

Pre-emption Vs Cooperation : Reframing The Choice

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Introduction

The year 1991 was a seemingly momentous year in shaping the future world order owing to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the success of the US led coalition in the first Gulf war. It seemed that it was the dawn of a new world order based on a shared commitment of peace, respect for freedom. Reduction of lethal armaments, free trade and globalisation. Possibly no one had ever imagined that a single terrorist strike a decade hence would shape the world order afresh. John Lewis Gaddis has summarised the happenings very well. "The Post Cold war era began with the collapse of one structure, the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and ended with the collapse of another, the World Trade Centre's Twin Towers on 11 September 2001"¹.

US Foreign Policy: A Paradigm Shift

Over the years, there has been a paradigm shift in US foreign policy. The success of the US led coalition in the first Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 seemed to have heralded an era of constructive engagement to promote peaceful co-existence. This seemed to be the main pillar of George Bush Sr's foreign policy. The post cold war realignments were still underway when Saddam Hussein tried to capitalise on the prevailing uncertain linkages and occupied Kuwait. The Americans responded promptly to neutralise the challenge, because this had put in jeopardy the opportunities provided by the end of the cold War for a harmonious and co-operative international order with the US at the helm². This propelled the US into a position of strength right at the beginning of the post cold war evolutionary stage of the international world order. However, the UN support sought by the US eventually proved to be misleading. Bush's interventionist foreign policy and economic nationalism paved the way for a unilateral policy with multilateral connotations³.

Clinton outlined his national security strategy of engagement and enlargement in a speech of July 1994. "Our national security is based on enlarging the community of market democracies while deterring and containing a range of threats to our nation, our allies and our interests"⁴. The Clinton administration endeavoured to strengthen the NATO, international institutions such as the UN, IAEA and they placed greater emphasis on cooperative security.

George Bush Jr in his inaugural address stated that, "America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favours freedom. We will defend our allies and our interests. We will show purpose with arrogance. We will meet aggression and bad faith with resolve and strength. And to all nations we will speak for the values that gave our national birth". Non-proliferation, missile defence and promotion of democracy were key elements of the foreign policy.

For President Bush, 11 September 2001 came as a revelation, leading him to the startled conclusion that the globe had changed in ways gravely hazardous to the security- indeed the very survival of the United States. This conclusion soon led Bush to a fateful decision; to depart in fundamental ways, from the approach that has characterised US foreign policy for more than half a century. Soon, reliance on alliance had been replaced by redemption through pre-emption: the shock of force trumped the hard work of diplomacy and long term relationships were redefined⁵. Bush's famous statement "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". These words heralded the advent of a new world order.

Thus did the US announce that the Westphalia State System, which had governed international relations pretty much since 1648, had come to an end. The twin doctrines on which it was based- national sovereignty and the duty of countries not to intervene in the internal affairs of others- were now obsolete. Its place was being taken by a new order based upon the principle of an Empire, an American Empire⁶.

Bush made his choice ignoring the advice of senior statesmen, including his father who stated "this most recent surprise attack should erase the concept in some quarters that the United States can somehow go it alone in the fight against terrorism, or in anything else, for that matter". But his son stated his choice shortly before invading Iraq "At some point, we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America".

Global Reaction to the 11 September 2001 Attacks

America's policy of pre-emption needs to be viewed in light of the fact that the 11 September 2001 attacks were not met by indifference by the world community. The Muslim world was united in condemning the dastardly acts, including Iran and the Palestinian authority. A large number of US allies joined hands to assist the military campaign against the Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. Even China and Russia pledged solidarity⁷. This could have been harnessed as a unifying factor to fight the common enemy of terrorism. However, this platform though available was not made use of by the Americans to their advantage. In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush focussed more on the axis of evil rather than the Al Qaeda. When the administration published its 2002 National Security Strategy, it took this process even further, transforming anticipatory self defence - a tool every President had quietly held in reserve - into the centre piece of its national security policy⁸.

In 2003, Washington once again started garnering support for its war against terror – this time to oust Saddam Hussain by use of force and then politely called it ‘regime change’. The United States then went to war having garnered the support of only four members of the UN Security Council. Iraq was portrayed as a rogue state in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and with a leader at the helm of affairs who could very well harm America's’ interests by their use. Al Qaeda and Iraq were termed as complementary halves of the same existential threat⁹.

The problem is that the President had reframed his initial question of every nation having to make a decision post – 11 September 2001. Madeline Albright has very aptly put it in the following words “instead of simply asking others to oppose Al Qaeda, he now asks them to oppose Al Qaeda, support the invasion of an Arab Country, and endorse the doctrine of pre-emption-all as part of a single package”¹⁰.

Potent Threats Emanating from this Doctrine

The US doctrine of pre-emption has brought into sharp focus a number of important issues. Some of these are; is the sovereignty of a nation guaranteed or under constant threat from a nation engaged in democratisation, nation building and regime change with or without the acceptance of the world community. Does the UN have any relevance any more. Does the Trans-Atlantic rift portend a turbulent future. Has this policy left no breathing space for moderate Islam? Has America been successful in enduring non-proliferation or is it that wielding the nuclear threat is essential to be able to deter the bully.

The Threat to Sovereignty of Nations. According to President Bush, the US has “expanded the circle of liberty and security and development that brought unity to Europe, self governance to Latin America and Asia and new hope to Africa”. Has one nation’s foreign policy rendered the Westphalian State System obsolete? Do the people of a nation not have the right to make their own decisions? Was the Iraq war not more out of choice than out of necessity? Are the threats to the sovereignty of Syria and Iran justifiable? Where will the US gaze of regime change, democratisation or non-proliferation fall next? Does sovereignty hold good any more as an ideology respected by the world community? Did the bipolar world order not safeguard the interests of nations and their people much better? So has this policy of pre-emption not made the equipoise of global world order much more fragile?

Role of The UN. A distinguished former Security General of the UN said in his annual report in 1948, “the main purpose of the UN was, and is, to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security”. The unilateral actions of the US put in question the role of the UN in today’s world order. The Anglo-American failure to obtain the second resolution was just their failure. It was not a defeat for the UN but for those who attempted to get the UN to bless their war plans. It was surely to the UN’s credit that it refused to fall in line with the demands of its most influential members¹¹. The credibility of the UN remains unquestionable, and a positive spin off of this action has been the rejuvenation of the debate about the expansion of the Security Council and the proposed reforms. An enlarged council with broader representation is the need of the hour.

The Trans-Atlantic Rift. The global coalition against terror was born out of commonalities which overwhelmed the differences. However, as the ‘war on terror’ progressed, the differences became more compelling than the common interests. A common prescription namely pre-emption for fighting terrorists and rogue states caused a Trans-Atlantic rift. The rift became more prominent when the US decided to invade Iraq. France and Germany were the most vociferous in their opposition for such an act of aggression. Such a rift does not augur well for the world order. Greater co-operation will undoubtedly ensure in limiting and containing problems and enabling forming alliances rather than coalitions of the willing. This Trans-Atlantic rift has also weakened the NATO. If use of military force was deemed essential, then could the Kosovo model not have been applied in Iraq? In Kosovo the democratic transition has been brought about by a NATO led peacekeeping force, incorporating Russian participation. The UN administrators are being very ably assisted by the EU and Organisation for Security and cooperation in Europe. Such a participative democratic transition is a role model, as everyone has a sense of belonging and works towards success, besides, the effort is shared and there is of course greater legitimacy. The challenge for the United States is to frame a choice for Europe that most of Europe can embrace with dignity. Differences with the US policy must be considered seriously and not dismissed as a sign of weakness or tantamount to treason¹². Participative co-operation is the need of the hour. The diplomatic engagement with Iran having been delegated to the Europeans is a step in the right direction.

Non-Proliferation Vis-a-Vis Strategic Defiance. Non proliferation was the American ideal being pursued very vigorously. But it needs to be seen whether the US policy of pre-emption has aided in achieving this ideal or rather encouraged nations to wield the nuclear threat as a means of strategic defiance. Iraq was invaded on the premise that they possess WMDs. However that justification sooner than later came to a naught. At the same time North Korea proclaimed that they possess WMDs and challenged America with their strategic defiance. Even Iran is pursuing the development of WMDs, at least so believe the Americans. America has dealt with North Korea with velvet hands and not an iron fist. It seems the nuclear deterrence has mellowed down the American response. So what has been achieved is a state wherein countries on the American hit list are now wielding the nuclear threat as a means to keep the ‘big bully’ at bay. Non-proliferation cannot succeed by use of force. The very reason for their possession, i.e. insecurity among nations needs to be addressed. The current US policy is only giving impetus to proliferation of WMDs.

Clash of Civilizations. The war on terror has also been termed as a clash of civilizations. As per General Mirza Aslam Beg, the strategic loss of an enemy, post cold war, was made up by the US strategic thinkers by creating a contrived enemy – Islam. This seems to be a radical view. However, if the war on terror has to be won, then moderate Islam must be allowed to raise its head. the current US strategy has brought radical Islam to the fore. Iraq, one of the most moderate Islamic nations is today besieged with terrorism and has become the new

breeding ground for terrorists. So are they fighting terrorism or further promoting it by their actions? Support from the Islamic world for the war on terror would be forthcoming if the issues of terrorism, WMDs, regime change are not interpolated by the US as complementary halves.

Reframing the Choice

The choice preferred by the USA – pre-emption, preventive war, coalition of the willing rather than alliance of the supportive, needs introspection and reframing. First of all it needs to differentiate between the war on terror, non-proliferation and rogue nations.

Next, the USA needs to realise that the war on terror cannot be won in a stand alone mode. The common enemy of terrorism needs to be fought from a common platform.

International institutions like the IAEA, the UN need to be strengthened and co-opted in achieving the desired end state. Consultation with the world community and showing respect for their belief is another important facet towards participative resolution of discords. There is a pressing need for sweeping reforms of the international system as represented by the United Nations. A border representation in the Security Council is imperative if we have to collectively face up to the future security challenges.

Non-proliferation itself must discard outmoded concepts and redirect efforts on sources of true proliferation concern. Its success as a collective effort would obviate the need for regime change to ensure non-proliferation¹³.

Conclusion

A co-operative model rather than a pre-emptive model needs to be adopted for conflict resolution. Respect for well established international bodies and the world community as also consultation is the way out. The same has been corroborated by the successful negotiations with North Korea and their positive intent announced on 03 October 2007. This was possible due to the concerted efforts of six nations led by China.

Multi-polarity must not be misconstrued as a policy creating two poles opposing each other. Collective decision making and an enduring spirit of consensus building would be the hallmarks of a stable and effective multilateral system. Yaswant Sinha has aptly put in words, “If Globalisation is the trend, then multilaterism is it's life-sustaining mechanism, for no process will survive without a genuine spirit of multilateralism, underlined by the belief that global problems require global solutions globally arrived at. Otherwise the world faces the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past”. Unilateralism seems to have met its end and a new world order is on the horizon, as the Indian Novelist Arundhati Roy has forecasted, “Another world, is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing”. Its time that America sat up and listened to this whisper, before it becomes a noise.

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