UNITED NATION'S ROLE IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

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ABSTRACT

Soon after its birth, the United Nations was constrained by the burgeoning cold war between the two super powers. During the cold war, collective security measures could be taken only against North Korea when it attacked South Korea. The UN had a limited role in the Suez crisis, Cuban Missile crisis, Congo crisis, Arab-Israel war and Afghanistan crisis. In Vietnam, it was almost stalemated. UN peace keeping missions were sent in several crises situations.

The UN however played an active role in decolonization process and promotion of human rights. It made efforts to reform the world economy. It promoted the concept of NIEO.

The expectations from UNO increased after the end of the cold war in 1991. Due to cooperation of P5, collective security measures could be taken against Iraq when it invaded Kuwait in 1990.In the post cold war era the number of peacekeeping missions also increased. Peace keeping evolved into peace enforcement. The missions in Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia were a fiasco. UN even outsourced peace keeping to regional organizations. Tensions continued between Israel and Palestine. UN played an active role in combating terrorism and advocating sustainable development. It launched Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and maintained its relevance.

The paper points out the initial achievements of the UN but also highlights that the choppy waters and rough terrain of international politics and relations were never easy to navigate. The UN fumbled at many junctures but on the whole its relevance continued.

Keywords:

Post Cold War, Collective Security, Peacekeeping, Disarmament, Sustainable Development

During the four decades of cold war, questions about UN's relevance and credibility in maintaining peace and security were raised from time to time. It was a period of trials and tribulations for the newly formed UNO when the international political landscape too was

changing at a fast pace. By the time the situation somewhat reached a plateau there were visible signs of the waning of the cold war.

Causes of the End of Cold war

In the mid-1980s when the new Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev came to power he wanted to reform communism. He therefore tried to discipline the Soviet people to overcome the existing economic stagnation. As a course correction he launched the idea of perestroika, or "restructuring," but the Soviet bureaucrats kept thwarting and ignoring his orders. He also used a strategy of glasnost, or open discussion and democratization. As a consequence, people began to question the ideology of communism itself; the satellite states witnessed an unprecedented revolt by the people to discard the communist ideology. Pressures for change gathered strength in Central Europe, especially Poland. Things became worse when Gorbachev refused to use Soviet troops to support the faltering government of East Germany in late 1989. Within weeks nearly all the satellite states broke free from Moscow in a peaceful wave of revolutions. The Berlin Wall fell. This wave spilled over to the Soviet Union also which too eventually disintegrated in late 1991. Russia got the Soviet Union's seat on the Security Council. After 45 years, the Cold War had ended.

In the meantime, the wave of globalization triggered frequent interactions in the fields of science and literature. Not only labor, goods, technology but ideas also were exchanged more often. The growth of transnational communications and contacts helped spread liberal ideas, and the success of Western economies gave them additional appeal. There were demands for democracy and civil rights. The enormous Soviet defense budget began to adversely affect other aspects of Soviet society. There was decline in the Soviet economy, reflecting the diminished ability of the Soviet central planning system to respond to changes in the global economy. Although in theory communism aimed to instill a system of class justice, Lenin's successors maintained domestic power through a brutal state security system involving lethal purges, gulags and broad censorship. The overall effect of these repressive measures was a general loss of faith in the system.

Economic globalization created turmoil in the world economy at the end of the twentieth century, but the Western economies using market systems were able to transfer labor to services, to reorganize their heavy industries and to switch to computers. According to one Soviet economist, by the late 1980s, only eight percent of Soviet industry was competitive at world standards. It is difficult to remain a superpower when 92 percent of industry is not competitive. (Nye Joseph, 2009)

Role of the UN

The UN which hitherto had been hindered by the super power rivalry suddenly seemed to be liberated from the eclipsed phase of Cold war. There were expectations and also exhibition of cooperation among the P5 powers. After 1990, there was a sharp drop in the use of the veto, accompanying the introduction of a culture of accommodation among the Permanent Five, and momentous shifts in the Security Council's approach to conflict and its resolution.

Kuwait crisis

After years of Cold War paralysis, it seemed the Security Council could now act decisively. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the Security Council passed a dozen strong resolutions against Saddam Hussein's government. An ultimatum was given to Iraq to either withdraw its troops or face an overwhelming multinational military force authorized by the United Nations and led by the United States. The United States and the Soviet Union voted together on this key resolution along with Britain and France. The fifth permanent Security Council member with veto power, China, abstained from voting. After achieving victory in the Gulf War, President Bush declared that a "new world order" was coming into existence where the United Nations, freed from Cold War stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. There were tangible achievements for the UN during the first decade of the end of the cold war. With the geopolitical setting completely altered by the end of the Cold War, the issues addressed by the Council and the way in which they were addressed also witnessed a change.

During the cold war, UN had played a relatively secondary role in most world crises, including the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973; the India-Pakistan War of 1971; the Vietnam War; and the Afghanistan War. However, with Soviet cooperation, the UN played a major role approving

action in the Persian Gulf in 1991 to drive out Iraq from Kuwait, and it actively supervised the subsequent cease-fire, embargo, and removal of strategic weapons from Iraq.

The Security Council took a number of steps towards the Responsibility to Protect(R2P), when the international community moved in, if necessary without the consent of the host country, to improve a situation where the government was either unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens.

Peacekeeping Operations

Resort to UN's peacekeeping activities also became more frequent in the post cold war phase. The mandate of these activities was also widened. They involved the UN in elaborate state-building activities, arranging and monitoring democratic elections, where none had ever taken place before, establishing police forces and the rule of law, protecting human rights. The second generation peacekeeping was multilateral, multi dimensional, multi cultural and multinational. Only thirteen peacekeeping missions were authorized prior to 1988. From 1988 through 2000, more than 36 operations were undertaken. The number of peacekeepers deployed and the budget of the peacekeeping missions increased manifold. Up to the late 1980s, peacekeeping operations were operated through the UN Office of Special Political Affairs. But increased demand for peacekeeping and its widening mandate warranted an office specifically for it. The Department of Peace Keeping Operation (DPKO) was formally created in 1992 when Boutros Boutros-Ghali took office as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The credibility of UN peacekeeping missions was high as they brought independence in Namibia, normalized society in Cambodia and El Salvador, improved and helped in rebuilding of Mozambique. But the dismal failures of UN peacekeeping operations in Rwanda from 1993-96 (UNAMIR), Somalia from1992-95(UNOSOM I, II) and in Bosnia Herzegovina from 1992-95(UNPROFOR) raised doubts on their effectiveness. There were demands by UN member states for more 'muscle' in peacekeeping operations. The subsequent missions were transformed accordingly. They were termed as 'third generation' peacekeeping or peace enforcement.

This type of peacekeeping is characterized by a greater interventionism, unprecedented use of force, less or total lack of consent. The efforts of such peacekeeping missions have focused on the more limited objective of providing humanitarian relief rather than facilitating a comprehensive settlement. They were sent in states with no clear or legitimate authority or where several groups claimed authority.

In some cases, during the present post cold war phase, it was seen that many other actors have also emerged as new peacekeepers. They include powerful states, regional organizations or coalitions of member states who have led or organized their own peacekeeping generally with the authorization of the UN Security Council. New peacekeepers are involved in peace enforcement operations, not peacekeeping though most often in cooperation with a UN peacekeeping operation. Some scholars term such operations as fourth generation peacekeeping, for example, the French multinational operation Turquoise in Rwanda. The US led such hybrid multinational intervention (UNITAF) in Somalia and the NATO military intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. UN subcontracts peacekeeping and peace building to regional organizations.

The first post-Cold War decade at the UN drew to a close in much less favourable circumstances than it had opened giving way to concerns about new world disorder with the UN once again being marginalised as it had been during the Cold War period.

The international climate deteriorated further for the UN after the first decade of cold war. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the main thrust of US policy became combating terrorism. It was considered as the main threat to international peace and security almost to the exclusion of all others. Rise of China from regional to becoming a global one, and the re-assertiveness of Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin, meant that the solidarity, or at least the consent, of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council (P5) could no longer simply be taken for granted. This became evident when the US ignored the collapse of the Oslo peace accords and the escalation of tension in the Middle East, particularly in South Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2009. It was amply reflected in the UN and hampered its functioning. Around this time the world was

engulfed by global economic crisis and captured the attention of the main players, security issues were sent to the back burner.

The chinks in the solidarity of P5 group were evident in the contexts of the hostilities in Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003. On both occasions military operations were launched without the explicit authorisation of the Security Council. The US maintained silence in the wake of disproportion Israeli attacks in South Lebanon and Gaza and Russia and China prevented any action in the causes of Burma, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka; and dragged their feet over Darfur. In 2007, divisions hampered the UN's ability to develop a fully workable peacekeeping mission in Sudan and Chad, where rebellion in Sudan's Darfur region and bordering parts of Chad created large numbers of refugees beginning in 2003. There were disagreements over the handling of the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programmes. Similarly on **Syria,** while the US and its European allies were contemplating non military sanctions tied to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which could eventually allow the use of force to end the conflict in Syria, Russia was opposed to any such move. Now the representative of the Secretary General is using his good offices to bring the two opposed parties to the negotiating table.

Following the peacekeeping debacles of the mid-1990's there was a sharp decline in the demands for UN peacekeepers but in the second post-Cold War decade it was reversed, so that, towards the end of the period the numbers authorised for deployment by the Security Council were well over 100,000 and the number of operations being handled by the Secretariat under the supervision of the Security Council had gone up. Most of those new operations were in Africa and most of them were multi-faceted in midst of intra-state conflicts in failed or failing states. Their mandate included revamping the governance shortfall in those regions. There were some notable successes, in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in Burundi and Southern Sudan.

The UN seemed most helpless in Rwanda where frightening genocide killing 700,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus occurred as peace agreements fell apart and it could not do anything to check it.

The UN scorecard, therefore suggests that while the UN has played an effective role in legitimizing enforcement coalitions for interstate, armed collective security (as in Korea and against Iraq in Gulf War I), the United Nations has proven to be a very ineffective peace enforcer in the many intrastate civil conflicts that emerged in the post–Cold War world.

The UN scorecard is a mixed one as it can boast of some achievements also for example; peace operations in Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique, Eastern Slavonia (Croatia), and East Timor suggest a complementary result. Here the UN succeeded in fostering peace through consent, building on an enhancement of Chapter VI–based peace-making negotiations and a creative, multidimensional implementation of the transitional authority that the peace agreements provided.

But the efforts of the UN have not borne the desired fruits in **Afghanistan**. In late 2001, the Security Council authorized the United States to overthrow the Taliban government, as an offensive against the terrorist al-Qaeda organization, believed to be based in the country. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was set up to provide military support for a newly-established pro-Western government. In March 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established to manage all UN humanitarian, relief, recovery and reconstruction activities. Still Afghanistan remains a "failed state."

The UN's role in the country includes promoting of good governance and the rule of law, training of police, and the like. But in a land torn by violence, warlordism, drug production and intense suspicion of foreigners, these programs seem unreal and very unlikely to succeed. Until Afghanistan achieves a lasting and stable peace designed and supported by Afghanis, there can be no prospect of progress, electoral or otherwise. (Global policy forum)

Iran also proved a hard nut to crack for the UN. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has adopted six resolutions as part of international efforts to address Iran's nuclear program. The central demand by the council is that Iran suspend its uranium enrichment program, as well as undertake several confidence-building measures outlined in a February 2006 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors resolution - including reconsidering the

construction of its heavy-water reactor and ratifying the IAEA Additional Protocol. The council initially laid out these calls in a nonbinding Security Council presidential statement adopted in March 2006. Almost all the resolutions were adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, making most of the provisions of the resolutions legally binding on Iran, or all UN member states. Four of them include a series of progressively expansive sanctions on Iran and or Iranian persons and entities. The sanctions represent one track in a "dual-track approach" pursued by the permanent five members of the council and Germany (the so-called P5+1), to address Iran's nuclear program. The other track involves a June 2006 proposal for comprehensive negotiations with Iran which was updated in June 2008. With the election of comparatively moderate president Hassan Rouhani in Tehran in 2013, things have started to look up. The US and EU have begun to ease sanctions on Iran in return for curbs to its nuclear program. Iran too has responded positively.

The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the new UN role in 1998: "Our job is to intervene: to prevent conflict where we can, to put a stop to it when it has broken out, or—when neither of those things is possible—at least to contain it and prevent it from spreading."(cited in Doyle and Sambanis,2006)

It is gradually becoming better understood that the environmental challenges associated with climate change contain important threats to international peace and security. The Council meetings, statements and resolutions on the rule of law, women and peace and security, children in armed conflict, protection of civilians in armed conflict, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and organized crime and trafficking, refugee flows have contributed to strengthening the Council's understanding of and preparedness to deal with new and evolving threats to international peace and security.

Seen from this perspective, the end of the Cold War and the emerging international system were characterized by the increasing possibilities for international cooperation. Therefore, in the new era the Security Council was able to realize its powers and orchestrate the collective security system initially laid down in the Charter. By taking a broad interpretation of the Chapter VII

powers the SC was successful in accommodating humanitarian intervention within the UN system and providing it with a certain degree of legitimacy. It held that sovereignty should be accompanied by responsibility. (Thakur, 2006) The states should protect its people and cannot deprive them of universal human rights. But this interpretation undermines the current inter-state system drastically. It is because of this that humanitarian intervention still remains an exception rather than a rule. Humanitarian intervention takes place mostly when there is a consensus among major global powers to mobilize the UN mechanism to address humanitarian emergencies.

Disarmament

In the post cold war world, UNO has given highest priority to reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons, destroying chemical weapons and strengthening the prohibition against biological weapons — all of which pose the greatest threat to humankind. The sad events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, and subsequent terrorist attacks in a number of countries, underlined the possible danger of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-state actors. Reflecting these concerns, the General Assembly adopted at its fifty seventh session in 2002, for the first time, a resolution on measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. In 2004, the Security Council took its first formal decision on the danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly to non-state actors.

During and after the cold war, the two major powers arrived at agreements that have significantly reduced the threat of nuclear war. In 1996, an overwhelming majority of General Assembly members adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), to ban any nuclear-test explosions anywhere. CTBT was opened for signature in 1996. Of the 44 states listed in its Annex II whose ratification is required before the Treaty can enter into force, 10 have not yet signed or ratified the instrument. The UN Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Depositary of the Treaty, has convened five Conferences between 1997 and 2007 on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT. To date, 182 states have signed the CTBT treaty, and 155 have ratified it.

Yet, entry into force remains no where in sight. The United States and China, have signed but not ratified the treaty.

Following the end of the cold war, the international community was confronted with the eruption of intra-state conflicts in many parts of the world, in which small arms and light weapons were the weapons of choice. Though not the root cause of conflict, these weapons exacerbate violence, facilitate the use of child combatants, hinder humanitarian assistance and delay post-conflict reconstruction and development. Controlling the proliferation of illicit weapons is thus a necessary step towards better international, regional or national control over all aspects of the issue of small arms. In 2001, an international Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was held at the United Nations. In order to contribute to confidence building and security among states, the General Assembly established the *United Nations Register of Conventional Arms* in 1992. This voluntary reporting arrangement enables participating governments to provide information on the export and import of seven categories of major conventional weapons systems: warships, large-calibre artillery; and missiles and missile-launchers, including short-range man-portable air-defence systems.

The United Nations undertakes information and education activities on multilateral disarmament in the framework of its Disarmament Information Programme — through publications, special events, meetings, seminars, panel discussions, exhibits and a comprehensive website on disarmament issues.

Combating Terrorism

In September 2006, the member states started a new phase in their counter-terrorism efforts by agreeing on a **global strategy to counter terrorism**. With this strategy all Member States of the United Nations have agreed to a common strategic and operational framework to fight terrorism.

The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) which was established in 2005 by the Secretary-General works to ensure overall coordination among at least two dozen entities throughout the United Nations system involved in counter-terrorism efforts. The UN is concerned and tries to take steps to tackle rapidly evolving threat posed by the exploitation of

technological advances by terrorists and non-State actors, including their use of the Internet and recent developments in nuclear, chemical and biological technology.

UN and International Law

In its resolution 54/28 17 November 1999, the General Assembly referred to the significant achievements in the development and promotion of international law which occurred during the Decade, which had contributed to the strengthening of the rule of international law, and reaffirmed the continued validity of the main objectives of the Decade, the fulfillment of which was essential to achieving the purposes of the United Nations.

The key events of this period were the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; the establishment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; and the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. It will also be remembered for the establishment of the two ad hoc international criminal tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, respectively, and for the holding of the 1998 Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of the International Criminal Court, resulting in the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Sustainable Development

The realization that environmental challenges associated with climate change contain important threats to international peace and security focused the attention of UN towards this sector. It was felt that the needs of the present should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is the concept of sustainable development. Seen as the guiding principle for long-term global development, sustainable development consists of three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection.

The Kyoto Protocol (KP) was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997. Due to a complex ratification process, it entered into force on 16 February 2005. The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets. In fact, the Kyoto Protocol is what operationalizes the Convention. It commits industrialized countries to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions based on the principles of the Convention. The Convention itself only encourages countries to do so.

KP only binds developed countries because it recognizes that they are largely responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere, which are the result of more than 150 years of industrial activity. During the Cold War, the main axis around which world affairs rotated was East–West, today this has been replaced by a North–South axis. The Copenhagen conference of 2009 on climate change was not quite successful partly because of the opposing and clashing worldviews of the global North and South.

Rio+20 – the short name for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development took place in Rio de Janerio, Brazil, in June 2012. It attempted to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous would for all. Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where countries adopted Agenda 21 – a blueprint to rethink economic growth, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection – the UN once again brought together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of smart measures that can reduce poverty while promoting decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources.

The very feature that gives the United Nations its unique legitimacy viz., universal membership, also makes it an inefficient body for making, implementing and enforcing collective decisions.

Millennium Development Goals

At the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, the world leaders officially set eight goals to be achieved by all member states by 2015. These goals were considered basic to a dignified human existence and aimed to eradicate disparity and injustices subjected to the weak

and vulnerable people of the world. All United Nation member states (193 at present) and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve these goals by the year 2015. The goals are:

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women,
4. Reducing child mortality rates,
5. Improving maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability and
8. Developing a global partnership for development.

Targets for each of these goals have been fixed, along with dates of fulfilling those targets. With the declaration of MDGs in 2000, the UN is working assiduously towards fulfilling them by 2015.

In the developing regions, the proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 24 per cent in 2008. In 2008, about 110 million fewer people than in 2005 lived in conditions of extreme poverty. The number of extreme poor in the developing regions fell from over 2 billion in 1990 to less than 1.4 billion in 2008. It is heartening to learn that in the developing regions, the proportion of children under age five who are underweight declined from 29 per cent in 1990 to 18 per cent in 2010. Enrolment rates of children of primary school age increased significantly in sub-Saharan Africa, from 58 to 76 per cent between 1999 and 2010. Barring sub-Saharan Africa, more than 90 per cent of children of primary school age were enrolled either in primary or secondary schools in 2010. In four developing regions (Northern Africa, Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and South-Eastern Asia), at least 95 per cent of primary-age children were in school.

Progress in reducing under-five mortality has also been spectacular since 1990. In the developing regions, the mortality rate declined by 35 per cent, from 97 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 63 in 2010. Northern Africa already has achieved the MDG 4 target, bringing down the child mortality rate by 67 per cent, and Eastern Asia is close, with a 63 per cent decline. Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have achieved reductions of only around 30 per cent, less than half of what is required to reach the target. It is reassuring that fewer people are becoming infected with HIV, with the decline in new infections happening faster in some countries than in others. Of the 33 countries where new infections have fallen, 22 are in sub-Saharan Africa, the region most affected by the AIDS epidemic. Annual new infections in 2010— 2.7 million people, 390,000 of whom were children— were 21 per cent lower than the 1997 peak and 15 per cent lower than in 2001. Sanitation coverage increased from 36 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent in 2010 in the developing regions as a whole. The share of urban slum residents in the developing world declined from 39 per cent in 2000 to 33 per cent in 2012. More than 200 million of these people gained access to improved water sources, improved sanitation facilities, or durable or less crowded housing, thereby exceeding the MDG target. (MDG Annual Report 2012)

Thus a plethora of activities, each important than the other, each contributing to uplift human lives the world over have been undertaken by the UN in the post cold war phase also. These efforts in no less measure promote a general climate of peace and harmony. There have been phases of highs and lows depending on the changing situations and milieus but the UN stayed the course.

The goings were really tough for the UN during the cold war, still it steered the world and saved it from another world war. Now although the cold war is formally over but due to historical residues, glimpses of old time rivalry can be discerned from time to time. The international scenario is always in a flux. China is graduating to be a super power, Russia too is trying to regain its earlier heft, and the developing nations are more vocal and demand fair treatment in economic, social and political relations. UN's ability to adapt, adjust and advance will never diminish its importance beyond a point. Its role during and after the cold war,

makes it indispensable in international relations and an important player in global governance.

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