

Towards A New World Order

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Teilhard de Chardin has shown that the world and man evolve in stages toward perfection. Each stage shows an improvement from the previous stage. The evolution of man is relatively recent compared to the evolution of the world and the universe. Therefore, man's evolution towards perfection is still going to take a long time. In this perspective, it appears to be too premature for Francis Fukuyama to predict the end of history with the victory of the ideas of liberalism-capitalism-democracy over socialism-communism-autocracy.

The end of the Cold War has to be studied as a stage in the evolution of civilization towards perfection. The current stage is definitely still far from that stage of perfection. The direction of developments in the post-Cold War era remains highly uncertain. What can thus far be said is that the end of the Cold War will bring about fundamental and systemic changes in international relations.

In discussing the future direction of global developments, it seems necessary for us to review the meaning of the "Cold War," its causes and its effects on international relations.

The Cold War was a total confrontation between two blocs, involving a clash of ideologies, political, social, and economic systems. As an ideology which served as the foundation for the Eastern bloc, Marxism-Leninism is now being discredited because of its failure both as a system of thought, and as a political and economic system. However, some of its aspects are still of some relevance although their implementation need not rest on the philosophy of historical-materialism or democratic centralism which has clearly failed. These relevant aspects include the dialectical way of thinking in analyzing social problems as well as the idea of social justice embedded in its philosophy.

The main reason for the decline of the Soviet Union as a superpower is the failure of its economic system. External factors, such as the pressures applied by the United States under the Reagan administration through the competition in costly new and advanced weapons, also contributed to the decline.

Will the Soviet Union become a threat again if in the future it resorts back to a confrontation posture in its foreign policy? This possibility seems to be remote because the Soviet Union will lack sufficient economic capabilities to support a confrontative policy. The Soviet's main challenge in the coming years is to be able to survive as a new confederation of nine, out of the fifteen, states.

The end of the Cold War has brought about systemic changes in international relations. The confrontation that began after the Second World War and which was so total in nature has ended, and with it the risk of a total war has been reduced. The Soviet Union is still a formidable military power, but because of its internal problems it does not have the political and economic stamina to engage in military adventurism. The danger would only arise with the return of a Stalinist dictatorship or a total disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, a Stalinist restoration appears to be remote; it cannot be sustained because foreign economic assistance will be withheld.

International relations in the post-Cold War era will not necessarily be free from conflicts. It will not be an era of eternal peace. However, the hope is for an emergence of a new world order that can effectively manage conflicts. There are a number of important challenges that the world faces in creating this new international order.

Both the US and the Soviet Union are entering an inward-looking phase because they face major internal problems. In fact, the Soviet Union is in a crisis so deep that its very survival is at stake. The US is also facing major challenges and its ability to overcome them will be critical to its future as a superpower. The main problem lies not only in the so-called twin deficits, but more fundamentally, in the areas of education, research, nationhood, the deterioration of physical infrastructure, and the health care system. These major domestic problems pose a constraint to its foreign and defense policies and therefore, the US cannot be relied upon to solve international problems and conflicts that do not have a direct effect upon its national interests.

It is questionable, therefore, whether the world has indeed moved from being bipolar to becoming unipolar. It appears to be more appropriate to argue that the world has become multipolar, except in the narrow military sense, which is still bipolar. This means that although the US is the only superpower which has a real influence in the political, economic, military, and even cultural fields, it will need to develop alliances in maintaining global peace and stability. The alliances could change in accordance with the problems that arise and the situations that develop. In this respect, the United Nations (UN) will play an increasingly important role to prevent and resolve regional and international conflicts.

Regional conflicts are likely to increase and not decrease as the superpowers are less capable of "controlling" regional actors. However, regional conflicts cannot easily escalate into major conflicts involving the US and the Soviet Union as during the Cold War. Of interest to note is the fact that as the world economy becomes more integrated, so too has nationalism become more pronounced. This is also accompanied by a process of fragmentation involving problems of ethnicity and religious differences both within a number of countries and between some countries. Primordial sentiments which were suppressed during the Cold War era have now come to the fore. On the other hand, regional cooperation and approaches to resolve regional problems and conflicts are given greater prominence because international approaches -- through the UN -- are felt to be inadequate. It is often the case that a regional resolution is sought first and becomes the basis for an international resolution, such as in the Cambodian problem.

The increased importance of economic problems in international relations had brought about new problems in the relations among allies, particularly between the US and Japan as well as between the US and Europe. In addition, frictions between the developed industrial countries and the developing countries continue to rise as economic relations between these two groups deteriorate. The problem has become more complicated because within the developing world itself, there are parts that are developing rapidly (East and Southeast Asia) and parts that are totally stagnant (Africa).

New issues in international relations, such as environmental degradation, migration, drug trade, terrorism, and the sales of mass destruction weapons, need to be tackled jointly. However, it is still unclear as to how these problems could be dealt with. International cooperation on these issues is still at its infancy and remains weak. In addition, most of these issues are

closely related to the internal developments of particular countries and are therefore very sensitive.

Finally, internal problems of countries, such as in the area of human rights, the political and economic system adopted by a country, national stability, and the rule of law, could all affect regional peace and stability when they lead to outside interventions. The interventions in Granada, Panama, and Liberia have not become a major international problem because of their limited international impacts. However, the aftermath of the Gulf war has brought forth the question of whether there is a procedure for international intervention in defense of a minority in a country, even though the country concerned has not made a request.

The above examination shows that with the end of the Cold War, international relations have entered a new phase. The experience from the Gulf war has demonstrated the importance of international cooperation through the UN and of regional cooperation in resolving conflicts.

US-Soviet Relations and the New World Order

As mentioned earlier, the US is facing major internal problems. It appears that in the years ahead the US will be forced to give greater attention to solving its domestic problems. Thus, the major constraint to a US role as an international leader is not "imperial overstretch" but because it is politically incapable of solving its internal problems. With the end of the Cold War, the American leaders have not found a new rationale for US leadership in the international arena. This does not mean, however, that the US will totally withdraw from the international scene as it did between the First and Second World War. The US has become more dependent on the world, especially in the economic field. Its exports amount to about 13% of GNP, involving 20% of its manufacturing products and 30% of its agricultural produce. It is often said that the American public now perceives the new threat to its security to come from international economic developments. Although the US faces many frictions in its external economic relations, these economic problems do not appear to be seen as a threat as concrete as the Soviet threat during the Cold War.

In order that the American public would accept US participation and leadership in creating a new world order, it is important that the cost to the US, both in financial and human terms, be reduced. Therefore, a new balance needs to be found between the objectives and the costs to meet those objectives. This may entail more limited objectives.

The weakening of the Soviet Union means that its role in the formulation of a new world order will be limited. However, this does not mean that it will not have any role to play, because its military capabilities are still enormous. And it is important that the Soviet Union be involved in the resolution of international and regional conflicts. In view of the severe economic and political crises in the Soviet Union, it can be expected that it will turn inward and would not be able to support a foreign policy posture that it has adopted

in the 1970s until the mid-1980s. Given its interests in economic development and political stability, the Soviet Union will not change its policy towards Central Europe. A compromise with Japan on the northern territories is likely, and the Soviet Union will also reduce its military presence in the Pacific. Together with the US and the UN, it will also seek to resolve regional conflicts, such as those in the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, and Cambodia.

It appears that the duopoly, involving the US and the Soviet Union, in the international arena will only be a feature of the current transition phase. The Soviet Union can still play a useful role in the resolution of international and regional conflicts, but the US appears to be the more active side. Current US-Soviet cooperation is mostly confined to the realm of security, since the Soviet role in international economic cooperation remains very limited. Since a great deal of its attention and energy will be devoted to internal problems, the role of the Soviet Union in the formulation of a new world order will not be too significant.

Regional Problems and the New World Order

The end of the Cold War does not mean the end of regional conflicts because many regional conflicts have their own origin. The conflicts in the Middle East, Cyprus, Cambodia, Kashmir, and the Korean Peninsula are some examples. Even Europe is not free from ethnic, regional, and religious conflicts that have been in existence for a long time but were suppressed during the Cold War.

The efforts to create a new world order have been strengthened by the outbreak of the Gulf war, which provided the world, for the first time after the ending of the Cold War, with a pure conflict situation in the sense that it involved a clear and direct aggression. In addition, the region concerned is of vital importance to the world because of its oil resources. Cooperation between the superpowers has also opened up the possibility of creating a new world order that is based on collective security.

It cannot be expected that other regional conflicts will be perceived as vital as the Gulf war so that they would lead the US to cooperate with the Soviet Union and other permanent members of the UN Security Council. Therefore, it is important that the UN be strengthened as a world body that could prevent and resolve conflicts. In addition, regional cooperation should also be promoted as a way to maintain regional peace, stability, and welfare.

Europe

In discussing about regional problems and institutions, it seems appropriate to first examine the developments in Europe. During the Cold War, this region was the main area of contention between the West and the East. Europe is also the most advanced in overcoming the division that was created after the Second World War. It is also ahead in the development of regional institutions.

With the signing of the CFE (Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe) and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which includes the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Soviet Union could no longer re-establish its control over the former members of the Warsaw Pact or divide Europe again. The thirty-four-nation CSCE, established by the Paris Treaty of November 19, 1990, is a regional body for European cooperation and collective security. At its initial stage, this body will function as a forum for dialogues on European security. Later, it could be developed into an organization that will manage Europe's political and security affairs. This could be realized if a common agreement can be reached on the idea of a European confederation as proposed by President Mitterand.

However, the CSCE still lacks a complete mechanism to manage Europe's security as demonstrated in its limited capabilities to help resolve the civil war in Yugoslavia. This seems to be the reason for maintaining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Western European Union (WEU), which could be seen as the military arm of the European Community (EC), has attempted to fill in the gap, but it has not been successful. Only nine of the twelve EC members are members of the WEU. The Gulf war and the civil war in Yugoslavia have shown the limited role that the EC can play as a political force. This is disappointing to Europe, especially in regard to resolving the Yugoslavian problem. The CSCE is also incapable because the Soviet Union refused to allow it to be involved in Yugoslavia as the civil war is seen by the Soviet Union as an internal problem which is outside the mandate of the body.

In addition to the creation of a new security structure in Europe, the relations with the US, and problems of ethnic and religious irredentist movements in Central Europe and the Balkans, Europe also has an important economic agenda. The important question is how Western Europe could incorporate Central Europe and the Soviet Union in the region's economic development. Should the EC give priority to the deepening of cooperation among its twelve members, or should it give priority now to the broadening of its membership?

Another issue for Europe is on Germany's future economic and politico-security roles. Developments leading to the unification of Germany have shown that Germany does not intend to go at it alone, but that it is seeking to continue to work with its European neighbors through the CSCE, the EC (and the WEU), and the NATO. The vacuum of political leadership in Europe suggests that the US will continue to play an important role in the continent. Now, this is performed through the NATO, but in the future this may be done within the CSCE or a new trans-Atlantic mechanism.

The euphoric mood in Europe, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, is now replaced by a sense of realism about the difficulties of creating a new security structure, of incorporating the Central European countries that are faced with severe economic and political crises, of dealing with uncertain developments in the Soviet Union, of deepening and broadening the EC, and of developing a European role outside the continent, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

The Middle East

This region has many local conflicts. These include the Israel-Palestine problem, the relations between the radical and the conservative Arab countries, the tensions between the rich and the poor, between the Sunni and the Shi'ite, as well as between the Arabs and the non-Arabs. There are also external factors that complicate the situation. These include the perception that the Western nations are essentially neo-colonialists, the problems of oil and of the transfer of sophisticated weapons, as well as the tensions between Islam and non-Islam.

The Israel-Palestine problem is the most difficult one to solve. President Bush and Secretary Baker have made some progress in moving the peace process, following the conclusion of the Gulf war. However, Israel has taken the opposite position on the principle of "land for peace" which is proposed as the basis for a solution.

The Gulf war can be considered to be completely ended if a realistic approach can be found to solving the region's long-term problems. This would include: (a) a new security structure for the Middle East which relies primarily on regional powers, namely a cooperation between Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia; (b) prevention of or the ban on the sales of sophisticated weapons (Initial steps have been taken by Bush, Mitterand, and Major, but a more comprehensive plan is required); (c) efforts to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor nations in the region, either through the establishment of a regional economic cooperation body, a regional development bank or increased official development assistance; and, (d) efforts to help the Arab countries in opening up their political systems.

The Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific region has been able to maintain stability and has developed a strong sense of cooperation for progress. These are shown by three major phenomena. First, bilateral dialogues are taking place between contending countries, such as Japan and the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union and China, Vietnam and China, Taiwan and China, Soviet Union and South Korea, China and South Korea, South Korea and North Korea, as well as between Thailand and Vietnam. This has been made possible by the ending of the Cold War, but an equally important factor is the dynamic economic development in the Asia-Pacific region.

Regional conflicts, such as those in Cambodia, the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea (the Spratly and Paracel islands), and between Taiwan and China, are all in the process of being resolved, primarily by the regional countries themselves, but with the support of the major powers, either through the UN or outside it.

Economic cooperation in the region has continued to strengthen. This has definitely led to the positive effects on the political and security fields.

However, intensive economic interactions also lead to frictions and conflicts. This is the reason for the establishment of regional fora such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The need for a political dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region is also being felt now. This dialogue will be focused on regional political and security problems, promote CBMs (confidence-building measures), and to resolve or prevent regional conflicts. At a later stage, it could be extended to other areas, including arms control in the region.

The Asia-Pacific region differs from Europe, because the former region is more complex and involves actors with different backgrounds and stages of development. Therefore, the European model and the CSCE cannot be replicated. However, the basic elements of CSCE can be introduced. Further, institution-building in the region needs to be developed carefully. It should also make use of existing institutions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Role of the UN and Regional Cooperation in the New World Order

The end of the Cold War has given the UN a greater role in managing international relations. This was shown during the Gulf war, namely in the development of a collective security approach towards Iraq's aggression of Kuwait. This was the second time such approach has been taken by the UN; the first one was during the Korean war.

UN support was crucial to the acceptance by the Third World and the US Congress to the actions by the military coalition towards Iraq. Generally, the UN's role has been in its peacekeeping activities which are meant to prevent conflict rather than engage in a military conflict itself.

As mentioned earlier, the collective security approach that was taken during the Gulf war cannot easily be repeated in the future given the special circumstances that present themselves then. In addition, the principles of collective security itself need to be worked out and elaborated. The UN, for example, does not have a military command and the necessary infrastructure; therefore, it will have to rely on certain countries. The redressing of this weakness will be a major task in the creation of the new world order.

In view of the limitations that the UN still has, regional organizations or bodies must play a greater role. In the Asia-Pacific region, APEC and the ASEAN provide the basis for the creation of a regional order which in turn will provide the basis for the structuring of multipolar relations among the major powers and other countries in the region.