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## UN SYSTEM AND GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY : AN ASSESSMENT

Over four decades ago in 1945 the United Nations was founded by the victorious alliance to ensure global peace in order "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."<sup>1</sup> This conception of peace as can be elicited from the UN Charter contains two elements : (a) Maintenance of international peace and security through renunciation of the use of force except in defending collective interest,<sup>2</sup> and (b) International economic and social cooperation to create conditions of stability and wellbeing, necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations.<sup>3</sup> The Security Council with its five permanent members—Great Britain, China, France, USA and USSR was given the 'primary responsibility' of realizing the first element of peace. The second pillar of peace, i. e. welfare measures aimed at increasing the living standard of peoples, rehabilitation of war shattered economies and humanitarian relief were thought to be achieved through some 'international machinery'. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and a number of Specialized Agencies and Programmes were to be gradually engaged for the purpose.

Since the emergence of the United Nations, the world has undergone great changes—many of them unexpected and unforeseen. The

1. Preamble of the *UN Charter*.
2. Chapter VII, *UN Charter*.
3. Chapters IX-X, *UN Charter*.

international system with the evolving East-West antagonism, manifest in cold war, moved in a direction in direct opposition to assumptions and operational principles of the Charter. Decolonization proved to be a much speedier process than it was thought to be and its consequence—the impact of the Third World majority in UN membership was not foreseen. As a result, the United Nations has also changed—both in quantitative and qualitative terms—in order to adapt to these new realities. Now, crossing over four decades, the United Nations is facing a credibility problem. Although no global war broke out, over 125 inter-state wars have been fought since WWII. The Organisation presides over a world which, on the one hand, is already armed to its teeth and, on the other, where one fourth of mankind languishes in squalor and impoverishment. This awesome trend is accompanied by a marked policy preference of bilateralism over multilateralism by some major powers who, retrospectively, were the most active of the UN founders.

With disenchantment in 'some' quarters, the United Nations already celebrated its 40th anniversary with the theme "United Nations for a better World". This pious optimism was, perhaps, profusely expressed by the founders of the United Nations back in 1945 at San Francisco. Therefore, implicit in the above theme is an endeavour to reestablish what the UN stands for. This is dictated by the way the role of the UN is evaluated by different circles. To some, the UN is a failure ; to others, it is a 'safety valve' in crisis or a 'supplier' of security and economic assistance. This divergence in evaluation arises, perhaps, out of the divergence in perspectives. Most often, it is only the first of the twin elements of peace enshrined in the Charter that is taken into cognizance. Thus, peace and security are basically seen in terms of UN capacity to stop or prevent hostilities between nations. This approach looks at the problem of global peace and security only in its politico-military dimension. But such a view overlooks the actual and potential role of the UN in creating and fostering peace and security

through development and well-being of nations. For the latter, presently the UN invests more than 80 percent of its material and human resources. Over the last decades, the mandate of the UN, as reflected in the majority opinion of its membership, has been gradually enlarged from peace and security, as traditionally understood, to world development, thus underscoring a trend of the present world order—from preoccupation with military to socio-economic security. The UN efforts to resolve the North-South conflict bears testimony to this. Therefore, whether the UN could make the world any 'better' during the last years had to be judged from such a wider perspective of peace and security. The present paper is a brief attempt in this direction.

## I

The granting of the veto power to the permanent members of the Security Council meant that peace would be enforced as an agent of the great power concert. Given the necessary agreement (as then believed) among the big Five, there was little wrong with the enforcement provisions of the Charter. But immediately after the war, intense ideological rivalry set in motion a cold war that split the world into two rival politico-military power blocs. This was manifest in the frequent use of veto by the two super powers, especially by the USSR to block decisions in the Council. The first ever peace-enforcement in the Korean crisis of 1950 in absence of the USSR from the Council subsequently showed the impracticability of taking any action in direct opposition to a superpower. The 'Uniting for Peace' resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 3 November 1950 which empowered the Assembly to recommend collective enforcement measures also was not enthusiastically pursued for the same reason.

Due to East-West bipolarity, the chartered project of a UN military force for ensuring collective security never materialized. Many member states of the UN, then, taking refuge under Art. 51 which stipulates that, "nothing in the present Charter shall impair the in-

herent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security," entered into regional military alliances and bilateral security pacts by the mid-50s. All these security alliances and pacts indicate the system of "selective security", upholding the principles of "some for some", thus putting an end to collective security which embodies the ideal of "all for all".<sup>4</sup>

As a result, the Security Council (or, exceptionally, by the General Assembly) increasingly took to peace-keeping operations as a conflict-control device in the recurring tensions and conflicts between members of the UN. Peace-keeping is not specifically provided for in the UN Charter, it was a timely and effective innovation by Dag Hammarskjold for neutral intervention in the Third World conflicts, the site of almost all armed conflicts since WWII. Initially, most of these conflicts have local causes, but in the secondary stage, they tend to become proxy wars for the superpowers. The former Secretary General hoped that the peace-keeping force with consent of the belligerents would be a neutral, interpositionary defensive force, meant to limit the size and severity of conflicts by preventing them from entering the second stage—with the ultimate aim of their peaceful settlement.<sup>5</sup> Inis Claude observes, "The very features of the contemporary international system and situation that make collective security irrelevant bolster the relevance of peace-keeping".<sup>6</sup>

So far the UN undertook 15 peace-keeping operations in different parts of the world. There are at present, in addition to 2 Observer Missions, 3 peace-keeping forces—in Cyprus, on the Golan Heights

4. Cited in S. Mukherjee and I. Mukherjee, *International Organisation* (Calcutta : The World Press Pvt. Ltd., 1979) p. 90.
5. Debra L. Miller "Contributions of the UN to International Security Regimes" in Toby T. Gati (ed), *The US, the UN and the Management of Global Change* (New York and London; NY University Press, 1983), p. 139.
6. Inis Claude, "The Peace-Keeping Role of UN", in E.B. Tomkins (ed), *The UN in Perspective*, p. 54.

and in Southern Lebanon. These operations took several forms : (a) sometimes, a group of impartial observers, as in Korea for supervision of election, between India and Pakistan for supervision of cease fire and disengagement and in West Irian for its transition from Dutch to Indonesian rule; (b) sometimes, a body of trained military personnel used for truce supervision - UNTSO in Palestine; and (c) sometimes, a proper military force - large or small, as in Suez crisis, in Congo and in other conflict spots.

The East-West split and their spread in the Third World actually circumscribed, in geographical terms, the UN involvement in particular disputes, limiting it to those areas outside of either superpower's sphere of influence, or as Dag Hammarskjold described it "beyond the no-man's land of the cold war."<sup>7</sup> Thus, in conflicts involving the superpowers directly or indirectly, either the UN could play no role, or, some party to the conflict did not comply with UN directives. The Berlin and Cuban crises, disputes between Argentina and Uruguay, conflicts between Haiti and Dominican Republic, the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian crises, the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian border disputes, Chinese occupation of Tibet, US-Vietnam war, Angolan intervention in Zaire, Vietnamese and Soviet occupation of Kampuchea and Afghanistan respectively are some cases in point. In fact, of all the international crises and wars since 1946, the UN has "intervened" (i.e. called for a cease-fire and withdrawal) in less than 20 percent of the conflicts, and in only about a half of these has the UN met with "success"—namely, compliance by the parties soon after the UN directive.<sup>8</sup>

It is to be noted that the conflicts, in which an aligned country is the aggressor and a nonaligned state—the victim, have proven most amenable to constructive UN involvement and where UN peace-keeping forces have been most active in supervising withdrawal of forces

7. Inis Claude, *Swords into Plowshares* (New York : Random House, 4th ed. 1971) p. 313.

8. J.A. Finlayson and M.W. Zacher, "The United Nations and Collective Security : Retrospect and Prospect", in T.T. Gati (ed), *op. cit.* p. 164.

and preventing renewed fighting.<sup>9</sup> Examples are the Suez crisis (1956), the Congo crisis (1960), the Bizerte crisis between France and Tunisia (1961), the Cyprus crisis (1963-64), the Middle East wars (1967, 1973), the Portuguese intervention in Guinea (1970) and Israeli intervention in Southern Lebanon (1978). In most of these cases, allies of the aggressor nations feared that long continuation of the conflicts could push

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the nonaligned victims to the rival camp for necessary political and military support. Prof. Goodspeed has rightly remarked that the "fact remains that at present the maintenance of peace is essentially a problem of power relationship."<sup>10</sup>

In addition to peace-keeping operations, the role of the Secretary General in mediation and his good office efforts are important for realizing the political dimension of peace and security. The Secretary General and his designated representatives have used their good offices in the Iran-Iraq war, Indo-China war, Southern Africa, Cyprus, Afghanistan as well as in Falklands dispute. His effort sometimes met with only modest success, but at least it can keep the channels of communication open between the conflicting parties where none others are available. The Secretary General under Article 99 of the Charter may bring "any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security" to the Security Council's notice and he did so in a number of cases. This naturally raises the political cost of aggression.

Although the UN could not be very effective in solving the politico-military problems of today's world, because of power politics, one

9. *Ibid*, pp. 167-68.

10. S.S. Goodspeed, *The Nature and Functions of the International Organisation* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1972), p. 649.

important function it performs is norms-setting and its legitimization. Thus, since 1945 the General Assembly has adopted countless resolutions and declarations promoting norms of sovereignty, pacific settlement of disputes and condemning aggression.<sup>11</sup> This significantly inhibits the freedom of those contemplating the use of force. In like manner, the overwhelming increase in UN membership by newly-independent countries and their new force, the Non-aligned Movement, clearly puts a brake on great power freedom of action. The major powers now find it desirable to pursue policies that do not appear to be inimical to the Third World as a whole. Thus, the visible flexibility of the Soviet Union or the West in resolving respectively the Afghan or Namibian crises is the result of the collective pressure exerted on them by the non-aligned countries in the UN.

Another important function the UN performs in the areas of global peace and security is consciousness-raising. Debates, adoption of resolutions and the publicity sensitize the world community and their perceptions of global issues. The fact that many of the treaties are made outside the locus of the UN does not undermine its role, for it is the UN where almost all those issues were first raised, debated and the underlying value-consensus generated. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1963 Hotline Agreement, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1972 Biological Weapons Treaty are examples. The UN Disarmament Centre has been revived and expanded since 1978 and two Special Sessions on Disarmament have taken place with participation of both Governments and NGOs.<sup>12</sup> From the 1960s onward, the UN has prepared several Reports on the socio-economic consequences of armaments, which established a negative relationship between armaments and development. Since then, the Assembly discussions, Special sessions and UN-sponsored conferences suggested ways and means for arresting the dangerously-escalating arms race — both conventional and nuclear.

11. Debra L. Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 136.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-37.

Finally, in averting threats to an all-out war and easing global tensions, what the UN contributes best is through providing a regular meeting place for the adversaries. Although critics claim that the view of General Assembly as a 'global town meeting' proved inaccurate, but in a conflict and mistrust-ridden world, the UN at least keeps nations talking and provides avenues for working together to find out multilateral solution to global issues.

## II

Let us now turn to the second pillar of peace, that is, providing general welfare measures to create "conditions of stability and well-being" in the member states. It may be mentioned that by 1945 the social sciences in Europe and America identified some relationships between socio-economic variables and the outbreak of war. The studies were limited only within the Eurocentric cultural bounds.<sup>13</sup> Those findings coupled with the shattered economies of Europe during the War found reflection in the Charter for "international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character."<sup>14</sup> For the purpose, the UN emphasis, then, was on agreed inter-governmental cooperation, rather than on a centralized management of the post-war economic order.

With such a perspective, the UN initial activities were focused upon providing much-needed humanitarian and material help for reconstruction of socio-economic infrastructure of the war-shattered member states of Europe. Then gradually, the UN system took attempt to meet the most pressing needs of the ever increasing number of developing countries who were joining the world body as a result of the decolonization process. At this stage, the concept of 'general welfare' was subdivided into two distinct areas: (a) the normative activities concerning decolonization, human rights and racial discrimination with universal application; and (b) the new programmes dealing with

13. R.E. Bissel, "US Participation in the UN System" in T.T. Gati (ed), *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.

14. Article 1(3), *UN Charter*.



technical assistance and pre-investment which later came to be known as 'development programmes' and were directed to the developing countries.<sup>15</sup>

In the normative aspect of general welfare the UN achieved commendable success. When the Organisation was created, self-determination of peoples was a goal. Today it has become a reality in most of the lands formerly under colonial rule. Of the last vestiges of colonialism, Namibia is at the centre of UN efforts to free it from South African rule. In the field of human rights, the world body tried to develop a broad consensus on its norms. Its gross violation may threaten intra-state and inter-state peace as well. Thus, the world community has long focused on Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and South Africa's apartheid policies. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights was one of the first products of the UN and subsequently it adopted two Covenants which put into binding legal form the Rights—(i) civil and political and (ii) economic, social and cultural. The Covenants came into force in 1976 and they provide measures to check human rights violations.

In the economic, social and humanitarian fields in the Third World, achievements of the operational units of the UN system such as WHO, FAO, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, UNDP and others are impressive.

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These 'functional' activities now account for about a third of all the UN expenditures under the regular budget, but for the UN system as a whole which spends about \$4 billion a year including all voluntary funds, this percentage rises to almost 90.<sup>16</sup> For example, the UNDP spends

15. Mahdi Elmandjra, *The United Nations System: An Analysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 291-92.
16. UN Department of Public Information, *Image and Reality*, (New York: 1983), p. 36.

yearly close to \$1 billion in the developing countries providing technical assistance and aiding development projects. Quantitatively, the amount the UN spends for development is ridiculously small relative to the needs, but it has a real multiplier effect for the economies of the poor Third World countries. Similarly, when regional peace is threatened due to massive outflow of refugees from a country engendered by civil war, domestic instabilities or natural disaster, the UN comes forward with needed material help and legal protection. In recognition to its services, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was twice awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, all these mostly charity-dependent development activities of the UN system are based on the North-advocated 'politics-free' functionalism. Mahdi Elmandjra points out, "During the early years of the UN system, there was a tendency to make a very sharp distinction between the political and security aspects of peace maintenance—which were within the realm of the United Nations Organisation—and the technical and specialized functions of the agencies which were of a nonpolitical character. In the 1960s this differentiation became more subtle as people began to speak of 'peace maintenance' and 'peace building'. The whole task of the system in the area of economic and social development, including human rights and decolonization was recognised as 'peace-building' effort and as an indispensable complement to the political maintenance of peace and security".<sup>17</sup>

In the 1970s this dichotomy between economics and peace and security was getting more and more blurred because, speedy growth of population in the Third World, rapid consumption of raw materials, breakdown of the Bretton Woods order and energy crises demonstrated the inseparable link between socio-economic issues and international peace. It is perhaps more than a mere coincidence that almost all violent conflicts since WWII have taken place in the developing countries. The initiation of the Basic Needs Approach as a development strategy by the multilateral agencies for the poor countries owes much

17. Mahdi Elmandjra, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-21.

to a growing feeling that economic underdevelopment breeds structural violence which often threatens intra-state and inter-state peace and security. Willy Brandt observes, "History has taught us that wars produce hunger, but we are less aware that mass poverty can lead to war or end in chaos. While hunger rules, peace cannot prevail. He who wants to ban war must also ban mass poverty".<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, from the mid-60s onward the struggle of the Group of 77 to narrow down the ever-widening developmental gap between the developed and the developing countries through restructuring the existing economic order gradually ensued the North-South conflict. This wider concern was symbolized by the extensive North-South negotiations that have characterized the approach of the UN system to economic issues since the adoption of the Programme for establishing a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974. The logic behind such an approach by the today's UN as a universal organisation is simple and clear : The foundations of the existing order were laid during and immediately after WWII mostly by the countries presently constituting the North, while most of the Southern countries were still under colonial exploitation. Naturally, their causes and aspirations were not reflected in that order. Moreover, the post-war industrial economies prospered on cheap energy and raw materials derived from the developing countries. Today the latter experience a different story in their development pursuits. Now the very composition of the South, comprising more than two-thirds of UN membership and of world population, renders it imperative that the 'old' order be changed to suit the new realities. That is what the call for a UN-sponsored Global Round of Negotiations is about. But the North seems still unwilling to part away with their well-entrenched dominance over the present order. They must realize that peace cannot prevail in a world where one-third of humanity is rich and getting richer and the remaining two-third is poor and getting poorer. Willy Brandt rightly

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18. Brandt Commission Report, *North-South : A Program for Survival*, 1980, p. 16.

cautions, "North-South relations should be seen for what they are, a historic dimension for the active pursuit of peace".<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the gradual expansion of the UN mandate over virtually the whole gamut of human interrelationships shows that today the world body is concerned not simply with the promotion of peace in a negative sense, based on mere absence of war, but more importantly, with the promotion of a positive peace—to be based on international cooperation for development, justice and removal of inequalities within, between and among nations. But, we know that the UN expresses the collective will of its member states and it can do nothing more than it is allowed to by them. The purposive merit of the UN system lies in its serving as an arena where the need to transform the world order for establishing a durable peace is under constant discussion. Let us hope that some day reason and good sense will prevail upon the whole of UN membership to positively respond to the transformation of the international order in the desired direction.

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19. *Ibid*, p. 15.