

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND MODERN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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The half-century that has passed since China and India and China and Myanmar enunciated the five principles of peaceful coexistence bears witness to the continuing validity of these principles in the promotion of peace and concord in the world.

During the more than a half-century of Pakistan-China relations, the observance of the five principles has generated the deep understanding and mutual trust that characterizes these relations. The Boundary Agreement of 1963 delimiting the watershed of the majestic Karakorum Mountains as their common border, was a landmark event that set the stage for developing the comprehensive, stable and long-term China-Pakistan relationship. This enduring entente has withstood the vicissitudes of internal as well as external challenges.

China's observance of the five principles has enabled it to resolve almost all its disputes or differences with more than a dozen neighbours on a basis of mutual accommodation. Renunciation of big power chauvinism and opposition to hegeinonism has won for China their trust, removing any friction in its peaceful rise to world power status; But China's famous aversion to arrogance is such that it insists on describing itself as a developing country.

In December 1953, when the five principles were first put forward by Primer Zhou Enlai, the Cold War was gathering momentum. The world was bipolar, divided into two military camps with the United States and the Soviet Union confronting each other in a posture of gladiators poised for mutual assured destruction. China had not taken its rightful place in the United Nations. De-colonization had only just begun.

Today, the world is unipolar, with all nations coexisting uneasily with the sole super power that bestrides the world like a colossus.

The hopes for a world at peace that arose after the lapse of the Cold War have suffered severe blows. Genocides in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Burundi and internecine wars in Afghanistan, the Congo and countries of West Africa, illustrate the failure of the international system to undertake timely action to save mankind from ravages of conflict and war. The longstanding issues of Palestine and Kashmir continue to pose a deeply moral and political challenge to the international community. A pernicious doctrine of clash of civilizations has sought to invent a substitute for the ideological conflicts of the 20th century to foment a war against Islam.

Reacting to the horrendous atrocity of 9/11, the United States seized its “unipolar moment” to propound for itself a radical strategy to protect its national security and interests. It claims the right to unleash the full force of its military power against terrorist or states accused of harbouring them should it perceive a likely threat of attack on its homeland or its interests around the world (US National Security Strategy paper of September 2002).

The new US security doctrine also envisages foreign regime change in states suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction or otherwise posing a perceived potential threat to US security or to that of its friends and allies. A concerned UN Secretary General Kofi Annan warns that this doctrine would set a precedent that would result in a proliferation of force with or without credible justification.

Unilateral pre-emptive use of force negates the core principles of the UN Charter that outlaw aggression and interference in domestic affairs of states and call for peaceful settlement of disputes. Pre-emption also goes beyond the pale of the inherent right of self-defence against armed attack as recognized by the Charter as also the five principles that emphasize non-aggression and non-interference in internal affairs.

Neoconservative ideologues were said to have advocated the war on Iraq as part of a grand design to “project power across the region”, “restructure the Middle East”, “command the oil market for the rest of the oil era” and perpetuate “the American imperium in the 21st century”.

Underlying the American urge to reform the Middle East is its belief that the main cause of terrorism is the lack of freedom and democracy in the region. Hence its sense of messianic as an “exceptional” and “indispensable” nation to morph the Arab world into accommodating American principles and interests.

The political ethos that prevails in the US is such that policy makers and public opinion are impervious to the alternative conviction, particularly in the Arab and the Muslim world, that hatred and terrorism could spring from the injustice of Israel’s unending occupation of Palestinian territories and their colonization by Israeli settlers.

The US has achieved one of its strategic war aim – Iraq has been eliminated as a potential military counterweight to Israel’s dominance over the region. Despite these geopolitical dividends for the US and its strategic ally, the counter-productive consequences of unilateralism and pre-emption in Iraq are manifest. This strategy if replicated against North Korea would be fraught with potentially catastrophic consequences for the region. Conscious of the limits to this strategy, the US has returned to multilateral diplomacy – with China playing a key role – in transforming the Korean peninsula into a nuclear weapon – free zone.

The manifest limits to unilateralism and preemption from the problematique of Iraq and North Korea, make imperative a return to the multilateralism premised in the norms of the UN Charter and the Five Principles.

“The debacle of Iraq does not mean the end of a one dimensional unilateralist evangelist belief in American military power as the key to world politics” writes Timothy Garton Ash. But this policy, essentially a hyper-power doctrine, can have no appeal for the overwhelming majority of the international community, especially for countries of the Third World that have emerged from the great historical process of de-colonization, even though many of them suffer from authoritarian rule, poor governance, disrespect from human rights, corruption and degrading poverty.

In South Asia, adherence by Pakistan and India to a bilateral pact committing themselves to the Five Principles would provide a conducive context for the normalization of Pakistan-India relations.

Rejection of hegemonism, embrace of peaceful and just settlement of disputes through a dialogue process to find an equitable solution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute—the cause of two wars and perennial tension between the two countries – could well lead to a solution acceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir. Turning the Line of Control into a permanent border would not be an equitable solution; hence unacceptable. Unlike real estate or territorial disputes, Kashmir relates to the right of self-determination of the twelve million Kashmiris pledged to them by Pakistan and India and consecrated by the international community itself.

A resumed dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve their outstanding differences and disputes must also explore confidence and security – building measures. A nuclear restraint and a nuclear risk-reduction regime should form part of the agenda. It would only be prudent in this situation to keep warheads unassembled and separated from missiles, not mounted for immediate firing. However, here, verification presents a difficulty.

There is some talk of making the respective nuclear doctrines mutually compatible, but asymmetry in conventional armaments makes doubtful a no-first use nuclear doctrine accord. A mutual non-aggression pact would be a more feasible

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China's miracle of growth since its opening to the outside, of its economy in 1976, has been sustained as much by its economic reforms as by its strict adherence to a foreign policy based on the Five Principles. Its resolve to eschew hegemony and project itself as a benign power promoting a peaceful and just international order conforms to the broad aspirations of peoples the world over.

Phenomenal economic growth has made China the twin engine, alongside the US, driving the global economy. No less than 400 million of its people have been uplifted by China from below the poverty line, enabling this mass of humanity to march towards the realization of their economic, social and cultural rights. As Premier Wen Jiabao stated at the Shanghai UN Conference on Poverty Alleviation in May, this achievement “will go down as one of the most remarkable feats in history”.

Pakistan is in the vanguard of the war on international terrorism. It is pledged to preventing extremism and terrorism operating from its soil.

President Pervez Musharraf has formulated a two-pronged strategy to combat religious militancy and extremism in some countries of the Muslim world. One prong – to shun militancy and extremism and focus on socio-economic uplift – is to be delivered by the Muslim countries themselves. The other prong is to be delivered by the West, the US in particular – to resolve the political disputes with justice’ to the Muslim world – for the root cause of terrorism lies in the political injustice done to it. President Musharraf cited inter-alia the Kashmir freedom struggle and the Palestine intifada as examples of injustice.

WILL THE WEST DELIVER ITS SIDE OF THE PRONG?

Wars between states have receded into history but violent conflicts in the forms of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity continue to pose a grave challenge to the conscience of the civilized world. It is these humanitarian crises that sound a clarion call for UN Security Council to authorize pre-emption or prevention of such systemic massive violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Extremist security doctrines of attack, invasion and overthrow of regime call for a fundamental reappraisal.

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Five Principles should serve to underline the imperative of basing modern international relations on these principles and on the rights and duties of states as set forth in the UN Charter. As Kofi Annan has affirmed “the world may have changed but the

aims of the Charter are as valid and urgent as ever”. If these rules of international law are deemed inadequate to more aggressively combat threats from terrorist groups armed with WMDs and call for revisionism, it is only the UN General Assembly, reflecting the universal membership of the international community that can give legitimacy to any new legislation.

Despite the imbalance of power with the West the Third World cannot be marginalized in the shaping of the post 9/11 international order. The role of China and the enlarged European Union would be critical.

Thank you.