

The end of the cold war politics essay



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The question of changing patterns of violence at the end of the Cold War is a valid one, especially when considering the changes which took place in the world order after the fall of the Soviet Union. There were many questions which freely circulated when the Berlin Wall fell, i. e. what would define the future order of international politics, and would it be safe to assume that there is a new world order, the essence of which rests in the hegemony of the victor; the United States of America? To address the question of imminent violence across the globe, firstly we have to address the state in which the geo-political order was left at the end of the Cold War. For four decades, the world saw the international arena divided into two spheres of power; the USA and the USSR. Conflicts, even politics could easily be placed into either sphere and there was an orderly definition in political behavior. In other words, even in a sense of misbalance, there was balance.

For forty-two years, the international arena saw conflict defined by a struggle of ideological supremacy; Marxist-Leninist on one side and democratic capitalism on the other. In such a scenario, foreign policy of the superpowers was clearly defined. Consequently, there were three periods over which the course of the Cold War was carried out; 1945-1962 was the period of 'Confrontation'; 1963-1978 was emphasized by a desire by both superpowers to 'peacefully coexist', otherwise known as the period of 'Détente'; and 1979-1991 was a period of 'Renewed Confrontation'. For four years the United States alone had the power of the atomic bomb but this in no way deterred the Soviet Union's plan for expanding the Communist regime (Kegley, Wittkopf 2004). In 1949, they too could boast of being part of the 'Nuclear Club', hence a period of bipolarity began in which both the

superpowers foreign policy could be clearly defined. The US enthusiastically followed the policy of 'containment' under the Truman Doctrine, while the Soviets continued to try and increase their power whenever opportunity allowed them to.

This era was defined by the growing threat of the arms race, eventually leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Under the threat of mutual destruction, the only option open to both powers was to agree to peacefully coexist and foreign policy shifted toward détente, as seen under both Kennedy and Nixon. However, this situation could not last for long because a new conflict, that in the Persian Gulf and Middle East had arisen; this conflict itself, the strategic importance of this area, the lure of the oil empire made it imperative for the US to protect its Gulf interests. The Middle Eastern conflict was defined not only by the rise of the revolutionary regime of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, but also that of the Palestinian crisis which seemed to be coming to the forefront as Palestinian resistance had started to grow and raise its voice. Much more urgent was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, an event which caused the military struggle for supremacy of powers to rise once again. This opened yet another chapter of proxy wars on the global forefront; a chapter that is yet to close and the consequences of which can be seen even today.

At the end of the Cold War, with USSR's peaceful retreat from superpower status, the world retreated into anarchy. For the realist school of thought, superpowers' struggle for supremacy never ends and it would soon result in another power rising to challenge US supremacy. To what extent does this theory reflect the truth? At the end of the Cold War, many theories emerged

as to what would be the future of the global politics of power? The world had witnessed a bipolar conflict. What was the new world order and how would it be defined? Was the United States a new power center? Was the world now unipolar or multipolar? What was the role of nonstate actors in global politics? These were the questions faced by theorists and many theories emerged.

First was the emergence of a twenty-first century multipolar world and the challenges brought around by multipolarity. A multipolar world order can be defined as having no single center of power but more than two dominant power centers, with the result that no single power can dominate the others. But does this necessarily mean that peace would reign and countries would not see any violence? This needs to be answered under the lens of the concept of globalization. What is globalization and how exactly can it be defined? 'Globalization' is shorthand for a cluster of interconnected phenomena that together are transforming world politics.' Friedman defines globalization as 'the integration of everything with everything else. A more complete definition is that globalization is the integration of markets, finance, and technology in a way that shrinks the world from a size medium to a size small' (Friedman 2002). Robert Kaplan has this to say about globalization, 'Today everything affects everything else. Good things are going to happen in a more global world but foreign policy crises are about what goes wrong. In the short run, I'm pessimistic. There is still nothing like a global leviathan or a centralizing force' (Kaplan 2002).

Globalization is essentially increasing integration and interdependence and this creates both opportunities and problems. In a multipolar world,

globalization means that economic and financial markets are linked together and trade and policy surrounding trade plays a greater part in politics and foreign policy decision making. This adds another precedent for countries to have relationships with each other on an economic front as well as rivalries based on trade relationships. In other words, 'Great powers are likely to go head-on-head on the economic battlefield'. This can be emphasized by the ongoing rivalry between regional trade blocks, for example that between China and Russia, and the United States, or the increasing isolation of Iran on the economic front with the Western powers, yet not with the Eastern powers, such as China and North Korea.

Second, taking into account Huntington's revolutionary theory of the 'Clash of Civilizations' (Huntington 1996) explains the increasing ongoing violence in a globalized world in great detail, answering many questions. What Huntington claimed to have said, based on the references from history, is that after the end of the ideological conflict between the Marxists and capitalists is essentially a conflict which is reflected by rivalry between the West and other emerging civilizations. The balance of power which existed between the two superpowers dominated all other forms of conflict until the balance of power shifted and the age-old conflicts found themselves on the rise again, in an increasingly interconnected world, thereby increasing the overall sense of anarchy. Another factor which has deep-rooted presence in global conflict is that of economics and how closely the economic success of the West is linked to failure in other cultures and identities. Incidentally, according to Huntington, the failure of Islamic regimes had to find a source

to blame its failure on, and that source became the capitalist ideology of the victor of the forty-two year conflict, the US.

What's interesting here is that the West, consciously or unconsciously realizing this antagonizing fact, had its own policy to stay in power. This is effectively described by Nye, who states the difference between 'hard' and 'soft' power and how both these forms of power are linked together. Hard power is basically a country's use of its military and economic power to retain its hegemony over other states, and soft power, as described by Nye, 'is the ability of a state to get other countries to want what it wants' (Nye 1990) through the appeal of its culture and ideology. Quoting Huntington is perhaps the best way to further stress this point, " Nye goes on to say that if a state's " culture and ideology are attractive, others will be more willing to follow" its leadership, and hence soft power is ' just as important as hard command power". What, however, makes culture and ideology attractive? They become attractive when they are seen as rooted in material success and influence. Soft power is power only when it rests in a foundation of hard power. Decreases in economic and military power lead to self-doubt and crises of identity" (Huntington 1996).

Analyzing this further, what Huntington states is essentially what defines the conflict existing in a globalized world today, i. e.:

The US, being the sole superpower both economically and militarily realizes the possibility of other powers rising to counter its hegemony, hence going on a pre-emptive ideological battle promoting its principles of democracy and capitalism.

Playing on its economic and military success by stressing its ideology of a free economy which has the power to grant such freedom to other nations, if only they follow the same principles.

Global South nations, increasingly handicapped first by playing host to the proxy wars as a result of the Cold War rivalry, and second, as being victims of ethnic and ideological hatred which erupted once the proxy governments set up by the superpowers fell.

The Global South's not such an unrealistic assumption that the West is to blame for its economic failure because of its role in the Cold War of effectively keeping war of its own soil and foisting it on countries which had hardly climbed out of post-colonial transition of power.

The Arms Race which had escalated beyond borders, resulting in the rise of small military juntas and locally armed conflict, especially between people of different ethnicities and cultures. String examples can be taken from the case of Somalia, Rwanda and Sudan in Africa, Afghanistan's Taliban in Asia, and the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict resulting in the Kosovo bombings of 1996.

The rise of international economic institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization and trade restrictions which has further angered the proponents of the North-South divide, resulting in more anti-Western sentiments and anger.

And lastly, the rise of a new threat altogether, that of 'terrorism', a threat that is not defined and is by no means limited to borders.

These factors on their own quite effectively define the prevalence of anarchy and violence in today's world. What makes the aftershocks more rampant is that truly the world is more greatly connected than it was. And secondly, the mere coincidence that those victimized in the Global South supposedly because of Westernization of cultures, are the followers of Islam, which is on its own a very powerful ideology. The failure of Islamic regimes echoes the sentiment that their rights have been taken away by Western capitalists. The Mid-East conflict and the unflinching US support of Israel greatly strengthen this sentiment. The isolation of Iran and the War on Terrorism itself was seen by Muslim nations as a war on Islam itself. In the eyes of rigid Islamists, globalization itself is based on Western technology, Western thought and Western commercialism. McDonalds, Facebook, and nowadays Apple's iTunes are all tools of a Western civilization's struggle to retain power.

In lieu of the discussion held above, let us penetrate a little deeper into the concept of ' globalization'. In globalization, we are faced with a global technological age, global economic and financial markets, and a powerful media with a global reach, as well interconnectivity between people and cultures. With the globalization of information we see a flow of information from the North to the South, without restraint, and the greatest example of this is that of WikiLeaks. Such a flow of information entails that no truth can remain hidden for long in an age where no boundaries are attached to the flow of information. With the globalization of trade we see the integration of global economic markets with the result that when one financial market collapses, the others do so one by one, which is displayed perfectly by the

Asian Currency Crisis in 1999 and the much more recent financial crisis of 2007-2008. Trade globalization has also brought to the forefront the issue of the MNCs and the fact that in order to earn higher revenues corporations have to relocate to other countries with a larger part of their revenues making its way back to their home country. This flight of capital essentially brings no benefits to many Global South countries in fact replacing national corporations, with the result that there are yet more power players for nation states to worry about. The trade globalization issue also opens up the conflict of 'hypocrisy' of Western nation states while promoting free trade- they are not seen to be enthusiastic followers of their own proposed strategy, thereby incurring even more censure from poorer nations. According to the World Bank, 'The United States, EU and Japan continue to maintain some of their highest tariffs on sugar, meats, fruits and vegetables, as well as textiles and footwear- precisely the kind of basic products in which developing countries enjoy a comparative advantage because of low labor costs.'

Lastly, this debate would not be complete until the issue of weapons proliferation and the twenty-first century armed conflict is addressed. This includes the rise of civil wars and regional conflicts, as well as ethnic warfare, failed states and terrorism. Civil wars, regional conflicts and ethnic cleansing were all seen to a great extent at the end of the Cold War. Between 1945 and 1981, 258 cases of ethnic warfare were observed, 40 percent of which involved high levels of violence (Carment 1993). The spillover from the Arms Race is clearly one cause of such occurrences. The other is state failure or civil disintegration, chances of which are higher in

autocratic governments, many of which were supported both by the US and the USSR. The eventual result was that once the US and USSR support was withdrawn, the states government faced administrative failure mostly because of an uprising from other factions in their countries.

Terrorism poses yet the greatest threat to the contemporary world order. Terrorist activities and instruments are varied and diverse and there are many instances of state sponsored terrorism in the modern world. State sponsored terrorism is the accusation the US leveled at Iran, Iraq and North Korea, under the Bush administration, and many other states leveled the same accusation at the US by supporting terrorist activities in countries like Nicaragua, Chile and Vietnam. No doubt that the rise of terrorism coupled with a race for arms and the Nth country problem (the addition of new nuclear states) greatly increased the threat faced from terrorists. In 2000, the Defense Monitor reported that 428 nuclear power and research reactors are in operation in forty-four countries. That number had increased today. Due to globalization, the scientific expertise required for weapons development has spread. " A large and growing number of states can now export material, equipment, technology and services needed to develop nuclear weapons" (Potter 1992). There are also leaks in nuclear export controls which have weakened the antiproliferation regime (Krepon 2002) as made evident by the network of A. Q Khan how easy it actually was to obtain highly sensitive nuclear documents and materials. After the fall of the Soviet Union a wide spectrum of problems arose on the global arena which has resulted in the kind of chaos, both economic and military, faced by the world today. The fact remains that globalization remains an elusive phenomenon,

leaving states to continuously struggle for peace and security in an increasingly insecure world.