Infering the Interpellations of the Post-Cold-War Era

We are living in an age of paradoxes, unnerving yet indispensable. No century in the history of human civilization has witnessed a rate and scope of technological and scientific advancement for the betterment of human life as has ours; but, at the same time, it is this very century which has witnessed not only the means but politically institutionalised will to shrink our home planet into vast crematory. There are numerable illustrations of this often bewildering paradoxes in which all nations - small and great - have their contributions. Yet, so penetrative and extensive has been the American influence in the matters concerning life and death of many a nations that the twentieth century has been called “the American century”.

Now, as this century is unfolding its last decade, it may also unravel the mystery as to whom belongs the next century? Though we have no intention to indulge into prophecy, yet the astonishing pace of international events have certainly created so complex a scenario that the greatest of nations will increasingly find itself enfeebled to control, manage and resolve crisis after crisis destabilizing the inter-state order.

A crisis is a situation in which the restitutive mechanisms of the system are no longer functioning well and therefore, the system is poised either for transformation or disintegration. The history of international relations has proved this well beyond doubt from the earliest days of inter-societal exchange relationships on organized basis, to
the breakdown of the feudal and balance of power mechanism, to
the present disruption in the bipolar configuration of international
power relationships hinging heavily on the nuclear deterrence mecha-
nisms. On the one hand, the actual and significant de-escalation in
militarization, the emergence of a more open and democratic soci-
ety in the former Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War do
raise hopes, not only for a mere tomorrow, but a better tomorrow;
yet, on the other hand, there have arisen severe interpellations which
no nation - including India and the United States - can possibly af-
ford to ignore.

It is possible to identify seven major interpellations which have, and
can further, enfeeble the restitutive mechanism of the contemporary
interstate order.

First, there has been a sudden, rapid and comprehensive depolari-
zation of international power configuration. The more obvious symp-
toms are well known: the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugo-
slavia and Czechoslovakia, the de-escalation in nuclear arms race
and the general change in the attitude of the great powers in rela-
tion to their Cold War postures. But no less dramatic have been the
Israeli-PLO accord, the new initiatives in Cambodia, Afghanistan,
Angola, and in a number of warring nations in Africa and Latin
America, the surprisingly concordant, swift and coordinated response
of the great powers to the latest gulf crisis. And cutting across all
these possibilities of relaxations and polarization of international
power may be gains on broader parameters - a generalized prefer-
ence for economic welfare of people over military power of the state,
a widely shared consensus on the democratic process as a way of
organizing governance, a broader acceptance of human rights and
a spirit of tolerance toward cultural pluralism.
It is not the depolarization of international power configuration *per se*, which is threatening to disrupt the fragile interstate order, but, it is the simultaneous diffusion and dispersion of the Cold War conflict into its rather small but extremely complex and violent regional manifestation, and the ensuing global power vacuum, which is causing concern. The world after the Cold War does not seem to resemble any world of the past. From a structural point of view it may be called multipolar. But, its poles have different currencies of power; Military (The CIS), military and economic (the U.S.), economic and potentially greatly military (the United EC, and Japan), demographic and military (China) and demographic and potentially military (India and some other frontline LDCs). Demographic power is more a liability than an asset, the utility of sheer military might devoid of legitimation is ebbing, only economic power is fully useful because it is the capacity to influence others by bringing them the very goods they crave (Hoffman 1990). Moreover, each of these poles is to some extent, mired by a world economy that limits its freedom of action.

While it is accepted that the United States and her allies have won the Cold War and the former remains the only genuine "superpower", the superness of American power is tempered by several factors. The United States has emerged from the Cold War in a precarious economic position. Just how precarious it is open to debate, but there is a consensus that America has to put her own economic house in order. The American national mood is more xenophobic. Moreover, protectionism in trade has much greater support than at any time since 1930s.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of this study, power has not only devolved to the new economic giants but also to diverse areas and regions, as well as to new institutions. The allies who were almost
totally dependent on Washington, seek greater autonomy and, like the U.S., are under pressure to assert more nationalistic postures.

The Second interpellation concerns the emergent organizing construct to prevent international system from lapsing into chaos. The world does not need to be reminded that it exists in a formal state of anarchy. There is no international government. Nor is there sufficient interdependence or division of labour among states to transform international relations into a social system akin to domestic affairs. Under the prevailing circumstances the emergent organizing method to regulate or prevent this anarchic system from lapsing into chaos is by establishing the regime of a central coalition. Today, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the liberation of Eastern Europe, the Gulf War and the approachment between the United States and Russia have lent the world a new concert of power. Five great bases of power again control the organization of world order; the United States, the European Community, Japan, Russia and China. The U.N. Security Council is one manifestation of this new central coalition which reaches its decisions in great power diplomatic consultations and only then expresses these in the United Nations and other international fora.

The present day situation is both urgent and precarious. While past concerts lingered on for some years, they failed to control events after about a decade. If the new post-Cold War international system began in 1989, with the collapse of the "Iron Curtain", the world now has about half a decade to make it workable and lasting. If the new system is not established within that period, the world order may again revert to balance of power or a multipolar deterrence by the end of this century.
The third interpellation concerns sovereignty of nation states. There has been a metamorphic dispersion of State's sovereignty, with a particular rapidity after the II World War.

Men and women do not wield or submit to sovereignty; they wield or submit to authority or power. Authority and power are facts as old and ubiquitous as political society itself; but they have not always enjoyed the support of legitimacy that the theory of sovereignty seeks to construct for them. Applied to a body politic, this concept has involved a belief that there is a final and absolute authority within the society. Applied to the problems that arise in relations between political societies, its function has been to express the principle that, internationally, over and above a collection of societies - each being final and absolute in its own right, no supreme overarching authority exists (Hindey 1968). Although we speak of it as something that may be lost or acquired, eroded or increased, sovereignty is not a fact. It is an assumption about authority a concept men have applied in certain circumstances to the political power which they or other men were exercising.

And it is this assumption about authority which is now increasingly and even violently challenged. The challenges are both from internal centrifugal forces and external penetrative forces. Again, as sovereignty has begun to transcend the territorial confines of a nation state and acquire a trans-territorial dimension, severe inroads have been made into its so called 'internal supremacy' and 'external independence'. There are now practical limitations on the ability of a nation to exercise governing authority over its territory and people, as well as strong reasons for limiting the assertion of its autonomy with regard to matters beyond its boundaries, which may be, nevertheless matters of its life or death.
Fourth, the revival of Muslim fundamentalism and its growing influence on the thinking of modern nation states and their external behaviour is increasingly becoming an alarming cause not only for the Western powers, but also to the precariously founded secular democratic traditions in many Asian, African and newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Fourteen hundred years ago, a new faith burst out of the Arabian deserts and exploded like forked lightning onto three continents. Under the oasis green banner of the Prophet Mohammad, the Warriors of Islam converted whole civilizations to their holy book, their way of life and their world view. Today, a reconstructed idea of Islam is spreading at what often appears to be the same speed over much of the same territory. From the north African coast to the steppes of Central Asia, Mohammed's precepts interpreted as a code of earthly behaviour are galvanizing Muslim societies with hope for renewal and for upheaval.

The whole world is watching and wondering about the impact of this tectonic shift, just as medieval Europe crouched when Islam reached the apogee of its power. With the death of the Soviet empire, some Western policymakers are concerned whether 'Islamic fundamentalism' - a term rejected by Muslims as a misnomer - may shape up as a next millennial threat to liberal democracy.

Terrorism, intolerance, and revolution for export - the revival movements three scourges, in the view of many people on both sides of the cultural divide - are one concern. Apart from concern for lives and freedoms that might be in jeopardy, European nations fear that Islamists might destabilize Muslim societies, driving larger armies of emigrants on the march for luster fields, which in turn may lead to socio-ethnic upheaval in the host countries. Already France, for
example, is convulsed by a political backlash against the many poor, socially unassimilated Arab immigrants who crowed high rise tenement suburbs of industrial cities.

Fifth, every state machinery is today constrained by the operations of the world capitalist economy. What distinguishes the modern state from any earlier state is that the modern state is defined by its participation in an interstate system; and what distinguishes the modern interstate system is that it was the first interstate system not to have been transformed over time into a world empire. Our interstate system evolved as the political superstructure of the capitalist world economy, and it is this fact which explains the specifics of both the modern state and the modern interstate system. The boundaries of the interstate system and the world-economy have thus been more or less synonymous, if both hazy.

While however, the developmental thrust of capitalism is proceeding energetically, its very development has engendered antisystemic forces within its bounds. These forces first appeared in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century and from the beginning in two forms: what we may generally call the social movements and the national movements. These two forms of antisystemic movements have always had a complicated and confused relationship one to the other.

The socialist anti-systemic movements are caught in dilemmas. the realities of existing mode of functioning of the world capitalist economy and the weakness of any single structure vis-a-vis the totality of the forces operating mean that the short-run costs in well-being and in the possibility of expanding the forces of production, occasioned by an effort to withdraw from the world economy are higher than any regime is politically capable of sustaining. The con-
sequence is that there is enormous social pressure from within the anti-systemic movements, when they obtain political power, to operate at a state level "catching up" strategy. The catching up of a given state to the economic levels of well-being of the currently more developed states necessarily involves the accumulation of capital through the expropriation of surplus value, the proletarization of labour, and the further commodification of all aspects of production and exchange not yet so commodified. Catching up, in short, means the triumph of the law of value in all corners previously resistant to its dominance.

The ideology of catching up will spread and prevail. In that sense, the slogan of "convergence" is essentially correct, if one remembers that what is in fact happening is the completion of the logic of world capitalist development. In perhaps fifty years from now, and for the first time, the world economy may fully operate according to the law of value as outlined in volume I of the "Capital".

**Sixth**, there is now a potential and in some cases actual challenge of a major ecological disequilibrium fast approaching. The root cause are clear enough: the combination of rapidly increasing population and destructive intensification of technology at the imperatives of the world capitalist economy.

Unfortunately, the reverse of technology's salutary influence is its impact on the environment, which is at the very least temporarily disrupting the ecological balance and in some circumstances damage it permanently.

There is no way to gauge what absolute limits to world population are, which makes it too easy to dismiss the issue as a whole. However, the hard evidence as represented by widespread poverty, re-
source and energy limitations, global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, deforestation, and reduction in bio-diversity provides a sobering indication of the devouring imperatives of this problem. The challenges for multilateral negotiations created by this situation are daunting (Keller 1990; Mathens 1989).

Finally, in the context of the above discourse, an incipient restructuring of the international system is imminent. However, what we do not know yet is what relations are going to develop among various actors, what institutional links - national, international, or perhaps quasi supranational - will they set up to manage their relations with one another, and rest of the world in a context of vigilant, demanding, and often turbulently mobilized masses. The fate of this new world will depend on the ability of “poles” to cooperate enough to prevent or moderate conflicts, including regional ones, and to correct those imbalances of world economy that would otherwise induce some states or their public to pull away from or to disrupt the momentum of interdependence.

Above all, it will depend on domestic currents that remain highly difficult to predict. Since foreign policy today is so largely shaped by domestic demands and expectations, the most dangerous remaining tension and the most difficult to overcome is that between the global dimension of issues that foreign policy will have to deal with and fact that political life remains, at best, limited to the horizons of the state and is often even challenging the unity, integrity, and the effectiveness of the state.

Thus, the crisis of survival has deepened and complicated. To merely parrot a fashionable slogan that “the Cold War is over” would not only mean trivializing the problem, but would also point to an utter
miscomprehension of the magnitude and subtleties of the crisis. Even if the Cold War era might have ended, it is being gradually replaced by a far more complex era of \textit{hot peace}. This is not to undermine the historic positive gains of the ending of the Cold War. Infact, any stepping away from the precipice to which militarization and global arms race were leading the world can not but be welcomed by all of us. It is the most important first step in the direction of global transformation and the creation of a better world. But unless it is followed by other major steps and unless it is prevented from being coopted by the indispensably dominant global interpellations as described here before, we are likely to misread symptomatic changes as being regenerative.

Remember the metaphorical sketch with which the first chapter began?

Well, for those students of international politics with a more parochial interest in monitoring the vicissitudes of U.S. policymaking, perhaps nothing captured more wittily the peculiar predicament of the Bush administration in its last couple of years than the cartoon by James Borgman (Rizopouls, 1990) published in \textit{The Cincinnati Enquirer} that showed a bemused President Bush, sitting at his desk in the oval office, looking at his watch and thinking: "Communism is dead, the wall is down, apartheid is falling, Mandela is free, the Sandinistas are outsted, Germany is reuniting, the Cold War is over, I've returned all my calls, and heck, it's not even lunchtime!"
References


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