

NEW WORLD ORDER, THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD¹

[Seven years ago, after the tragic assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, the new Prime Minister, made a broadcast to the nation on November 12, 1964, in which he said:

“As we build today so will be the tomorrow. Together, we will build for an India of the twenty-first century.”

Now, with the end of the cold war and the upsurge of democratic revolutions, the world has an opportunity to build for the 21st century. History cannot forgive this generation if it misses this opportunity and leaves behind a world ravaged by the debris of the so-called “cold war”, in which arms and drugs are the first two commodities in international trade, the ecological disaster which is overtaking the planet and the criminal disparities in standards of life of human beings.

In that context, I have ventured to make a few observations.]

Since President George Bush spoke a year ago of the possibility of a “New World Order”² and the need “to bring the United Nations into the twenty-first century”,³ there have been frequent references by leaders of governments around the world to the New World Order and the role of the United Nations in such an order.⁴ There is, however, little discussion of the elements of a new order and the means to establish it. A true “partnership of nations” suggested by President Bush has hardly emerged.

Much of the discussion about the United Nations is limited to the means to strengthen its capacity for “peacekeeping” or to improve the management of the

¹ Paper presented to the Third Indira Gandhi Memorial Conference, New Delhi, 1991. Published in: India Gandhi Memorial Trust, *Challenges of the Twenty-first Century*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Limited, 1993.

² Speech to the Joint Session of the United States Congress on September 11, 1990:

“The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move towards an historic period of co-operation... a new world order can emerge: a new era, freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace”.

³ Speech in the United Nations General Assembly on October 1, 1990

⁴ At the current session of the United Nations General Assembly most leaders of delegations made references to the new world order, but this was only in the opening statements and there has been no serious discussion in terms of action. They see the opportunities and express hopes. Some dealt with it in generalities in terms of the rule of law and peacekeeping operations; some assume it has already arrived. Many delegates, especially from the non-aligned countries, stress that it should not involve hegemony and domination, nor ignore the vital issue of economic disparities in the world.

Secretariat. It is essentially a continuation of the effort to revitalise the United Nations, which began after the Organisation suffered from attacks on it, and on “multilateralism” in general, during the Reagan administration in the United States. Meanwhile, the United Nations is again confronted with a serious financial crisis due to delayed payment of contributions.

More important, the concept has not caught the imagination and generated involvement in meaningful action by public opinion and public organisations which have played a crucial role in bringing about the change in international relations and atmosphere. People around the world seem apathetic, as they confront a prolonged economic recession, if not cynical about the promises of a new order.

Some of the cynicism about the New World Order is due to the fact that the concept was projected during the crisis following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, though it arose more from demands from United States public opinion for a new vision by the United States administration in response to the changes in eastern Europe and the end of the cold war.

The experience with the Security Council resolutions on the Iraqi aggression, and the actions by the United States-led coalition, though effective in ending aggression, were hardly reassuring as a precedent or a model. For, the Security Council virtually gave a *carte blanche* for military action with little supervision or control. Countries reluctant to support the action were subjected to intense pressure and many countries, especially in the third world, have suffered grievous economic damage with no compensation, while those which joined collective military action received billions of dollars from the governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The people of Iraq have been subjected to undue suffering by the destruction of civilian installations, with sanctions even on food and medicines. The effects of military action continue.

This raises inescapable ethical questions. Is it just that the people of a country should suffer thus from the international community for the actions of its tyrannical regime - in this case arising partly from the reckless supply of military equipment and technology by some of the countries which launched the collective action? Is it just that poor workers and peasants in India, and countries even farther away, should suffer the economic effects for developments over which they had no control whatsoever?

The lesson of this crisis is perhaps not to strengthen the capacity for such collective action but to appreciate the dangers of military solutions, even if they are under the auspices of the United Nations, and the need to build a non-violent world envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi.

The end of the cold war, the phenomenal changes in Eastern Europe, and the progress in peaceful settlement of a series of conflicts, created or aggravated by

the superpowers during the cold war, does provide opportunities to build a new order and deal with urgent problems of humanity. But they have not yet been grasped.

There has at last been significant progress in restraining the arms race, but tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain and there is not even a suspension of nuclear tests. The abolition of nuclear weapons, even as a distant target, is not yet accepted by the United States and other Powers. The military alliances are in place except for the Warsaw Pact.

There is a greater effort in the United Nations to avoid confrontations and adopt resolutions by consensus. But there is little meaningful North-South dialogue on urgent economic issues and little progress in utilising the United Nations as a “centre for harmonising the actions of nations” in the attainment of the purposes of its Charter.

The end of the cold war has enabled settlement of several long-standing local conflicts, through co-operation among the Great Powers, and efforts towards a solution of other conflicts - almost always by the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from a major role in the regions concerned. At the same time a series of ethnic and other conflicts have emerged in several regions with unpredictable consequences.

President George Bush, in his address to the United Nations on September 23, 1991, explained:

“Communism held history captive for years. It suspended ancient disputes; and it suppressed ethnic rivalries, nationalist aspirations and old prejudices. As it has dissolved, suspended hatreds have sprung to life...

“This revival of history ushers in a new era teeming with opportunities and perils.”

This theory of suspension and revival of history hardly explains all the present crises, and is in fact misleading, for history has never stood still.

There has been much talk of a “unipolar” world or “multipolar” world replacing a “bipolar” world. That is perhaps simplistic.

The collapse of the Soviet Union came partly because of its inability to survive the economic effects of an uncontrolled arms race with the Soviet Union, and partly because of the irresistible popular upsurge reflecting the spirit of freedom in the age of communications revolution.

The United States, for its part, has not come out of this race unscathed. It is faced with serious economic and social problems as its heritage of Reaganism. No

stable world order can be created under American domination.

President Bush, therefore, showed wisdom and realism when he declared before the United Nations on September 23, 1991:

“... the United States has no intention of striving for a *pax americana*... We will offer friendship and leadership. In short, we seek a *pax universalis*, built upon shared responsibilities and aspirations.”

There is also propagation of unfettered market forces as the panacea for economic ills, forgetting the devastation caused by commodity markets to the economies and political stability in many poor countries, and the long efforts of the people to ensure social responsibility of corporations and build “welfare states.” But this is untenable.

The Era of the Cold War

The cold war, which began soon after the foundation of the United Nations, shattered the hopes of humanity at the end of the ghastliest world war. The effectiveness of the United Nations was undermined and tens of millions of people perished in conflicts in the “third world”. Major problems affecting the planet and its inhabitants, cutting across all boundaries of nations and blocs, were neglected.

But history did not stand still.

This was also a period when the greater part of the world emerged from the shackles of colonialism, increasing the membership of the United Nations more than three-fold.

The scientific and technological revolution was equally momentous, though enormous human and material resources were diverted to means of destruction. The revolution in communications helped make world public opinion a significant factor in international relations.

While the superpowers and their allies were busy talking of mutual deterrence and “clean bombs” under the nightmare of nuclear confrontation, some governments, organisations and individuals showed courage in resisting the plans of the superpowers and drawing attention to the problems which demanded co-operative international action to save humanity and civilisation from extinction.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru provided leadership in the early years. The efforts of India and other non-aligned countries proved effective to the extent that they could find response in public opinion in the West and from governments in many of the smaller countries.

As a result, the combination of the non-aligned States, together with some smaller Western countries, and large elements of public opinion - including in particular scientists, youth and churches - was able to exert effective pressure on the major Powers to move towards a new outlook and to address urgent international issues, such as disarmament, regional conflicts, environment etc. There developed, as the United Nations Secretary- General recognised a few years ago, an “unholy alliance” between the United Nations and public opinion.

An agenda and a plan of action to deal with a series of problems was formulated in resolutions of the United Nations, as well as the declarations of the Non-aligned Movement and of various conferences and commissions - such as the Brandt, Palme and Brundtland Commissions - to deal not only with the nuclear confrontation but with the root causes of war, such as denial of human rights, racism, ecology etc. (as emphasised by Olof Palme in his Indira Gandhi Memorial Address in New Delhi in January 1986).

Meanwhile, it became unacceptable for tyrannical regimes to resort to massacres of non-violent demonstrators for freedom - and a series of such regimes came to be overthrown by essentially non-violent revolutions in Iran, the Philippines and eastern Europe.

The ideology of this combination of forces is not only “relevant” as we look ahead, but the only ideology that can lead to a just world order.

The Non-aligned Movement has played a significant role, but it would not be correct to exaggerate the importance of hastily drafted resolutions of non-aligned conferences involving compromises, and neglect skeletons in their cupboards such as the lack of democracy in many of the non-aligned countries and their quarrels over boundaries etc.

We need to look at the approach of the founders of non-alignment, especially Pandit Nehru who was never enthusiastic about a non-aligned bloc or grouping, but stressed the approach rather than structures. That approach can and should now encompass the world - including both governments and segments of public opinion where governments are anachronistic in their thinking.

Role of the United Nations

Can the United Nations, created in 1945, be developed to deal with the present realities and challenges?

If the essence of this new world order is a concert of Great Powers to maintain international peace, that would hardly correspond to the demands of the times.

Four decades of the nightmare of a cold war, the unbridled arms and nuclear arms

race, and the reckless despoliation of the environment have created global challenges which require a higher level of international solidarity and co-operation.

But the United Nations has shown a remarkable adaptability within the confines of its Charter, and can be an adequate instrument until structural and other changes become feasible with the development of greater solidarity.

Role of Public Opinion

Perhaps what is lacking at present is an alert, active and determined public action to make a just new world order a reality.

The end of the cold war has perhaps led to complacency. A number of international organisations have been weakened and paralysed as they had become identified with the decadent regimes in Eastern Europe. The economic recession has preoccupied attention at a national level.

An urgent priority of governments and individuals who seek to build a humane world order is to promote the development of public movements to bring that about. Then alone will “we the people” be able to play their rightful role in the United Nations and in history.