charter the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and peacekeeping." The report titled *Agenda for Peace*, prepared by Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to a great extent captured the promise of the UN in a fast changing world and has become a courageous and quite optimistic initiative that shows how significant and assertive the UN's role could be in ensuring international peace and security in the post-Cold War era.

Question of Confidence

It is not intended here to examine the proposals contained in the report, nor to make an evaluation thereof. Suffice it to say that since its publication the report has received generally favorable response. There has

12. Vladimir F. Petrovsky, "Multifaceted Cooperation: A Post-Confrontational Perspective for the United Nations", *Disarmament*, United Nations, Vol. XIII, No.2, 1990.

been hardly any opposition to the proposition that the UN should be given enhanced capacity for "preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping". The more specific aspects of the proposals which would certainly generate considerable debate, for example, the proposal for making armed forces available to the UN on a permanent basis and that for more secure financing of the peacekeeping operations are yet to be duly addressed. The problem of burden-sharing is old and complex enough, but as the cost of peacekeeping must be much less compared to war, it has the prospect of being paid for though. with growing demand for peace keeping operations it may become further complicated.¹³ More intriguing is the question of the creation of a force on a permanent basis as it is not yet clear whether the member states have the confidence in the UN's capability to manage the wide range of conflicts to the extent that they can transfer control of their armed forces to the supra-national body on a permanent basis. In retrospect, member-states of the UN have in the past about five decades of its existence always been reluctant to authorize the use of international force for the purpose of enforcing the UN decisions largely because of a suspicion that the 'monster' might one day turn against them.¹⁴ The Gulf War, as already indicated, can hardly be viewed as a model and the likelihood of continued inhibitions against the creation of an international army seems to be more evident than not. In any event "overloaded" as the world body presently is in putting out fires in as many as 13 on-going peacekeeping operations, it is hardly surprising that the Secretary General's proposals have not yet been fully examined by the member governments.

'Collective' or 'Selective' Security?

Leaving that debate open, there is little doubt that given the centre-periphery outline of the emerging international security landscape, the effectiveness of the world body in facing the challenges discussed above would depend on how member governments are committed to the very large

13. Brian Urquhart, *op.cit.*, p.317.

14. Ramesh Thakur, *op.cit.*, p.19.

and global effort that is required. Questions have to be raised, for example, about the meaning of the term collective security as it appears in the *Agenda for Peace*, and on ways to ensure certain degree of transparency in this respect. If collective security is to indicate that security of one is the concern of all, then the system that UN should be able to work out must mean much more than the protection of perceived interest of certain countries while that of other can be ignored. Otherwise, it would turn out to be *selective security*. The most important source of failure of the UN in past 45 years has been that governments have ignored its decisions and principles with impunity.¹⁵ The failure of the UN to prevent member countries defy critical Security Council Resolutions over the years as well as subjectivity of the world body in defining its response to various crises and conflicts even in recent times have created genuine grounds for accusing the UN of 'double standards'. Some basic questions like who should decide on the appropriateness of a collective response to a security threat or conflict must be answered. What tasks should be included in the collective security response and who should implement that? What should be the role of the individual countries - either at the centre or at the periphery - in such policy decisions? Should the various regional bodies be given any role in such collective endeavor? Unless some clear answers to such questions are found the possibility of consistent and uniform application of the principles of collective security would remain far-fetched.

Bias for Military Solutions?

Despite rather clear cut recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach to international security, there seems to be a continuing bias for military solutions. There is no doubt that the traditional idea of avoiding war or controlling conflict remains valid. But the UN with its overwhelming stress on peacekeeping seems to have overstretched. One is not so sure if the very presence of UN forces would not have prevented the

15. Brian Urquhart, *op.cit.*, p.316.

parties pursue political and other non-military resolutions. Too much of stress on the need to deploy forces would represent a failure of alternative responses to dispute settlement. On the other hand, this also in a way tends to justify continued wasteful spending on arms. Consider that the global spending on arms still continues to be at the level of one trillion dollars a year, and that most of the instabilities in various regions of the world are still fueled to a considerable extent by the flow of arms in which the five permanent members are the largest participants as suppliers.

Globally Shared Stakes

If the UN has to truly respond to the security challenges of the post-Cold War era, it has to substantially expand its security role beyond the hard-core military instruments. As evident from the discussion in the previous section the international security agenda in the post-Cold War era will be significantly different from the one witnessed during the period since 1945. The root of many of the formidable problems facing the world community lies in the socio-economic field. Every aspect of today's international security threats - whether it is deepening internal political crises and instabilities in the vast majority of the periphery countries, disintegration of the state system in former communist societies, continuing inter and intra-state ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border population movements, or inter-state tensions and hostilities related to resource sharing - in the ultimate analysis have an economic dimension. The challenge is not so much the fact of weakening of the periphery and strengthening of the centre, as the shared stake of both in reducing the gap between the two. The biggest challenge from this perspective of course comes from the economic sector. The success of the international community to collectively manage global economic problems would in great measure contribute to the solution of most other problems - political, societal and environmental - as discussed earlier.

Environmental issues will certainly grow in proportions, and associated with this, there will be growing incidence of natural disasters needing

humanitarian intervention of a scale beyond the capacity of the countries concerned. Here it may be worthwhile to examine the possibility of mobilizing a permanent task force at the UN auspices which may bridge the gap in the existing system. It is well-known that the aid extended to victims of 1991 cyclones in Bangladesh by the US marines was possible only because the fleet was on its way back from the Gulf War. There is little chance of reappearance of such coincidence in a future disaster of the similar type, here or elsewhere, hence the rationale for improving upon the adequacy of the existing possibilities.

Rule of International Law

In the ultimate analysis the best way to ensure a secure, stable and conflict-free international order is the establishment of a rule of international law. The existing international legal order is rich enough, but the machinery to enforce the same is far from effective. States have been violating international laws with impunity in the face of the International Court of Justice which needs to be strengthened in terms of both enforcing and monitoring capability. The question here is whether the international community as an invariable part of its concern for strengthening the security role of the UN could also be committed to develop an international legal system that would ensure the consistent, non-parochial and transparent enforcement of the rules and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. The United Nations is a mosaic of sovereign states and governments, what it can achieve is defined by the collective wisdom, will and commitment of its member states and governments. The fact that it is an institution of sovereign governments also implies that any major change in it, in order to be successful, should be gradual rather than radical. The global trend towards the triumph of democracy and its values and institutions must be the source of inspiration for true democratization of this world body. Unless the opportunities provided by the post-Cold War transformations are matched by the commitment to introduce truly democratic morals and politics in the UN body, these new found opportunities would simply be 'forgotten again' the way Tocqueville noted.