

Post-Cold War Era

Dr. Paromita Chakraborty, Surendranath College, Kolkata

An important characteristic of the post-Cold War era is the rapid expansion of Western influence, and the Western expansion and advantages in military, economy, technology, spheres of influence, ideology and culture have seen little substantial challenge. However there are other important features in the post cold war era which we will look below:

1. Rise of the West- Though the Cold War period had created a bipolar world order where the actions of the states were predictable and the actors in the international system were supportive of the state actions. The Cold War period that way brought status quo and stability to the international system. The fall of communism created a vacuum and left the world unipolar with US as the sole super power and leader of the free capitalism and liberal democracy.

The Cold War world order was divided based on the ideologies of capitalism and communism. The end of Cold War brought an end to this ideological division. Hence the first characteristic of post Cold War era is the dominance of free market capitalism. It is since then seen as a major tool, approach and an important means to achieve economic development.

The Cold War period provided some amount of predictability and certainty in international relations. The fall of communist bloc allowed the USA and its allies to play a dominant role in world politics. The end of Cold War certainly expanded the US role from being the chief protagonist of capitalism to other areas such as global security, peacekeeping and peacemaking and peace enforcement, 'war on terrorism', and further to areas such as regime change, democracy promotion, human rights etc. In the name of protecting the democratic regimes and international security, the post-Cold War era saw US intervention in several countries. The Gulf war of 1991, US-led NATO intervention in Afghanistan in the post 9/11 period, invasion of Iraq without UN sanction, interventions in Libya and Syria are the examples of US and its allies aggressive policies. With the military operation to Afghanistan and invasion of Iraq after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States perpetuated its dominance in the region.

2. Globalization- The end of the Cold War, in addition to the collapse of the ideology of socialism and socialist bloc, coincided with the acceleration of the process of economic globalization. Since this process of interconnectivity was global in nature, and the spread across the streams of social, cultural, economic, technological and political, the process also came to be known as globalisation. Globalization is a major process in the form of rapid growth in international economic and trade relations and deepening of interdependence on one hand and great technological milestones in Information and Communication technologies on the other hand.

However the process of globalization has weakened nation states: Countries and individuals alike are exposed to unprecedented risks in the face of international capital. the term globalization refers to the increasingly strengthened global connections and interdependence in economy, trade, transport and communications. Globalization benefited many countries and individuals, but has at the same time brought about great risks: First is the extreme imbalance in distribution of the benefits, resulting in greater gaps between nations and individuals; second, capital's easy penetration of national boundaries has also weakened countries' capabilities for managing and coping with such a phenomenon, exposing individuals more directly to the control of international capital, rendering them helpless.

Globalisation has also led to the rise of new actors in the International relations. These new actors are often non-state actors such as Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Multinational Corporations (MNCs) etc. These actors have also acquired important role in determining the relations between nation states.

3. Rapid growth of Trade- The irreversible globalisation has made the world into a small society where interactions between the countries are more based on commercial interests. Production, movement and marketing, and consumption of goods and services have become deeply integrated. Investment decisions, flow of capital and technology across borders and regions and movement of corporate managerial elite today integrates the world in an unprecedented manner. In the process commerce have become main and important tool in shaping and reshaping the relations between the nations. Commerce has become more important than ever before and foreign policies are driven by the commercial interests.

Formation of the WTO marked the rise of a rule-based multilateral trade order. The increased international trade allowed the countries to become interdependent and to forge economic relations. Global corporate and banking interests have emerged as extremely powerful economic players. Foreign economic relations have become dominant over other traditional issues like defence and border security etc. hence the post WTO world order has been shaped by the idea of 'market' and reaching the market has become more important than rigid borders and border conflicts.

4. Terrorism, is another serious threat to peace in the post-Cold War era. While occasional terrorist activities have been part of human history, terrorism particularly became a serious problem after the end of the Cold War, especially after the September 11 attacks. The term terrorism has been described variously as both a tactic, a reaction to oppression, and a crime.

5. Nuclear weapons

The most dangerous post-Cold War legacy is a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons. Though fears of nuclear war have diminished, the presence of nuclear weapons remains a concern in the modern world.

6. Deepening of Economic Interdependence

The next important characteristic of post-Cold War era is the rise of new actors who are mostly non-state actors. These non-state actors do not have any nationality, state identity and are not controlled by the state. These initiatives are focused on issues ranging from easing trade to security to environment to migration at regional level. International nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International and Greenpeace emerged championing specific issues like protection of human rights and environment. The emergence of these non-state actors created several multiple linkages between the states and non-state actors.

The rise and growth of these international organisations in the post-Cold War era is phenomenal and their importance has grown rapidly. These international organisations deal with single to multiple issues and in their reach range from global to regional. Thus the

importance of regional organisations and regional cooperation initiatives on multiple issues has grown. All these characteristics have changed the discourse of international relations in the post-Cold War era. The emergence of more actors at the interactions between the states started influencing the actions of the state.

7. Sustainable Development

The Cold War period witnessed massive rise in industrial activities, advancements in military technologies, nuclear programmes, production of weapons of mass destruction etc. The Cold War competition had no scope for the concept of an industrial order that would be environmentally sustainable.

The end of Cold War hence immediately impacted the international relations in the field of environmental protection. Global environmental concerns have become common agenda in the international platforms. Unlike the Cold War era politics, which would prevent countries to come together to fight for common cause because of various reasons, the post-Cold War era could successfully identify these common concerns. Hence climate change took shape and became embedded as an important goal in the economic development strategies of developing and developed countries.

8. Multilateralism

One of the most important developments that happened and which has deeply influenced international relations at the end of the Cold War is the expansion of multilateralism. It refers to alliance of multiple countries and their agreement to work together to achieve common goals or to address common issues.

Multilateralism allows countries to take membership or to form an alliance at equal footage without any discrimination in any form. In that sense, it is opposite to unilateralism. Though the institutions like United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) were the core form of multilateralism during Cold War era and did play a vital role in diffusing the Cold War tensions, the real essence of multilateralism could be seen in the post-Cold War era. Groups such as BRICS, and SCO are the examples of growth in multilateralism at trade, political and security levels.

These developments have significantly affected international relations after the Cold War and changed the discourse on polarity in general and facilitated the rise of a multipolar world.