
UNIT 17 POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

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17.1 INTRODUCTION

The world affairs we witness today are no doubt very complex. The problems the humankind and the basic territorial units—which we may call states—face are diverse with issues like peace, human rights, development, environment protection, trade, and so forth. States—whether big or small—are unable to address these problems individually, without working with other states, near and far, for negotiating, for narrowing differences and expanding areas of agreement. Since the problems and the parties (states) involved are multiple, country-to-country contacts may not always be sufficient. Forums engage governments in dialogue and negotiations on pressing or long standing issues on a regular basis and have become beneficial features of the modern world affairs. India has gained long and rich experience in tackling issues of concern to itself and also to the international community in global forums like the United Nations and the Non-aligned Movement and the regional level organisations like SAARC, ASEAN.

17.2 UNITED NATIONS

To India, the United Nations holds the key to a world order wedded to peace and prosperity. The United Nations represents universal values like democracy, equality and justice, which guided India's history through ages. In fact, one of the basic principles of India's foreign policy has been active cooperation with the United Nations and international bodies, which are seen as protectors of the interests of the newly independent countries. India has actively participated in the activities of the United Nations with reference to the maintenance of world peace, peace keeping, achievement of economic progress, protection of human rights, etc. Let us turn to some of these issues and India's role.

17.2.1 War and Peace

Independent India saw its security as part and parcel of the world security. But world security and stability has faced problems of different kind right from the early days of the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. Those days, the prime cause for worry to India was the East-West Cold War, pitting the United States and the former Soviet Union against each other as rivals.

While constantly engaged in the acquisition of sophisticated nuclear and other weapons, these two big powers acquired superpower status with global influence. They fought their battles (proxy wars) not in Europe but by fanning tensions and conflicts between states in Africa and Asia. Divided Korea became the first major battle ground for staging the Cold War competition. In addition, neighbouring countries fought wars often with the military and political support from the Cold War blocs over disputed borders or over other problems. Wars in West Asia between Israel and the Arab countries, the Iran-Iraq war, in the horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Somalia come under this category. Besides, the United States or the Soviet Union militarily intervened in some countries. Dominican Republic, Grenada in the case of the United States and Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan by the Soviet Union exemplify this trend. There has been clear Cold War dimension to the conflicts in Cambodia, Nicaragua, and last but not the least in India-Pakistan subcontinent. In all, nearly 250 small and big wars occurred during the Cold War period.

Although the clouds of Cold War had vanished in the early days of the decade of 1990s, global order of peace and stability has continued to be threatened in both old and new ways. Notwithstanding the two wars on Iraq, foreign invasion as a major danger to peace has diminished in importance. Instead, the civil strifes in state after state in Africa, Asia and Latin America have played havoc with political systems, economies of nations and even the lives and rights of innocent men, women and children. Societies of Yugoslavia, Haiti, Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and many more countries have become victims of this disturbing trend. Nearly 6 million people lost their lives in such wars in the past 12-13 years.

At the United Nations, India disapproved forcible occupation of the territory of any state or interference by one state in the matters of other states, which are violation of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and advocated settlement of problems through negotiation and other peaceful methods. India strongly supported the sovereign rights of Egypt, Hungary, the Congo, Lebanon, and demanded immediate and unconditional ending to fighting whoever started it for whatever reason. India remarkably was flexible in its approach for peace. We preferred moderation whereby the countries that might have violated rules are given an honourable escape route for restoration of normalcy. This approach was successful and effective in the context of the invasion of Egypt by the United Kingdom, France and Israel in 1956. Similarly after the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbours, India joined other members in the Security Council in providing a framework for the coexistence of both Israel and its Arab neighbours within secure boundaries after withdrawal from occupied territories.

The blend of principles with pragmatism became more necessary to respond to situations after the end of the Cold War. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and refused to withdraw, India supported the military action by the US-led coalition—blessed by the United Nations Security Council—to free Kuwait. Although many would see softness towards the United States in India's positions in the United Nations, India opposed the American military action (2003) to remove president Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, an action the United States launched unilaterally in violation of the UN Charter. India is among the many countries that are worried about the weakening of international institutions and the tendency to impose unilateral preferences over others.

To guard against these unhelpful trends, the wings of the United Nations must be suitably

strengthened. There is no more important organ of the United Nations than the Security Council, which needs to be reformed to correct some of the founding weaknesses in its composition and powers. India has argued since 1992 that the Security Council needs democratisation in tune with the changed realities. There is something specific to be noted here. Based on its contribution for world peace and security, the appreciation it receives as the world's largest and functioning democracy, its economic performance and potential, many in India are convinced that India deserves a permanent seat along with a few other developing countries. With only China as a permanent member presently, Asia is grossly underrepresented, whereas Africa and Latin America do not have any representation in the inner circle of this important organ. Although consensus on the issue is yet to be reached, India is patiently waiting for a favourable outcome at a future date.

India believes that the cause of peace could be promoted not just through cautionary advice but through concrete action on ground. The peacekeeping activity is the strongest symbol of that action under the United Nations umbrella. UN peacekeepers in military uniform and also from various civilian professions worked to cool tempers in a war-torn nation either by impartially helping the warring armies, honour their word not to resume fighting or helping reconciliation through implementation of a negotiated accord already signed. Among nearly 55 peacekeeping operations the United Nations launched so far in Europe, Asia, Central America, Africa and Europe, India is counted among top 10-15 nations contributing soldiers and civilians not to fight wars but terminate them peacefully. As a nation we should be gratified about our contributions in 35 such operations – whether in Suez, the Congo, Cambodia, Mozambique, Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The United States sought India's contribution in a force being mobilised outside of the United Nations framework for restoring order in the occupied Iraq in 2003. India refused to send its troops without an explicit UN mandate.

17.2.2 Racism, Colonialism and Human Rights

The issues grouped in this section are close to India's heart. Foremost among them is the racism—the controversy centred on South Africa's official policy of racial discrimination. In the very first session of the General Assembly, India took up the matter and mobilised support from the world community to pressure South Africa to end apartheid. India worked hard to build an anti-apartheid coalition in world politics that did not hesitate to launch actions like ban on participation in sports events, ban on participation in international forums and ban on sale of military equipment, to pressurise the White minority government of South Africa. In this context, it is a matter of great satisfaction that in 1993- South Africa declared itself apartheid-free following which a freely elected democratic government assumed power under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual heir.

India is credited for taking up liberation of subject population, i.e. the peoples under the yoke of colonial rule in different parts of the world. Being one of the first to gain freedom after the end of the Second World War, to continue the struggle against colonialism elsewhere is natural to India. The cause of Indonesia for freedom from the Dutch colonialism was one of the first issues India took up in the late 1940s. The freedom fighters in numerous parts of Asia and Africa—Indo-China, Algeria, Angola, Namibia, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Tunisia—looked to India for diplomatic and political support and guidance. During the 1960s, India led the anti-colonial cause by heading the UN Committee charged with speedy implementation of the Declaration on Decolonisation. Statistics speak for themselves: There were nearly 75 crore colonised peoples

when the UN was founded and now only half a crore remain to be decolonised. Most of the liberated territories have become members of the United Nations taking the tally from the original figure of 51 to 191 now.

As a democratic country, India is naturally wedded to the cause of human rights like civil rights, viz. right to life, freedom, to be free from torture or unlawful detention, etc. But India, joined by nearly the whole of the Third World countries and also the former socialist countries felt that the civil and political rights would have to be achieved in conjunction with, and are indeed inseparable from, the economic, social and cultural rights. They go hand in hand, not one at the expense of the other. Among the political rights, the right to self-determination is among the most controversial issue. Whether the right is to be applied in the context of foreign, colonial rule in the context of foreign, colonial occupation, or to be extended to the ethnic, cultural minorities to secede from a country is among the most hotly debated questions. Another issue is: whether those using violence to secede from a country could enjoy the protection of rights as freedom fighters, or are to be put on a different plane as terrorists? Are states accountable to the world outside on account of gross violation of human rights? Can foreign powers militarily intervene citing human rights violations? India has taken a tougher, if not conservative, stand in favour of the unity and sovereign authority of states.

17.2.3 Development

Economic and social development is an issue at the core of human rights debate as well. Again it is a vital concern that makes India and the United Nations partners. India's basic position is two-fold. First, economic development is a necessary precondition for peace. World peace can be durable only when conditions like poverty, hunger, exploitation that breed conflict are alleviated. Secondly, the newly acquired political independence of most of the erstwhile colonial countries would be incomplete without the economic and social development. In other words, the development element of the world order is critical. India devoted considerable energies for the establishment of scores of UN bodies dedicated for assisting the economically backward nations, viz. the regional economic commissions, the UN Development Programme, and UN Conference on Trade and Development. In the 1960s and 1970s, India was in the forefront raising demands and grievances with regard to unstable prices of agricultural products in the Western export markets and also the unhelpful terms of trade that worked to the benefit of the rich and industrially advanced countries. The Third World (also known as the "Group of 77") came to be identified as a distinct (though diverse) entity in diplomatic conferences and negotiations. One of the dream themes of this group that echoed in the UN forums in the 1970s was the establishment of New International Economic Order based on the principles of democracy, equity, and justice.

Let us also note here that India and other developing countries have promoted a holistic approach towards development. As per this approach, major problems like environment, population control, food, human rights, and women empowerment are closely linked to development. For example, the idea of sustainable development underlines the importance of conserving environment in a manner that the present generation can make use of the biological resources without denying the same privileges to the coming generations of humankind. The Earth Summit advocated this approach; and in that Conference India proposed the setting up of the planet protection fund.

Let us not ignore the setbacks to the efforts of India and other developing countries. The anticipated

dialogue between the developed North and the developing South failed to take place. The government to government development assistance levels had progressively declined. So was the case with the resources made available to the development activities of the United Nations agencies. On the other side, the sharp rise in the debt of the developing countries (standing currently at some US\$ 2,500 billion) was a source of alarm. Nearly 80 developing countries including India had to turn to the International Monetary Fund for loans to tide over their short term economic difficulties, but at the same time go through a back breaking regime of conditionalities.

You need to appreciate the fact that the development activities of the United Nations signify two things. India has been a major beneficiary of the multilateral development assistance, some of which have been channelled through UN agencies like the UN Development Programme. Side by side, as one of the leading lights of the Third World countries in terms of its technical manpower, India has often contributed in a big way through the UN wings like UNIDO, UNESCO, and UNDP for the advancement of other developing nations.

17.3 REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The existence of regionalism side by side with universalism is a notable feature of our contemporary world. Mistaken as better forums than the United Nations, regional and sub-regional organisations have come up in very many parts of the world, in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America. In recent years, of course, their number has considerably gone up. While the Commonwealth and the Organisation of American States are among the oldest, many like the Organisation of African Unity (now called African Union), Organisation of Islamic Conference, the Association of South East Asian Nations, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation are of relatively recent origin.

India's attitude to the regional organisations combines both understanding and caution. India never saw them as competitors, but complements to the United Nations mechanism. This view is important to be noted in the context of the establishment and activities of organisations like NATO during and after the Cold War. The NATO activity in Kosovo in 1999 has only deepened those apprehensions. Again, India did not want regional organisations to take a stand on disputes between a member state and a non-member state. For example, the Organisation of Islamic Conference had often endorsed Pakistan's views on the Kashmir problem, transgressing the boundaries of diplomatic fairness towards India.

India has happy experiences with most of the regional organisations. The Commonwealth serves as the most useful example. Soon after Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to the British monarch becoming the nominal head of the Commonwealth, without compromising on its status as a member with elected head of state. Over the years, India has played active role in helping the Commonwealth play positive role in support of the rights of the Black majority population in South Africa and Rhodesia, in disapproving military coups against democratic governments of member countries as in the case of Fiji, Nigeria and Pakistan, and facilitating cooperation in promoting educational and cultural exchanges. Likewise, India is very pleased with the Association of South East Asian Nations of which India is not a full member. India's political and commercial relations with ASEAN nations improved, especially after India embraced the "Look East Policy". India is a full dialogue partner and is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum -a vehicle for

enhancing understanding and cooperation in regional security. India has supported the policies and activities of those regional organisations like Organisation of African Unity (AU) and Organisation of American States for consolidation of political sovereignty and economic advancement in those regions. However, it is a matter of regret to India that these organisations remain weak because of lack of unity among members.

Let us now turn to the fortunes of regionalism in India's neighbourhood. In South Asia, the birth of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation would not have been possible without India's support in 1985. India welcomed the initiative of Bangladesh. Besides India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are its members. All these countries have political, cultural, historical, economic and ethnic ties more with India than with one another. There are problems too, the most serious set being the India-Pakistan tensions. At the same time care has to be taken to ensure that the new regional forum would not be misused to score political, propaganda points. Accordingly, it was agreed that it will be a forum to promote greater contacts and understanding among heads of state/government and various other levels of policy makers, and contentious bilateral matters are to be kept out.

But unfortunately SAARC has suffered greatly from India-Pakistan tensions. Pakistan has often tried to use SAARC as a tool to twist India's arms. India has retaliated by refusing to clear the path, sometimes, for convening the SAARC's periodical meetings. For example, the last Summit, held in Kathmandu in 2002 was held after three years. The next scheduled for 2003 in Islamabad became the prisoner of the bilateral problems. The implementation of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement or the SAARC anti-terrorism convention is being obstructed. The people to people contacts are also being obstructed. With the result, the SAARC process has considerably slowed down.

17.4 NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT

The Non-aligned movement as the biggest peace movement of governments has special significance for India. For, after all, India has pioneered the policy of nonalignment, in the early days of its Independence. The policy represented our desire to retain the freedom to take positions on international issues without being bound by membership in military alliances formed in the context of the Cold War rivalry. Several newly independent countries drew inspiration from the lead given by India and embraced the policy of nonalignment in the 1950s and thereafter. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia and Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt came together in 1961 to found a grouping or a movement of the non-aligned (NAM) countries. 13 Summit Meetings of the Non-aligned Countries (including the seventh hosted by New Delhi in 1983) were held so far. The last one was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2003.

During all these years, the features of the Non-aligned movement include the near universal in membership, the shift in the focus from anti-colonialism and anti-racialism to development and globalisation. Of course unchanged are the commitments to the rights of the Palestinian people, the need to strengthen multilateral political and financial institutions like the UN and the IMF and the World Bank. The flip side of the additions to membership (some countries did not abandon special military relationships with the superpowers before seeking membership) diluted the philosophical and political cohesion, if not the credibility of the movement. Moreover, military conflicts occurred between member countries of the movement. Wars between Iran-Iraq, India-

Pakistan, Ethiopia-Somalia threw up dilemmas to the membership. Again, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a founding member and towering part of the movement, was a severe blow. Finally, the end of the Cold War had thrown many non-aligned countries out of gear; they had to quickly reorient their foreign policy as per the new compulsions of the pre-eminence of the United States and its allies.

As a result the non-aligned movement declined in importance even among the member countries. Countries like Myanmar and even Egypt suggested that the movement should be disbanded. Although India has not gone that far, it certainly has not done more than lip service to the cause of non-aligned movement.

With the changed context, it has been widely asserted by the critics of non-alignment that the non-aligned movement ceases to be relevant and useful to serve the needs of countries like India. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that the spirit underlying the nonalignment, viz. the wish not to subordinate national policy-making freedom to the pressures and whims of the militarily, economically powerful countries is perhaps more relevant now than before. There may be defects in the way the movement has shaped, or the way the policy was pursued by countries, but the intrinsic worth of the policy cannot be doubted. If India can demonstrate this, it will be a big service not only to the idea of nonalignment but also to a more egalitarian world order. It is intriguing that the weakening of the UN has coincided with the weakening of NAM. That means that they share common destinies. This is a lesson for our present and future leadership.

17.5 GLOBALISATION

No doubt, you will agree, globalisation has emerged as the foremost issue of political and diplomatic significance. Thanks to the revolution in the fields of computer, telecommunication and satellite technology, information has become very easy to exchange through Internet facilities. Many—whether individuals, public or private, national or foreign institutions—nowadays, across the world, are beneficiaries in transforming the way we function. For example, mail can be exchanged through Internet between two or more locations anywhere in the world instantly. Likewise, companies are transacting business of selling and purchasing goods across the globe with the help of information and communication technologies. Money is moving from one account to another without the use of a chequebook. Customers can order goods and get them delivered at home and pay for them without moving from their drawing room at home through the use of Internet services. This is called electronic commerce. Companies are moving their production centres from one corner of the world to another very fast. Companies like Microsoft, Samsung, and Citibank with production, marketing and work force in several countries have become household names even in rural areas of a country like India. The multinational companies are earning, investing and moving across companies and countries overnight. Banks, offices, transport services, companies, non-profit organisations, educational establishments, international organisations and individuals are making use of computer software to create their own cyber sites with information to be accessed, printed or downloaded on a floppy disk by any one sitting before a computer with an internet facility. Satellite channels are beaming their programmes directly to homes anywhere in the world. News is being flashed instantly and wars have been shown live. In other words, globalisation is identified with the phenomenon of flow of capital, goods, information and even people across borders at a very high speed through the use of

information and communication technologies. Suddenly the territorial borders identified with nation states have become less relevant. A global civil society comprising parliamentarians, trade unions, non-government organisations is becoming perceptible. Truly, global village has become a reality.

With strengths like well-developed and highly competitive computer software industry, the availability of technical and skilled work force and its potential as a very large middle class market, India hopes to benefit in the era of globalisation. Since 1991, India changed the orientation of its economic policy by injecting pronounced features of privatisation, liberalisation of rules for foreign investment, disinvestment of public sector companies. Customers are flooded with an amazing choice of goods in the market—from motor cars to food products. India's exports have gone up especially in the service sector, investments have come into the country, and our foreign exchange reserves are extremely comfortable. Overall, India, during globalisation, has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Though India is open to beneficial aspects of globalisation, it is concerned over the adverse effects. To critics, globalisation is another name for Americanisation of the world. American companies, currency, channels and weapons have taken over the world. The worrisome consequences of globalisation are political, economic and even cultural. The globalisation process as manifested in the activities of multinational corporations, media giants and non-governmental organisations has considerably undermined the sovereign prerogatives of the state structures. For example, governments have come under great pressure in one conference after another—from Rio to Seattle and Durban. The presence of refugees and migrants is a cause of political upheaval in North as well as the South. Misuse of technology for spreading terror and violence is an important political effect of the globalised world. The income gaps between the rich and the poor both among and within countries have sharply widened. As brought out by the United Nations, nearly one half of the world population (mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia) subsists with an income of less than two dollars a day. Indeed, the assets of top 3 billionaires in the world are said to be greater than the combined GNP of all the least developed countries put together. And with the rise of market power, much of the developing world has become both unattractive for private investment and non-competitive for export purposes. Moreover, our life styles are undergoing radical change going in the direction of meaningless consumerism, propelled by the advertisements shown on television.

To offset the negative effects of globalisation and harness the benefits among all sections of the humanity, India is engaged in working with other countries at the United Nations, regional organisations and also in the Non-aligned Movement. There are some encouraging developments such as the decision by the Group of 8 countries to cancel the debts of some of the most indebted and poor countries. Consensus at the Millennium summit of the United Nations to work for achievement by 2015 of certain socio-economic goals in the area of poverty reduction, child education, AIDS, etc. may help in putting human beings at the centre of positive happenings.

17.6 SUMMARY

To India, the United Nations holds the key to a world order wedded to peace and prosperity. India has always emphasised the diplomatic uses of the universal forums for forging common fronts in managing consequences of conflict, poverty and deprivation. It opposed the use of the United Nations for divisive, coercive and narrow ends. Similarly, India's view of regional

organisations as mechanisms of promoting greater understanding and cooperation is also mature, by stressing that they must work hand in hand with the global forums like the United Nations. The reason is the growing interdependence, now transformed into an era of globalisation, needs to be managed to make life on the planet more equitable and fair. In other words, India emerges as a seasoned voice of maturity, moderation and forward looking in world affairs. This characteristic remains despite domestic political changes.

17.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Identify some of the important aspects of India's contribution for world peace and security through the United Nations.
- 2) In what ways has India worked for the economic development of the Third World countries?
- 3) Discuss India's association with the Commonwealth and ASEAN.
- 4) Write a short note on SAARC.
- 5) Bring out the diplomatic achievements of India's non-aligned policy.
- 6) How different is the nonalignment policy from the non-aligned movement?
- 7) What are the benefits that globalisation has brought about?
- 8) Identify some of the problems associated with globalisation.

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