International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies, Vol. 2, No 4, December, 2015.
Website: http://www.rcmss.com. ISSN: 2354-1598 (Online) ISSN: 2346-7258 (Print)
Mohd Aarif Rather & Kishor Jose, 2015, 2(4):53-60

UNITED NATIONS AND THE US HEGEMONY IN THE POST- COLD WAR WORLD ORDER

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Abstract

After the end of bipolar world order, many internal conflicts broke out in different parts of the globe. This changing nature of conflicts made it imperative for the UN to launch a new era of humanitarian interventions into domestic affairs, state sovereignty etc. The period also provides an opportunity for the international community to realize the regulation of international conflict through the UN structure. At the same time, the US retained the status of world's most powerful nation in terms of militarily and economic capabilities. However, the US has been inconsistent towards the UN vis-à-vis in helping to maintain international peace and stability. Instead, it has used the UN and many other organisations associated with it only to serve its interests. There are instances wherein UN is used to legitimise US direct or indirect military interventions in many parts of the globe and also instances wherein US has failed to achieve its desired outcome through UN against such interventions. Many scholars like Anna Cornelia Beyer describe global governance as a product of American leadership, so it can be viewed as hegemonic governance. Wherein Mearsheimer and Joseph Nye argue that, the USA is not a true hegemon because it has neither the financial nor the military resources to impose a proper, formal, global hegemony. Thus, the paper attempts to analyse the nature of the post-cold war world order, whether it can be viewed as US Hegemony. Further, the study will examine the possibility of restructuring the UN in order to respond the challenges faced by it.

Keywords: United Nations, Conflicts, US, Cold war, hegemony.

Introduction

After the end of Second World War, the United Nations (UN) came into existence in 1945 for the purpose of preventing the succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which the mankind has witnessed twice. It has also undertaken the responsibility of maintaining the world peace and order. The drafters of the UN Charter intended to create the organisation as an entire spectrum of conflict resolution and management ranging from preventive measures to crises and to the long term stabilisation of conflict areas. However, the cold war period remained dominated by the bipolar world order. After, the end of cold war, the UN was confronted with two major challenges. Firstly, the armed conflicts began to emerge more often at the intra- state level (conflicts that occur within the borders of states). It was assumed that the main threat to peace does not any more come from major inter-state confrontations, but from another source i.e, intra-state conflicts. Secondly, the scope and level of involvement had to change accordingly. Thus, the changing nature of conflicts in the post-cold war era made it imperative for the UN to launch a new era of humanitarian interventions (Osmancavusoglu 2000). But such interventions may sometimes come in conflict with the concept of state sovereignty.

The period from 1988 to the present witnessed nearly 47 conflicts in which the UN intervened and among them only three were inter-state in character. They are Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, Chad-Libya border conflict in 1994 and Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute in 1998-2000. But, the UN cannot be said to have well prepared to deal with intra-state conflicts as it was primarily designed to cope with inter-state problems which were treated as the main threat to world peace and security.On the other hand, the internal conflicts occur within the borders of states made major international actors including the UN reluctant to intervene. The reason behind is being two folded- firstly, for legal concerns and secondly, to avoid probable loses. Therefore, unless conflicts really escalate, the UN has preferred not to get involved in any of the intra-state conflicts (Yilmaz 2007). At the same time, the role played by the United States (US) cannot be undermined.

The US has played a vital role in the formation of UN and is often claimed as its main founder. After the end of Second World War, the US wields a great deal of influence at the United Nations and also felt the responsibility to defend the nation- states. The basic purpose of US strategy to establish the UN was to improve upon the League of Nations in two fundamental ways. One was to do everything possible in order to attain the collaboration among the great powers as the cornerstone of the peacekeeping system. The other was to strengthen the organization's social and economic programs as the best long range means of preventing the occurrence of future wars **(**Haviland1965). It further moulded other nations according to its own image as well as conducted diplomacy across the globe without hindrance from any extreme minority or undeserving majority. In addition, the US in greater terms was able to actualize most of its UN initiatives and establish its world legitimacy at the UN General Assembly (Sarsar 2004).Thus, the relationship of the US to the United Nations has come under special scrutiny for reasons that it has been utilized in the past, or can be used in the future, as an instrument of US foreign policy.

In the aftermath of World War II, the US started to play a role of the hegemon in the international system. As it played a leading role in establishing global institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Bretton Woods system as well as a host of others. The US dominated the functioning of these institutions and thereby fitting its hegemonic role of upholding the rules. Also, the United States has played a consistent role as the ultimate mediator and arbiter of international conflicts since the end of Second World War (Szayna et al 2001). In addition, the US has dominated the international system in material terms as it has the strongest economy on a global scale vis-à-vis had the only military with truly global reach. But on the other hand, scholars like Mearsheimer and Huntington suggest that we are already living in a multipolar world and the US is just only one pole among many. They are of the view that mainly the BRIC States including Brazil, Russia, India and China account for powers that need to be counted in, with are source and militarily strong Russia and economically emergent China. Moreover, the EU as a whole is as stronger as the US in economic terms. It is the only match to the United States in economic terms at the global level. Thus, it leads one to say that we are already living in a multipolar world where no state solely dominates (Beyer 2012).

On the other hand, the UN has been under a constant state of transition from various international stakeholders as they desire to seek ways in order to improve the effectiveness as well as efficiency of the UN system. Also, the matters related to the Iraq Oil-For-Food Program[i], charges of sexual abuse by UN during peace-keeping operations etc have focused changing attention on the need for improving and restructuring of the UN. In addition, the heads of UN member states in September 2005 met for the World Summit at its Headquarters in New York in order to discuss the strengthening of United Nations through institutional reform. The outcome of the summit sought to lay the emphasis upon a series of reforms including establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, enlarging the membership of UN Security Council and creating a new Human Rights Council (Blanchfield 2011). Apart from this, the scores of governmental studies, independent commissions and scholars through the years have put forward many proposals aimed at making the UN work better, modify its mandate, decide more fairly or operate more efficiently (Luck 2003).Thus, the reformation or restructuring of UN becomes desperate in order to maintain peace and order across the globe.

United Nations in the post cold era

After the end of cold war, the international arena witnessed a considerably changed environment. The disintegration of the Soviet bloc reduced the hostility and the suspicion in the post cold era between the

two power blocs, which represented and dominated the entire global politics during the cold war. The absence of power blocs in the immediate bi-polar world gave an impetus to the role of UN in the field of international peace and security. Also, the period was marked by the new willingness among the permanent members to co-operate which was earlier missing due to old hostilities for dealing with the crises vis-à-vis carrying out their primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In addition, the right to use the veto power by each side to block decisions in the past was left aside in the new environment. The Gulf war was perceived to be the first instance of showing the new willingness among the super powers to cooperate for the preservation of world peace as well as stop the aggressor states through collective security. Within this context, the UN not only condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 but also imposed economic sanctions on it (Latif 2000).

The Gulf war was although the last case of the traditional kind of inter-state conflicts. However, on the other hand, many intra-state conflicts in the form of civil wars and ethnic conflicts broke out in different parts of the globe in this period. Such conflicts include former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti and arguably the acts of terrorism since 2001 (Kenneth 2006). These conflicts demanded UN to take pro-active role and as a result military operations of the UN increased immensely. In 1993, the UN operated 18 peacekeeping missions and deployed around 80,000 troops under these operations (Osmancavusoglu 2000).Through these operations, the UN expanded its constitutional powers into fields of human rights, democratic governance, international criminal justice and international terrorism. But, on the other hand, it failed to stop the tragedies that take place in former Yugoslavia, Haiti, Somalia or Rwanda etc and the role of UN was widely criticised.

The United Nations has also been unable to stop a number of wars since 1948 till today like the conflict between Arab-Palestine and Jews; and the case of Somalia. In 1991, the situation in Somalia deteriorated and broke into civil war on the grounds when their president Said Barre was overthrown. Under such circumstances, the armed factions and warlords violently started competing for political and economic dominance. The situation worsened as communication and food supplies broke down and thousands of refugees started fleeing into neighbouring states. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) asked the UN to intervene and the UN send 37,000 peacekeeping forces in order to ensure the aid distribution as well as to restore law and order by disarming the tribal warlords. But the UN failed to provide any fruitful gains and withdrew all its forces in March 1995 (Falk 1995).On the contrary, the UN and its agencies have shown great concern and ability to aid social, economic and cultural development vis-à-vis to settle regional disputes to the possible extent. Moreover, it had played a vital role in giving protection to people suffering from the diseases like AIDS small pox, Malaria etc and has rendered useful humanitarian services. The UN has also provided a great assistance and relief to the refugees across the globe (Yatnoor 2006)**.** In addition, it had successfully solved numerous disputes like the disputes between Syria and Lebanon, the Korean War crises (1950-53), the Suez crisis (1956), the Congo crisis (1960-64), the Cambodian crisis (1975 onwards), the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88), the Afghanistan (1990-2000) tragedy and so on (Falk 1995).

In the present times, the role played by the UN is viewed with widespread scepticism and is believed that the organisation has been unable to achieve its noble aims and objectives. To maintain the peace and security in the world, the UN had set for itself two major objectives i.e, establishment of a New International Economic Order and disarmament and arms control. But almost seven decades of its working reveal the complete failure. Although, it has passed several resolutions regarding the disarmament, but the world never witnessed any reduction in arms race and even not a single weapon has been destroyed. Even the UN has only played a marginalised role in several disarmament and arms control agreements like INF Treaty, SALT I, SALT II, the NPT and MBFR accord in Europe**(**Radha 2003).

The UN in the 21st century confronts with the denial of necessary funds by some member states making it difficult for the organisation to cope up the crises situations in early times. The specialised agencies like WFO, UNESCO, FAO etc who have been created to serve these ends have not yielded the desired results due to the financial crises. The lack of funds therefore puts a limit to the role of UN vis-à-vis its attempts to what it can do and intends to do **(**Radha 2003).

In contemporary times, it is widely perceived that the UN is an association of "divided nations" having a little commitment for the aims and objectives as set by its Charter. The member-states as well as various groups of such states are primarily interested to achieve their national or group interests which are often in conflict with the interests of the international community. During the cold war period and aftermath, the UN has been largely dominated by powerful and rich nations who have numerous times ignored or violated the spirit of the UN charter. Moreover, the five permanent members of UN Security Council regard themselves as the guardian of peace and security across the globe and have not equally treated other UN members as their equals. The domination of a great power lies in the fact that if it is involved in a conflict, it intends to keep the conflict aloof from the UN jurisdiction. At the same time, it insists on applying UN laws to a conflict between poor or smaller nations (Yatnoor 2006).

To sum up, the UN over the years appears to have become a mere peace-keeping machine and the General Assembly as an unwieldy debating community of member states. The agencies of UN spreading over different continents have become overlapping in their operations. However, in spite of all these failures, it would be wrong to assume that UN has been a complete failure. In several areas, the UN has successfully led the way towards notable social developments as well as humanitarian causes. Also, it has been always played an active role in rehabilitation, relief and development works across the globe. In addition, the UN aided the birth of more than 100 newly independent states, fought against racial and other forms of discrimination vis-a-vis encouraged development through economic cooperation. Furthermore, it had codified and enlarged international law of the sea as well as protection of global commons. The poorer countries had always received inspiration and developmental assistance from the UN. It has also initiated joint action on supranational issues like environmental protection, ozone depletion as well as terrorism **(**Radha 2003).

Perceptions on the US as a Hegemon

The period of cold war from 1945-1989 characterized the pattern of international politics in a bipolar world with two power blocs namely the United States and the Soviet Union balancing each other as well as providing relative stability in international relations. However, the disintegration of Soviet Union and the victory of capitalism over communism left the US as the only remaining superpower dominating the international system and shaping the future of global politics. In terms of its military and air force capabilities, the US can target any country in the world as well as can deal with a conflict without deploying ground forces. For instance, the air campaign in Kosovo after which the US was considered as “hyper power” by the French foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine. Also, the progress in global finance and marketing, the achievement of international institutions envisioned by the US for peace-making and world democracy, advancement in science and technology makes it unparalleled all around the world (De Votta 2005).

The capability of US was further accelerated with the advent of globalisation which allowed its multinational corporations into every major market possible. It enjoys a rich cultural heritage and has an incredible reach to the remotest corners of the globe as its products can be found in every spot found on the world map. Moreover, its rapid development in world communication that connects the farthest regions more closely than ever before, have become important attributes of a promising peaceful global order(Geir 1994).In the words of John Ikenberry, no other great power ever enjoyed the privilege of having such advantages in political, economic, cultural and technological spheres as the US does. He further argues that “we live in a one-superpower world, and there is no serious competitor in sight”.

Today, the US hegemony is seen to extend well beyond the management of the international economy to include international security, rule making and management in areas of international development, peacekeeping, nation-building, democratic transition as well as human rights. The hegemonic character of the US can be also perceived in the contents of countless regimes that regulate global relations within several issues areas composing current political economy and world politics. To those who perceive the world being managed today by the hegemony of the world’s only remaining superpower understand global organizations mainly functioning as creators, monitors as well as enforcers of international regimes. Thus, the hegemony of US, both logically and practically implies US domination of global organizations most notably the international economic and financial institutions vis-à-vis the United Nations (Puchala 2005).

In the context of United Nations, various scholars have claimed that it acts as the servant of a long-standing US hegemony. During the early years of the Cold War period, the UN has been frequently used as an instrument of US foreign policy. For instance, the cases like Korea, the Congo, Suez, condemnation of Iran in 1979 as well as censuring the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Puchala 1982-83). Also, the hegemonic character of US in the United Nations reflects from the fact that during the era of North-South relations when the views of the majority of the membership shifted, the hegemony of the US was to be observed in the several things that did not happen at the United Nations. The China was being denied of membership until Washington decided otherwise. In addition, during the 1970s, the New International Economic Order failed to emerge mainly because the United States opposed it. In 1990s, the US have attempted to stop the Vienna Conference on Human Rights from turning into an Asian and Islamic celebration of cultural relativism vis-a-vis stopped an effective and timely UN response to the genocide in Rwanda as US was still smarting from its failure in Somalia. Moreover, the US stopped the Kyoto protocol from moving the developed world through international legal sanction in order to protect its own national interests. This widely held impression at the United Nations gives an insight that the UN remains largely a US-controlled organization.

For understanding international relations more broadly and the predominant position of the US in the world more specifically, Anna Cornelia Beyer argues that both the material and ideational factors are necessary. She contends that the US is not only the great power but also the most dominant in both the ideational dimension (its discourse and ideology) as well as in the material dimension (its economy, armaments) which together make it a global hegemon. In material terms, the US dominates the entire international system as it had the strongest economy on a global scale. Also, it had the only military with truly global reach and no state has the chance to challenge the US military. The US hegemony rests on material foundations but is created and maintained through ideas. Apart from the material might, the US has played a legitimate leadership role in combating global terrorism as well as its participation in counterterrorism measures showing the ideological influence (Beyer 2012).

Anna Beyer further supporting her arguments by claiming that in the case of ASEAN, the economic power is dominant but still US is believed by these nations to be a legitimate leading state. The effects of soft power exercise in hegemony are even stronger as the EU not only recognises and accepts the leading role of the US but it also accepts the US dominated discourse on contemporary terrorism and security threats. This indicates that the US leads by using both ideological and material aspects of power. She claims that neither ASEAN nor EU could lead by military and economic power alone because their leadership would have difficulty to create consensus on which hegemony is based. On the other hand, the US uses its power in different forms to govern the world in a hegemonic manner (Beyer 2012).

On the contrary, there exists a conflicting view among others regarding the hegemonic nature of US. To them, neither US is a global hegemon nor there existed unipolarity in the contemporary world order. For instance, Mearsheimer and Huntington argued we are living in a multipolar world in which United States is just one pole among many countries. They contended that mainly the BRIC states including Brazil, Russia, India and China account for powers that need to be counted in, with a resource and militarily strong Russia and economically emergent China. Today, Russia and China have the conventional capabilities to give the US a good fight in a major war and they both possess the great capabilities of nuclear arsenals. It would not be easy to conquer either of the two countries in a conventional warfare and as such both qualify as great powers. This implies that we are already living in a multipolar world where no state solely dominates. They further claimed that the European Union is not a pole and the EU as a whole is similarly strong as the United States in economic terms. Globally, it is the only match to the United States in economic terms (Mearsheimer2008).

Similarly, Joseph S. Nye claims that the US is not a true hegemon. He argues that if hegemony means being able to dominate or dictate on the rules and arrangements by which international relations are conducted, then the US is hardly a hegemon today. For instance, the US does have a predominant voice and vote in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but does not have a free hand in choosing the director. In the World Trade Organization (WTO), it has not been able to prevail over Japan and Europe. It could not prevent International Landmines Treaty to come into existence despite its strong opposition. Also, in 2003, the US could not even obtain the votes of Chile and Mexico when it sought second

resolutions in the UN Security Council to authorize its invasion of Iraq. Although, these countries are sometime described as belonging to the American sphere of influence, the US could not even get the permission of Turkey's for its troops to cross the country in order to invade Iraq from the north. In this context, if hegemony is defined more modestly as a condition where one nation has significantly more capabilities or power resources than others, then it simply indicates American preponderance, but not necessarily control or dominance. After the 2nd World War, when the US controlled half the world's economic production, it was not even able to prevail in all of its objectives (Nye 2008).

Joseph Nye further argued that in contemporary times, power is distributed among the nations in a way that resembles a complex three dimensional chess game. On the top, military power is largely unipolar. In this case, the US is the only country having intercontinental nuclear weapons and large state-of-the-art air, ground and naval forces capable of global deployment. However, on the middle, economic power is multipolar with the Europe, US and Japan representing two-thirds of world product vis-à-vis with China, India, and others becoming major players. Thus, in the economic dimension, the US must not be claimed as hegemon which has led some observers like Samuel Huntington to call it a hybrid uni-multipolar world. At the bottom of chessboard is the realm of transnational relations that cross borders out side the control of governments and includes diverse actors ranging from bankers which electronically transfer sums greater than most national budgets, the terrorists transferring weapons or hackers threatening cyber security. Thus at this level, power is widely dispersed and it makes no sense to speak of hegemony, unipolarity or multipolarity (Nye 2008).

To sum up, it may be assessed that there exists an ambiguity regarding the hegemonic nature of US. There are instances where it can be safely assumed that US has the potential to dominate the international relations mostly on material grounds. In contrast, the complex web of emerging nations and organisations in contemporary times has put severe challenges to its hegemonic role.

Restructuring the UN

The UN was created to maintain peace and security, foster economic growth and social development as well as uphold respect for human rights. The organisation served as a platform to the member states where they discuss global issues and set global standards. In due course of time, the UN has undergone an intense expansion of its operations, functions and budgets. In contemporary times, it is involved in a wide range of activities ranging from peacekeeping and peace building to the struggle against poverty as well as diseases like AIDS vis-à-vis promotion of the Millennium Development Goals. For the successful operation of these activities, it received a proper support from wide range of partners including nation states, civil society, regional organizations and private-sector companies. But in spite of the apparent support and increased allocation of resources for the UN, a great level of dissatisfaction has been raised from time to time which frequently triggering demands for fundamental reforms as well as restructuring.

During the cold war period, the UN was mostly dominated by the power blocs and more particularly by the US which had often used it as an instrument to secure its own national interests. However, after the end of cold war, the UN has become highly involved in intra-state conflicts which made it imperative to intervene in the internal matters of member states. This approach of UN has been questioned more particularly by the developing countries for reformation as well as restructuring. Apart from this, the effectiveness and legitimacy of the organization were also questioned in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack of2001 as well as the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Moreover, the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme in Iraq raised issues of integrity and management competence. In addition, the apparent shortcomings in the human rights machinery vis-a-vis peacekeeping came to the forefront. On the other hand, the services of the UN were in demand as for instance, peacekeeping operations were almost doubled in the recent years and now account for half of its activities (Luck2003).

In response to these crises, the workings of the UN were questioned and there were discussions on the reformation of the organization. In this context, the world summit at the UN headquarters among heads of member states took place in September 2005 to discuss strengthening the organisation through institutional reform. The outcome of the summit sought to lay the groundwork for a series of reforms including the establishing a Peace building Commission, enlarging the UN Security Council, establishing a Democracy Fund, strengthening the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) vis-à-vis creating a

new Human Rights Council. The member states also reached a consensus of improving internal UN oversight capacity, enhancing its whistle-blower protection, establishing a U.N. ethics office as well as reviewing all U.N. mandates five years or older **(**Blanchfield 2011)**.**

After the end of bipolar world order, the questions were also raised by the member states regarding the restructuring of UN Security Council. Across the globe, there are two divergent views within member states in relation with the restructuring of the Council. The first view argues that restructuring the Security Council is only a question of its continuing legitimacy. To them, expansion in its membership could help enhance its authority and it would eventually become most powerful organ of the UN vis-à-vis could make it more transparent. While the others hold that restructuring the Security Council is only about increasing their own power in order to increased influence over UN system. Largely, it seemed that the powerful or large nations favoured the inclusion of new permanent members mainly themselves. But their regional rivals or the developing countries preferred adding more non-permanent seats in the Security Council. Accordingly, the debate quickly created three main blocs among the member state.

The first bloc constituted Italy, Spain, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, South Korea, Pakistan as well as some other countries (known as the Coffee-Club, which was later renamed as Uniting for Consensus) called for the creation of more non-permanent seats with members to be elected on a regional basis but strictly opposed adding any new permanent seats. These countries claiming that any increase in the permanent seats would violate the principle of sovereign equality as well as would create new centres of power, both within and outside the UN. The second bloc including India, Brazil, Germany, Japan (Group of Four or G4 countries) and their supporters on the other hand have always demanded for the creation of new permanent seats. Among them, Japan and Germany claim permanent seats on the grounds of being the major donors of the UN. India did so as the second largest country in the world in terms of population, with one of the world's largest economies and the 3rd largest contributor of troops to UN peace-keeping missions. Similarly, Brazil claims on being the largest country in terms of population, territory and economy in South America. Moreover, India and Brazil have also increasingly based their claims on their status as being the leading countries of the global south. While as the third bloc including the countries of Africa (African Union) have strongly call for the two permanent seats in the Security Council for Africa. They claim that it is the only continent not having any permanent seat and this historical injustice has eschewed the balance of the Council. Presently, their claim is based on the Ezulwini-Consensus[ii]. Among them South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria are among the main contenders for permanent seats (Freiesleben 2008).

Conclusion

The paper has made an attempt to analyse the nature of the post-cold war world order in relation to the hegemonic nature of US. It has been evident that UN has played very little role or no role in many of the international conflicts. Also, in majority of the cases, the UN interventions have had a US interest involved. However, based on large scale international criticism, some of the issues (as observed in the paper) were taken to UN, but the outcome has always been in favour of US and its allies. The role of US in present international domain is largely hegemonic in a traditional perspective but not in a modern contemporary sense of global power politics that is perceived by many to be a multipolar world. In this changing nature of global power equations the relevancy of UN is of utmost importance, however, it has to undergo reformation and restructuring ensuring democratic governance, accountability and transparency. It had also to consider the aspirations of many other nation states particularly the developing or third world countries.

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Notes

[i]The Iraq Oil-For-Food Program was established under the United Nations Security Council's Resolution no. 986 under which Iraq was permitted by the UN to sell oil on the world markets in exchange of essential commodities like medicine, food and other humanitarian needs. The program also imposed restrictions to Iraq of not enhancing its military capabilities.

[ii]A common position adopted by the members of the African Union in 2005 demanding two permanent seats in the UN Security Council on the basis of rotation within the group.