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## **CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER: POLITICO STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THIRD WORLD**

### INTRODUCTION

The world is in a phase of unprecedented transition. Eastern Europe is undergoing a process of dramatic transformation with far-reaching consequences. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* have already transformed the rigid stereo-type Soviet society into a pluralistic and liberalized one. The *new political thinking* has dramatically changed both Soviet image abroad and its self-image. By now, Gorbachev has apparently shifted his emphasis from 'reforming the system' to 'replacing the old system with a new one'. The process of reform in the Soviet Union—the lone stabilizing factor in East European alliance—has spread over other East European countries in 1989 with a hurricane speed. In the past, East European attempts to introduce radical reforms were suppressed by the use of force by the Soviet Union. More important, the threat of Soviet intervention under the Brezhnev doctrine precluded any attempt of fundamental reforms in East European societies. Entangled with *perestroika* and *glasnost* at home, Mikhail Gorbachev became the first Soviet leader to demonstrate a distinct unwillingness to intervene in East European countries, while encouraging reforms

similar to those of his own. It gave the final boost to East European upheavals. Gorbachav has stood by while old order has collapsed in Eastern Europe. With the overthrow of Ceausescu regime in Rumania, the last domino of 'old regime' in Eastern Europe fell. East European revolutions have been followed by free elections and the establishment of democratic governments in all the countries of the region. In a historic move, two German states have reunited to form a single political entity. All other countries of the region have new governments with new manifestos. Certain questions, however, still remain to be answered. Old system of economic management and the political order have been discarded. While Gorbachev and his East European counterparts have a vision of the future, their concrete plans remain less clear. More important, they have unleashed certain forces in their societies whose intentions, strength as well as future pattern of behaviour remain unpredictable. The most crucial question : where the East European societies are moving towards would continue to remain unanswered for some time to come. Despite numerous uncertainties, one thing seems to be clear : life in East Europe and its role in international arena would never be the same again.

The stereo-type post-War image of East-West relations has radically changed. With the emergence of Gorbachev phenomenon and consequential changes, intra-alliance relations both in the East and the West and inter-state relations in the North in general have entered a distinctly fluid phase. Second Cold War has given way to a new period of East-West *detente* with near impossibility of the revival of cold war in the foreseeable future. More important, the super powers are going beyond *detente* to establish a rather traditional state-to-state relations. The very dichotomy between the East and the West is loosing relevance to



the present context. Soviet influence in Eastern Europe has reached its lowest ebb. The Soviet Union is neither willing nor capable of playing the role in East European affairs as it did during the period since World War II. Such a Soviet role is also unfeasible in view of the rising tide of nationalism in Eastern Europe. Lack of visible Soviet threat to the West Europe, latter's self-assertion as expressed in the "Single European Act" of EEC coupled with the decreased economic strength of the US *vis-a-vis* West Europe and Japan are quietly undermining US influence in the West Europe. In this backdrop, question is being raised about the future of bipolar structure of international relations as well as the two politico-military blocs. In the same realm, certain circles are reviving the relevance of a nineteenth-century balance of power game to the present context. Others in the US are dreaming of an international order that would be dominated by a single power—the United States. Some in the South view the recent changes as creating favourable conditions for the establishment of a just and peaceful international order based on shared interest and mutual consensus. Others, however, are fearing that the World could be turned into a condominium of the North where the Third World would even be more severely squeezed. In the circumstances, what sort of international order is in the offing remains to be the most crucial question to be answered.

International order that was shaped following World War II had consistently been dominated by the two super powers and their politico-military and economic blocs. Therefore, such a process of dramatic change both within and between the two power blocs is certain to have decisive impact on the emerging pattern of international order.

Of particular interest to us, however, is the question how these changes would affect the Third



World countries? In this regard, the questions which loom large are : where and how would the Third World suit to the international order that is likely to emerge? What would be the nature of triangular relationship among the East, West and the South? Would the prospects for peace and prosperity in the North benefit the South? The Third World is beset with numerous regional conflicts. While most of them are rooted in the Third World itself some are certainly the by-product of super and great power rivalry. Even those conflicts, for the outbreak of which great powers can not be held responsible, have often been complicated by their competitive involvement. In certain cases, the momentum of the conflicts in its most perilous form were sustained only thanks to super power involvement. Now the question is : How would the changes in East-West relations influence the outcome of numerous regional conflicts in the Third World ? Post-independent socio-economic and politico-cultural development of Third World countries has been characterized by numerous asymmetries, contradictions and resultant social conflicts. They were rooted in both colonial past as well as the post-colonial dynamics of socio-economic development. However, competing models of socio-economic and political development from both the power blocs accompanied by political support and economic and military assistance certainly played a significant role in the outbreak and the sustenance of intra-state conflicts in the Third World. Since the respective power blocs are minimizing their competition on this score, it becomes pertinent to ask how such changes would affect the intra-state conflict scenario in the Third World ?

The present paper is an attempt to answer some of these questions. Part I would deal with the emerging pattern of international order and place of the Third



World in it. Part II is an attempt to analyze the impact of recent changes on regional conflicts in the Third World, while, part III is designed to deal with the intra-state conflicts in the region.

## I. CHANGING PATTERN OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND THE THIRD WORLD

Post-War international order has been consistently dominated by the two super powers and their politico-military and economic blocs. By virtue of their economic and military strength, scientific and technological potentials, and politico-diplomatic influence, they, at times, acted as the virtual arbiter of global developments. Their relations, however, have been characterized by fierce competition and rivalry interspersed by periods of constructive dialogue, reconciliation, accommodation and certain degree of cooperation.

While from the very beginning, correlation of forces in all respects have overwhelmingly been in favour of the West, the situation was being gradually changed in favour of the East. The super powers, it appeared, were moving towards parity. As a matter of fact, by mid-1970s, a rough parity in terms of military strength between the two super powers came into being. The enormous gap between the two economies that existed following World War II has been substantially bridged. In the Third World, the Soviet Union posed a real challenge to the Western, particularly the US interests. Thus, in a world order based on bi-polarity consisting of two super powers, each was trying to dominate the world. Global developments often have been viewed by them in terms of a zero-sum game. While the US and her allies had an edge over the Soviet bloc countries, the power of one bloc in international arena could be balanced by that of the other.

Apparently rigid bi-polarity had also its own limitations and was challenged by a number of relatively autonomous actors in international arena. First among them was the establishment and strengthening of the Non-aligned movement which united under its fold more and more nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America desiring to keep themselves independent of super power conflict. Second is the growing assertion of autonomy among a number of countries in both parts of Europe, Japan, China and others. Third is the emergence of a large number of authoritative regional and international organizations which significantly influenced major international developments formulating and executing their own policies in a quasi-autonomous fashion. As a matter of fact, one of the characteristic features of contemporary international relations is that there exist countless channels of interaction spread all over the world through which international relations of large as well as small powers keep on influencing each other almost all the time.<sup>1</sup>

In the bi-polar world, while the Third World countries are often squeezed by both super power conflict and domination, they are also left with sufficient room for maneuverability. Even during the heydays of First Cold War, despite enormous US pressure, the vast majority of Third World countries remained out of US-sponsored military blocs while most of them were economically dependent on the West and were following capitalist model of development. Many of the Third World countries that joined super power military blocs, did so more due to either vulnerability of the regime to indigenous opposition or conflict with the neighbours than super

1. S. P. Varma, *International System and the Third World : A Study in Changing Perspectives*. (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988), p. vi.



power pressure. Pakistan's participation in US-sponsored military blocs could be cited as a classic example.

As perceived by the Third World countries, Post-War history witnessed two distinct periods of offensive directed at them by the super powers. During the 1950s and 1960s, the interests of the US and its colonialist allies came to a direct collusion with that of the Third World primarily due to former's abrasive foreign policy, suppression of national liberation movements in a number of countries and a series of military interventions. While mobilizing the militancy of nationalism directed against the West in the Non-aligned movement, the UN and other international forums the Third World could count on Soviet support. International politics around issues like Palestine, Vietnam and apartheid are cases in point. As a matter of fact, Soviet support also included economic and military assistance. During the 1970s, when the US was suffering from so-called Vietnam syndrome and withdrawing from a number of its positions, the Soviet Union embarked upon a policy of exporting revolution which finally made her bogged down in a protracted war in Afghanistan. In a historical turnabout, the militancy of Third World nationalism was directed more against the Soviet Union than the West. On issues, like Afghanistan, The Third world collaborated with the US without any hesitation. In both the cases, super powers succumbed to Third World demands. Thus, in the world of all-embracing confrontation between the two super powers, Third World countries have had the option of counter-balancing aggression or intimidation on the part of one of the super powers by the clout of the other. In certain cases, it was even possible to defy both the super powers with certain degree of impunity. Iran under Khomeini is a striking example.

Even in economic terms, where Western domination has consistently been overwhelming, the existence of the other bloc left the Third World with substantial bargaining capability. Aswan, Bhilai and Bakaro may be more symbolic than substantial, nonetheless, they could be used as bargaining chips *vis-a-vis* the West and always reminded Third World's other option.

It is necessary to ascertain what sort of changes are likely to take place in the current international order before going to the question on how they would effect the Third World.

In view of the recent socio-economic and politico-ideological crisis suffered by the Soviet Union, ensuing process of the dissolution of its alliance system and the absence of any power that could pose the US an all-pervasive challenge as done by the Soviet Union, certain circles on both sides of the Atlantic are asserting that the US would remain the only world power.<sup>2</sup> For a considerable part of American conservatives it is rather an ambition nourished for long. In practice as well, the US is pursuing its foreign policy objectives with a high hand. Its dealings with Libya and Panama are just two illustrated examples to this. While Iraqi occupation and annexation of Kuwait provided the US with a *casus belli* that is justified in the eyes of the larger section of international community, the pattern of behaviour as displayed by the US has unmistakably assumed the nature of that of an international gendarme determined to establish its own order in the region. Moral aspects of US policy become meaningless when judged in the backdrop of sustained US support to Israel in its continued occupation of Arab lands.

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2. See, *The Economist*. (February 24, 1990), pp. 11-12.



Politico-strategic and economic realities of the present day world and the current trends in these fields, however, to the disappointment of US ambitions, suggest that the bi-polarity is rather being replaced with multi-polarity. While the Soviet Union is a super power primarily in military terms, the US is already, or about to be the same in the foreseeable future. The US has lost its position as the economic giant that dominated and structured the world economy of the post-War period. Its share in the world economy has significantly dropped. From world's main creditor it has turned to be the largest debtor.

In the contemporary world, aggregate economic strength is increasingly becoming the determinant of national status of a state. As long as the world remains in a state of equilibrium that permits only local wars and only in out-of-the-way arenas, super power status is likely to be defined more by commercial and monetary strength than military might. In the changed context, Japan and Germany have already risen to world-power status. With its economic muscle flexing, Japan is further squeezing the United States. United Germany is likely to surpass the US as world's largest exporter. According to one estimate, in 1988, two German states exported goods and services worth US \$ 334.1 billion as against the US export of US \$ 321.6 billion.<sup>3</sup> According to the same estimate, trade surplus of Japan and the two German states combined in 1988 was US \$ 77.5 billion and US \$ 73.9 billion respectively as against a US deficit of US \$ 138 billion.<sup>4</sup> The unification of Western Europe as envisaged by the EEC's plan for the 1992 would further dilute US economic clout at the global level. The Soviet Union is almost certain to remain a significant economic power. Its investment in allies in

3. *Newsweek*. (February 26, 1990), p. 8.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the Eastern Europe and the Third World has been an enormous economic burden which reached the peak of between \$ 38.72 billion and \$ 47.68 billion in 1981.<sup>5</sup> In the past, great powers, following the period they got rid of overseas burden, witnessed tremendous economic resurgence. The Soviet Union as well may undergo similar experiences. In any scenario, the US is likely to face formidable economic challenges from a number of sources.

Even in the field of security the situation is changing. Japan is quietly, though in a moderate and circumscribed fashion, emerging on a path of active security policy. West Europe as well is thriving for greater influence in the Western security system.<sup>6</sup> Another important factor, decreasing Soviet threat to Western Europe and Japan would further decrease their dependence on the US in terms of security. These factors would also undermine rationale for US arms build-up. If these factors are viewed against the economic reality of the world, the US ambition of being 'the only world power' would neither be desirable nor feasible.

The aggregate result of the above is that the world is gradually but steadily moving from bi-polarity to multi-polarity. It would be pertinent to mention here that such a trend predates recent changes in Eastern Europe and there should be a transitional period before the world becomes a genuinely multi-polar one.

Prospects for multi-polarity, first of all remind the international order that came into being following the

5. Charles Wolf J., Keith Crane, K. C. Yeh, Susan Anderson and Edmund Brunne, *The Cost and Benefits of the Soviet Empire, 1981-1983*. (The Rand Corporation, R-3419-NA, August 1986), p. 16.

6. Phill Williams, "US-Soviet Relations: Beyond the Cold War?" *International Affairs*. (volume 65, Number 2, 1989), p. 285.



Vienna settlement of 1815 and existed until 1939. During this period, the 'balance of power' remained the hallmark of European diplomacy. It "refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality"<sup>7</sup> Applied to a world of sovereign states, uncontrolled by effective supranational agencies, the concept assumes that through shifting alliances and countervailing pressures no one power or combination of powers will be allowed to grow so strong as to threaten the security of the rest.<sup>8</sup> In the circumstances, a number of great powers, almost equal in strength to each other, had tried to build up their strength, some times dominance, through shifting alliances.

If the past is taken as a guide to the understanding of the future, then the ensuing multi-polar structure of international order does not seem to be one that would serve better either the cause of world peace or that of the Third World than the bipolar one. The 'balance of power' designates a power equilibrium among states so that no one could be dominant. However, the truth of the matter is that the states are interested only in a balance which is in their favour. "There is no real security in being as strong as a potential enemy; there is security only in being a little stronger"<sup>9</sup>—such is the guideline according to which the states act. In pre-War Europe, each of the great powers made persistent attempts to shape a 'balance of power' that would be in its favour. As a consequence, the desired equilibrium among states has been subject to constant change, shifting alliance

7. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, (Alfred A Knof, 1955), p. 155.

8. N.D. Palmer and H. C. Perkins quoted in, J. C. Johari, *International Relations and Politics: Theoretical Perspective*, (Sterling Publishers, 1985) p. 226.

9. John Spykman, quoted in, *Ibid.*, p. 231.

and power relationships—in short, to disequilibrium. In such a fluid power configuration, neither the balance of power nor the balance of interests was maintained. Due to the lack of authority and clear responsibility for the maintenance of peace, no mechanism of crisis management and conflict resolution could remain effectively operative.

Consequently, the recurrence of a number of crises in the early years of the twentieth century had led to the First World War and a similar phenomenon had led to the Second World War. However, during post-World War II period, crises were no more so dangerous. They could either be resolved locally or kept simmering. While some of the analysts view the lack of war between and among the great powers as a result of nuclear deterrence or balance of terror, such authoritative specialists on international relations like, Kenneth Waltz and Raymond Aron view it as an outcome of bi-polarity. According to Waltz, nuclear capabilities had merely reinforced a situation that would have existed in their absence as well.<sup>10</sup> Whether the bi-polarity or the balance of terror thwarted the Third World War is a debatable question, but, the truth is that despite the recurrence of numerous conflicts and crises in the bi-polar world, universal peace could be preserved. On the other hand, in the multi-polar world two world wars took place just within three decades. While prospects for multi-polarity are in the horizon, such a comparison makes even an ardent supporter of ending super power domination skeptic about the future world order.

It is not to argue that the ensuing world order would be as unstable as the one that existed during the first half of the century. While such fear would conti-

10. See, S. P. Varma, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.



nue to persist for some time to come, there would also be enough reasons to expect that such an international order could be evolved that would be both multi-polar and manageable. First of all, great powers have significantly gained in experience and maturity. They must have learned that playing the old game of 'balance of power' could very well end with a nuclear catastrophe. It would compel them to set in quest of new rules of the game. In this regard, a mechanism of crisis management and conflict resolution that would withstand the test of time must be at the top of the agenda. This is not an impossible task. The pursuit of self-interest by the great powers and its means have already become significantly sophisticated, while the interests themselves much more enlightened. The national boundaries are becoming less and less important in defining economic i.e. the most vital interest of the states. Even the concept of nation state itself is becoming obsolete in the context of the developed world. EEC's plan for 1992 alone could serve as a powerful argument in favour of such an assumption. The rest of the developed world would be compelled to respond to the changes within the EEC and formulate their policy accordingly. Reasons are not economic alone. Global strategic scenario has significantly changed. The balance of terror is certain to persist in the foreseeable future making war among developed countries an extremely dangerous undertaking. Thus, both economic and strategic reality of the contemporary world would create almost insurmountable pressures on the great powers to avoid the danger of war between and among themselves and maintain a level of mutual understanding that would let them mitigate their conflicting interests.

The Third World came into being and developed in the bipolar world, where two opposite camps were

challenging each other in politico-strategic, economic as well as ideological spheres. Super power conflict while posing a challenge to the Third World, also provided the latter with an opportunity. The challenging task was to keep the region away from super power conflict and domination by either of them. In this regard, they could take the advantages offered by the conflict itself. All common forums of the Third World, the Non-aligned movement and the Group of 77 in particular, were created and their strategies were formulated with these objectives in mind. Recent changes in Eastern Europe and the consequential changes in the international system upset most of Third World calculations, nonetheless, it appears to be quite unprepared to adjust to the changed situation.

The Soviet Union is undergoing a deep crisis which encompasses every spheres of its life. Its alliance system in Eastern Europe has virtually collapsed. It has been significantly weakened and has definitely lost its will to challenge the West. Democratization of the polity and the liberalization of the economy have also eroded the very rationale for confrontation with the US. On the other hand, the West has consolidated its position and re-established its dominance over the international system. As a consequence, the Third World has lost the Soviet card which often played vital role in its dealings with the West. Its bargaining capability *vis-a-vis* the West, particularly on economic issues, has decreased significantly. The once mighty voice of the Third World—the Non-aligned movement—is increasingly fading away. The movement is gradually losing its vitality. Similarly, the Group of 77 and its vital agenda—the New International Economic Order—are making no headway. Even during the 1970s, the West displayed a significant degree of preparedness to



make compromise on North-South issues. Since the West has consolidated its position at home and over world economy, it is more and more advocating the old values of free trade while offering little concession to the Third World. As viewed from the Western capitals, there is no incentive for making compromise with the South and no disincentive for not doing the same. The intransigence of the developed countries *vis-a-vis* most of the north-south issues is getting increasingly firm. It is difficult to foresee any change for the better in the near future.

In the backdrop of recent changes in Eastern Europe, the Third World is posed with even a more dangerous threat. Gorbachev, since his emergence to power, has been tirelessly advocating common cause, common values, common interests and so on with the West. His ideas are being interpreted in the West and elsewhere as being Western. The Soviets cautiously avoid challenging such interpretations. Many even regard Gorbachev as being more American than the Americans themselves. Of particular importance is his determination to free foreign policy and international economic relations from class struggle. Initially, it was believed that under Gorbachev economic rationalism would prevail over politics. He is, however, going far beyond that. In quest of common causes, common values and common interests with the West, he has firmly emerged on a path of freeing Soviet foreign policy from ideology. In this regard, his successes are obvious. The Soviet Union has already lost its identity as a countervailing power *vis-a-vis* the US in international affairs. Soviet economy is more complementary to those of the major Western countries than competitive. In the circumstances, Soviet economy could be increasingly linked with those of the West or at least the Soviet Union could enter into arrangements which once the Soviets

themselves characterized as being imperialistic. If ideological barriers are removed then history, racial identity, religion, and most important, economic necessity would work in favour of close integration of Soviet and other East European societies into the West. Such a scenario, thus, raises the fear of 'collective new colonialism' with participation of all the major economic powers leaving the Third World countries with little room for manoeuvrability. Such a phenomenon is clearly appearing at the horizon.

As it was indicated, the Third World is miserably failing in keeping pace with the dynamic changes in international arena. Its manoeuvrability is circumscribed not only by the changes in international arena, but also by its internal weaknesses. Economically, the Third World remains as vulnerable to the West as ever. After so much talks about self-reliance for so many decades, the vast majority of the countries are becoming more and more dependent on the West. Those Third World countries who are richer or are faring well in the contemporary international economic relations, are increasingly deserting the common cause of the region. Most of the organizations of regional co-operation in the Third World are facing almost insurmountable difficulties. Nothing is going to be changed easily or within a short time. In the circumstances, the Third World countries, particularly the poorer ones, are unlikely to be benefited from the ensuing changes in the international system, while risk of being squeezed further would persist.

## II. THIRD WORLD CONFLICT SCENARIO

From the very onset of de-colonization, the Third World was beset with numerous conflicts. These were rooted primarily in the historical past as well as the dynamics of post-colonial socio-economic and politico-



cultural transformation of the region. Problems were compounded in the process of interaction with the outside world. The bi-polar world order characterized by fierce rivalry between the two super powers and their respective blocs had accelerating impacts on most, if not all, of these conflicts. Viewing international developments in terms of a *zero-sum-game*, the super powers have almost invariably involved themselves competitively in most of the regional conflicts in the Third World. In certain cases, the momentum of regional conflicts—in its most perilous forms—were sustained largely due to the competitive involvement of the super powers. At times, regional conflicts in the Third World appeared to be the by-products of East-West Cold War. However, in certain cases, crises were defused, wars were stopped, primarily thanks to super power efforts. Therefore, it is hard to overestimate the implications of any change in US-Soviet relations—an environment of cold war or *detente* between them—for regional conflicts. In the past, cold war vitiated the atmosphere in the Third World and gave impetus to regional conflicts, while *detente* created favourable conditions for their peaceful settlement. Competitive involvement of the super powers in numerous regional conflicts in the Third World has been one of the major reasons for the outbreak and the sustenance of the Second Cold War. Therefore, it is only natural that the *detente* would influence the conflict scenario in the Third World.

The nature of such influence was, however, determined by the very nature of the second *detente* itself. While the first *detente* of the 1970s was premised on the limited basis of settling the issue of strategic stability, the second *detente* transcends the issue. It includes such issues as regional conflicts, which are critical to peace and security for the Third

World. On the part of the super powers, there were obvious compulsions. Conflict scenario in the Third World and super power involvement in it have their own dynamics and changing perspectives. While during the First Cold War, predominant fear was that the Third World countries could be dragged into conflicts as the great powers maneuvered in pursuit of their global interests. The situation has just reversed. During the Second Cold War, predominant concern of the super powers—particularly that of the Soviet Union—has been that they could be entangled in conflicts in distant places with insignificant interests of their own. Such a situation compelled the super powers to search for a code of conduct that would regulate their competitive involvement in Third World conflicts.

The first *detente* took place when the US was suffering from Vietnam syndrome and was withdrawing from a number of its Third World positions, while the Soviet Union was in the offensive. Second *detenete*, however, came at a time when the latter suffering from a severe crisis was withdrawing from most of its overseas positions, while the former regained much of its lost confidence. The emergence of Gorbachev phenomenon and consequential changes in the Soviet Union and other East European societies coupled with the collapse of Soviet alliance system virtually eroded the super power status of the Soviet Union. It was rendered incapable of maintaining its commitments to Third World allies. Democratization of the polity and the liberalization of the economy have also eroded the very rationale for confrontation with the US. The demise of Cold War coupled with the lack of any threat on the part of the Soviet Union to Western positions in the Third World allowed the US and its allies to withdraw much of their commitments from the region. As viewed by the West, Third World



conflicts were no more dangerous to universal peace or threatening to its vital interests. Thus, the super powers were going beyond *detente* to find convergence of interests at the global level. In the circumstances, super and great powers were displaying a distinct unwillingness to involve themselves competitively in the regional conflicts. Instead, they were employing collective efforts with a view to resolving regional conflicts *albeit* with varying degree of sincerity and mixed success. Meanwhile, the management of such conflicts was gradually being left more to the regional actors.

While it is often argued that the recent changes in Third World conflict scenario are the outcome of improved relations between the two power blocs, a point conspicuously missed is that they are also the outcome of the changes in the co-relation of forces in international arena. A combination of the two made it possible to achieve substantial progress in resolving Afghan and Kampuchea conflicts. Soviet troops from Afghanistan were withdrawn by February 1989 as it was envisaged by the 'Geneva Accord'.<sup>11</sup> It has minimized competitive involvement of the super powers in the conflict, though, the civil war between the present regime and the Mujahedins rages, *albeit*, with declining intensity.

Latest situation in Kampuchea may be viewed as the outcome of a number of developments—decisive rethinking on the part of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev about the nature of its commitments to the Third World, East-West *detente* and Sino-Soviet *rapprochement*. On 26 September, 1989 the last 26,000 men of a Vietnamese army that was once

11. See, A. K. M. Abdus Sabur, *Post-Brezhnev Soviet Policy towards the Third World*. (BIISS Papers, No. 8, 1988), pp. 55-56.

200,000 strong have left Kampuchea as it was demanded by the international community—the West, China and the Asean in particular. The withdrawal took place pending the most important issue of the conflict : who is to rule Kampuchea ?

Along with Afghanistan, the situation in Kampuchea once again vividly demonstrated that the withdrawal of foreign troops from a country after a prolonged presence does not necessarily bring peace. It is particularly true, when withdrawal is done pending the settlement of the conflict over the appropriate model of socio-economic development and the corresponding political order. When foreign troops leave behind the government they have installed or sustained in power, for the parties opposed to the invasion *casus belli* remains as vivid as ever. In the circumstances, internal parties continue their struggle for power, while for the external parties, it becomes difficult to keep away from the conflict they were once involved in. Therefore, the withdrawal of foreign troops from a country by itself is not a settlement to the conflict, while it may create favourable conditions for such a settlement.

The Iran-Iraq War presents a different category of regional conflicts from the point of view of external inputs in regional conflicts, specially from the super powers. It was initiated and fought almost independent of the super powers, excepting US involvement toward the end. The cease-fire and the dramatic resolution of the conflict following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as well were the outcome of domestic compulsions of the parties concerned. Nonetheless, international situation has, in one way or the other, influenced the shaping of both the events.

In contrast to Afghanistan and Kampuchea, Arab-Israeli conflict is getting more and more complicated.



Both peace and justice remain a distant dream. Reasons are more or less clear. With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, cor-relation of forces both in the regional as well as global context is overwhelmingly against those who are struggling for a just and peaceful solution to the conflict. While there is a deep underlying psychological drive for Arab unity at the grass-root level, Arab regimes are sharply divided among themselves. Often intra-Arab feuds overshadow Arab-Israeli conflict. Neither any Arab regime nor a group of them have a combination of will and capability that is necessary to bring Israel to the negotiation table. To this was added the withdrawal of Soviet commitment from the Palestinian cause. On the other hand, the US remains as committed to Israel as ever. All these have sustained Israeli intransigence on Palestinian issue. Faced with *Intifada*—the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza strip—and the declaration of an independent Palestinian state by PLO leader Yasser Arafat, Israel has responded by strengthening the coercive apparatus of the state. In the fourth year of intifada, no sign of Israel's compromise or flexibility on the issue is visible. In the circumstances, the conflict remains as alive as ever.

Another important development among regions of the globe is the tripartite agreement on Namibian independence signed between South Africa, Angola and Cuba. The agreement, among others, envisages the cessation of hostilities between SWAPO and South Africa, withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia and free election in Namibia supervised by the UN to decide the future of the country. The agreement also envisages the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.<sup>12</sup> The Agreement and the subse-

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12. Pauline H. Baker, "The American Challenges in Southern Africa", *Current History* (May 1989), pp. 210-211.

quent developments opened a new chapter in the history of Namibia. Free elections in Namibia were held in the country in November 1989 which led to the victory of the South West Africa Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) and Sam Njoma became the first elected president of the country.

South Africa is as well moving in a positive direction. After 26-years, ANC leader Nelson Mandela is released from prison. It would certainly open prospects for a negotiated settlement of the conflict leading to the establishment of majority rule in the country. Recent developments in South Africa, fratricidal warfare in particular, are, however, indicative of the fact that country's way to freedom is likely to be a painful one.

To sum up, radical changes at the global level have had only limited positive impact on the conflict scenario in the Third World. While the resolution of some regional conflicts was apparently facilitated, others continue to persist. The withdrawal of the competitive involvement of great powers has reduced the external inputs from the conflicts which have only partly been responsible for their outbreak or sustenance. The complex web of factors that continue to bedevil inter-state relations in the Third World is rooted within : historical antagonism, irredentism, undefined land and maritime boundaries, cross-border affiliation of ethno-linguistic and religious groups, conflict of economic interests, sharing of common water resources, and above all a turbulent process of nation building accompanied by numerous intra-state conflicts and their cross-border implications. The Third World, therefore, remains an area of recurrent conflicts and endemic crises.

Another important phenomenon, in this regard, is that certain Third World regions as well as regional



conflicts are assuming varying degrees of autonomy. The Third World regions, however, appear to be badly prepared to shoulder such a responsibility. It is primarily due to the fact that such a situation often benefits the so-called regional powers to the detriment of their smaller neighbours. Once the super and great powers demonstrated a distinct unwillingness to be involved in regional feuds, some regional powers found themselves in a position of maintaining an independence of will and capacity which appeared to be singularly important. This, in certain instances, served as uncontrollable temptation for emerging as regional hegemon. Some of the regional powers, while exploiting the opportunities offered by super power withdrawal remained cautious about possible repercussions on the part of the great powers. Others, however, tended to remain insensitive to the interests of and response from the great powers. In this regard, India in South Asia and Iraq in the Gulf are two different cases in point, a brief analysis of which would be helpful in further explaining the phenomenon.

During the entire post-independent period smaller South Asian countries either directly or indirectly welcomed external great power involvement in the region with a view to counterbalancing otherwise unchallenged might of India. On the other hand, India's policy was to keep the great powers—friends and adversaries alike—out of intra-regional affairs, so that it could exert its power and influence to bear upon the countries of the region.

In the circumstances, with the withdrawal of super and great power competitive involvement from South Asia a vacuum was created, setting the stage for India to fulfill its objectives envisaged in the India Doctrine and to emerge as the self-appointed custodian of peace and stability in the region.

Indian policy towards the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka and the stationing of IPKF in that country under a controversial treaty, its intervention in the Maldives to suppress an attempted *coup* and the deadlock in its relations with Nepal were only the most illustrated manifestation of this policy. In this regard, however, India all along remained quite sensitive to the interests of extra-regional great powers who mattered in regional politics. The great powers as well on their part have recognised, either implicitly or explicitly, India's role as the regional hegemon in South Asia.

However, India's experience is not one of encouraging for the actual or potential hegemons in the Third World. The reasons are primarily of domestic and regional nature. Enormous costs incurred by India in terms of material and human resources to sustain Sri Lankan adventure, unhappy experience of deadlock in its relations with Nepal have brought, even during Rajiv Gandhi's rule, a change in Indian mind. The crisis in Kashmir, while deteriorated Indo-Pak relations, also vividly demonstrated the need for shifting emphasis from foreign adventures to domestic politics. Already under V.P. Singh, Indian regional posture was undergoing a process of change. The withdrawal of IPKF from Sri Lanka, a comparatively conciliatory approach towards Nepal and to a lesser extent towards Bangladesh were indicative of the new trend in Indian thinking. The crisis over Babri Mosque issue and subsequent developments, including the change of government, have reinvigorated the shift in Indian foreign policy away from foreign adventure to domestic problems. India, over recent years, is literally at war with itself. Any dramatic improvement in the domestic situation is unlikely and it would serve as a powerful restraint against foreign adventure.



The case of Iraq is the most striking example of a regional hegemon extremely insensitive to the interests of and unaware of the responses from the concerned great powers to its actions in the given region. By its occupation and annexation of Kuwait, Iraq has challenged the West, particularly the US, in an area which they have repeatedly declared to be of 'vital interest' to them and thus, provoked the largest Western military preparation since World War II. The eruption of Gulf crisis has painfully revealed the hollowness of strategic assumptions prevailing among certain academic circles that in the backdrop of the absence of Soviet threat, regional conflicts in the Third World no more could pose any serious threat either to the vital interests of the West or to peace. Future developments of events in the Gulf Crisis and more important, its outcome would significantly shape the behaviour pattern of indigenous hegemons as well as the external great powers in Third World regional conflicts.

The relative autonomy, that is being gained by the Third World regions by itself is obviously a positive phenomenon. The initial period may be difficult, even painful. It would take some time before both 'big' and 'small' Third World countries could come to realize that benefit from cooperation would far outweigh that from conflict. In the process, it is quite possible to evolve such a mechanism of crisis management and conflict resolution that would mitigate their diverse interests and facilitate the departure from conflict to cooperation. Enormous difficulties suffered by them and the gigantic tasks ahead would create tremendous pressure in favour of such a transformation.

### III. INTRA-STATE CONFLICT IN THE THIRD WORLD

The process of development in the Third World has always been difficult and in certain cases, even

painful. Colonial legacy left not only different classes, social groups, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities, but also social, political, economic and cultural institutions asymmetrically developed. In this backdrop, economic, administrative and political power in post-colonial societies has been concentrated in the hands of a few with the exclusion of the vast majority of the population. Representatives from those social, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions who fared better during the colonial rule formulated and executed development strategy of their respective countries in a way which preserved, and strengthened their vested interests. They usually preferred development strategies most of which have been successfully tested in the developed countries. Borrowed development models were complemented by foreign aids and experts, and along with them, donor's influence on development programmes. This created severe problems of adaptation and adjustment in the peculiar conditions of the newly-emerged countries. All these factors *en bloc* exacerbated widespread disparities in terms of socio-economic and politico-cultural development. In consequence, Third World countries, from the very beginning of their independence, were facing numerous internal cleavages involving a cross section of classes, social strata, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions. Such problems of primarily political nature, often assumed security dimension. A good number of countries have suffered from civil wars and secessionist movements and others are still suffering.

From the very onset of the process of decolonization, intra-state conflict in many parts of the Third World were being linked to the super power conflict. Internal parties attracting external support



favoured competing models of development which entailed not only alternative socio-economic systems but also alternative external alliance. In the process, both the super powers were entangled in a number of Third World conflicts. Recent changes in Eastern Europe, East-West relations and in international arena in general, make it imperative to look at how they would influence the intra-state conflict scenario in the Third World.

As a result of recent changes in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union in particular and the disastrous consequence suffered by most of the socialist-oriented countries in their nation-building efforts severely decreased the appeal of the socialist model in the Third World. At least for the time being, threat of intra-state conflict on whether to opt for a socialist or a capitalist model of development is non-existent. Left-over of similar conflicts are gradually being resolved. At present in the Third World, virtually one model is in the agenda—the capitalist one.

It has, however, given boost to another type of intra-state conflict over the appropriate model of political development—democracy *versus* dictatorship. Those social and political forces who stood for free democracy and free market economy were being opposed by two opposite camps. The communists branded them as the representatives of bourgeoisie—the worst class enemy. On the other hand, a significant part of the proponents of free market economy, often out of the fear of communism, supported anti-communist dictators. The situation has changed significantly. For understandable reasons, the communists and other leftist radicals are now shifting their focus of attention from the struggle for socialism to that for democratic freedom. Anti-communist supporters of dictatorship are gradually identifying themselves with the movement for demo-

cracy. In the circumstances, those social forces who champion free democracy and free market economy are increasingly coming to the forefront of Third World politics. Struggle for democracy is gaining momentum in a number of countries.

Super and great powers are more and more distancing themselves from intra-state conflict in the Third World. While the Soviet Union is either convincing their allies to undertake democratic reforms or even abandoning 'friendly dictators', the Americans are under tremendous compulsions to do the same. As a matter of fact, the US is already creating pressure on friendly repressive regimes to initiate democratic reforms. By now, most of the pro-Western dictators are concerned that they could be abandoned by their great patron. Recent changes in Eastern Europe, East-West relations and consequential changes in socialist-oriented countries rendered it virtually impossible for the United States to support coercive measures against democratic movements in the Third World without strong repercussions at home. Another important development in this regard is that with the fear of communism subsided, the US no more needs to patronize most of its friendly dictators. All these, however, do not mean a too bright future for democracy in the Third World. Both the newly-emerged democracies and the democratic movements would have to undergo severe tests before some of them could establish themselves as viable democracies. Recurrent crises in the Philippines and the fate of Benazir Bhutto are indicative of the fact that the forces of dictatorship are determined to defend their positions and regain the lost ones. In this regard, they would not hesitate to use all the weapons they have got at their arsenal—palace intrigue, sabotage, economic and political subversion, bribery and the use of brute force to name a few. In the circumstances, the



danger of violent changes would continue to loom large in the horizon.

Developmental efforts in the Third World often turn to be scramble for scarce resources among economically and politically dominating groups. That, among others, generates uneven economic, political and cultural development of different ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities and geographical regions within a single political entity. In other words, certain sub-national groups establish their domination in economic, politico-administrative and even cultural spheres depriving others of their legitimate share. It induces an insecurity amongst the people with cultural or religious/ethnic identity different from those of the ruling elite and give rise to the sense of 'internal colonialism'.<sup>13</sup> In the backdrop of uneven development over a period of time and the absence of a politically viable national alternative, the deprived sections of the society respond by seeking the proximate sources for mobilizing militancy and political pressure : i.e. the assertion of ethnic, linguistic, religious or regional identities.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, however, the growing polarization of society along sub-national lines so charged the political atmosphere that in a number of cases relatively affluent sections also began to assert their ethnic or religious identity and accordingly, mobilize militancy.

Quest for equal participation in the process of nation building by the deprived ethnic and/or linguis-

13. For details on internal colonialism see, Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*. (UPL, Dhaka, 1980), p. 6

14 See. Ponna Wigana Raja and Akmal Hussain, "The Crisis and Promise of South Asia", in Asgar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in South Asia*. (Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1987), pp. 22-23.

tic groups, religious communities etc., their quest for national/sub-national identity different from that of the dominating group/groups and in desperate cases, bid for secession turned to be the single-most dangerous threat to internal stability in Third World countries.

Another significant aspect of intra-state conflict over ethnic, linguistic and religious issues in the Third World is that it often assumes inter-state character with cross-border implications. Reasons are rooted both in the historical past as well as the current dynamics of inter-state relations in a given region. In certain cases, pre-colonial antagonism has been revived in the post-colonial period. On a number of occasions, state boundaries have been challenged in the form of irredentist claims. More than anything else, cross-border affiliation of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups creates almost irresistible temptation for the involvement in the intra-state cleavages in the neighbouring countries. As in the past, the ruling elites in many countries often tend to seek external bogey with a view to justifying repression and mobilizing people to defend the 'sovereignty and integrity', of the country.

Thus, intra-state conflicts in many parts of the Third World often transform into inter-state one, vitiate the political atmospheres and hinder the process of regional cooperation. Greater prudence is likely to be shown by the outside particularly, the super powers with respect to both intra-state and inter-state conflicts in the Third World. In recent years, however, developed countries are showing a distinct willingness to curb at least one political stream—revivalism, whether it is religious or nationalist. Such forces, now operating in all over the region, seek a reversal of history, a retreat into the past that they have mythified for political purposes.



Their aim is the eradication of the present in the hope that the future will more closely resemble the past. As viewed by some Western analysts, they are among the dangerous and disruptive forces.<sup>15</sup> It appears that both the power blocs seem to be in agreement that religious fundamentalism and nationalist revivalism should not be allowed to grow stronger. Nonetheless, such a stand is unlikely to effect their more pronounced policy of disengagement from the Third World conflicts. In the circumstances, numerous conflicts and the emerging process of regional cooperation in the Third World are left primarily to the regional actors who—as it was indicated earlier—remain far from being prepared to shoulder such a responsibility.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the recent changes in Eastern Europe and subsequent developments have already brought a series of radical changes in international system, the situation still remains fluid enough. It would remain difficult to make any definite conclusion before unfolding developments take a clear shape. Making an assessment of their implications for the Third World appears even more difficult in view of the complex and contradictory nature of intra-state and inter-state politics in the region. The situation would allow us make, at best, some tentative observations.

By now, what appears to be more or less clear is that the super and great powers have drastically reduced their competitive involvement in the Third World and are pursuing a policy of disengagement from regional conflicts. Answer to the questions why

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15. John Chipman, 'Regional Stability in the Developing World', *BISS Journal*. (Volume 11, Number 1, January 1990), p. 65.

and how these policies are being implemented and how the super and great powers are going to mitigate their conflicting interests following relative disengagement could serve as a key to understanding their implications.

As a source of raw materials and market for industrial products, the Third World remains as important to the developed countries as ever. Their disengagement is motivated by the fact that competitive involvement proved to be far more expensive than accommodation. It is being conducted at a time when the Soviet Union is significantly weakened and lost its will and capability to challenge the West. More important, the Soviet Union and its allies are increasingly divesting of their ideology. In the circumstances, the long desired super power withdrawal from the Third World would not be as beneficial to the region as a challenge to it.

Bipolar world left the Third world with significant room for maneuverability. It could take advantage of the contradictions between the two power blocs. At least for the time being, that advantage has gone. If the socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, transform into capitalist ones, the danger of the emergence of 'collective colonialism' with participation of all the major economic powers would be eminent.

Even the prospective benefits from super power withdrawal are being severely circumscribed by the inherent weaknesses of the Third World. Most of the countries of the region are politically fragile and economically vulnerable. A good number of them are dependent on the developed world for their mere survival. Relatively prosperous Third World countries are increasingly reluctant to identify themselves with the common cause. The region is beset with numerous



intra and inter-state conflicts. The situation has been further complicated by the emergence of relatively autonomous local hegemons. All these factors, while limiting Third World options, also would create tremendous pressure for mobilizing collective efforts to deal with the situation. The need of the time is unity among the countries of the region, strengthening of the process of South-South cooperation, reactivating the Non-aligned movement and the group of 77 with realistic programmes that would also reflect the legitimate aspirations of the developing countries. Third World, however, seems to remain less aware of the changing situation in international arena and the tasks ahead.