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29

CONTEMPORARY WORLD ORDER

The world of today consists of nearly 200 states, which are also known as countries. They are similar in many ways. Each enjoys independence, with a government to administer an army to protect the country against foreign invader. But, at the same time, states are different in their geographical size, population, natural resources, economic conditions and type of government, etc. However, no country – whether strong or weak, big or small – can afford to conduct its affairs in isolation. They need to live together and work with others for mutual benefit.

Although world affairs is mainly the sum total of relations among States, it is not limited to States only. Contact and cooperation between ordinary people like us in our capacities as tourists, journalists, businessmen, sportsmen, etc. are growing very fast. With satellite technology and introduction of mobile, telephone conversations between people living in distant countries has become easy. Not only this but also the live telecasts of sports, political or cultural events or even of wars are brought to our sitting rooms by cable television. All these developments have virtually made the huge world into a village where a sense of togetherness prevails and problems are handled in that spirit. Hence, it is essential for us to be aware of the happenings around the world. That necessarily includes trends in world around us and also its problems.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to

- explain the meaning of 'world order';
- discuss the working of bipolar world during the Cold War years;
- trace the emergence of a multipolar world;
- recognise that after the end of the Cold War, the world order has become unipolar;
- recall the enormity of human suffering on account of wars, violence and terrorist

activities in the contemporary world;

- explain the meaning of globalisation and the factors responsible for it;
- recognize the growing economic inequalities between the rich and the poor countries in the contemporary global order.

29.1 Meaning of World Order

‘Order’ indicates a condition in which everything is in its correct place. It also refers to respect for and enforcement of rules. Day-to-day activities would be normal and peaceful if order exists. In the world affairs, order brings a certain method in the way one country conducts its affairs with other states. The method can be noticed in the form of a set of rules and principles, which are commonly accepted and respected by governments. These rules and principles include equality of all countries, that one country should not interfere in the internal affairs of another state, that force should not be used or even threatened in the bilateral relations, that prisoners of wars and refugees should be treated humanely, etc. For assisting countries to make and implement these rules, they often establish common institutions like the United Nations. They are meant to assist in sorting out differences and problems between countries through dialogue and diplomacy.

The phrase ‘world order’ may sound strange in the light of opposite realities. Though the states are supposedly equal in a formal sense, there are gross inequalities among them. And some of these inequalities have been recognised in the form of veto power conferred on five permanent members in the UN Security Council. Countries often compete for resources and influence, they suspect each other’s intentions and ambitions, and they quarrel about borders, trade and several other issues. In fact, right now a dozen wars are going on in counties of Asia, Africa and Europe causing death to millions and destruction of valuable property. Moreover, problems arise not just between states but also within those states. Many states are fighting civil wars. Civil war is a prolonged situation of brutal war between state military and certain groups of people wanting to remove a government from seat of power or form their own separate state. Sri Lanka is a good example of countries fighting a civil war. Linked to this aspect is the spread of terrorism, which causes fear among common people through indiscriminate violence and inhumane killings. Besides, additional commercial and social pressure groups have emerged to make heavy demands on state policies. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in America and Europe have become powerful enough to dictate the economic policies of many poor states, whereas the influence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on official policies is growing very fast.

MNCs are big business companies based in Europe or United States. They have spread their business in consumer goods, drugs, etc. to most parts of the world. You are familiar with Multinational Corporations like Coke, Microsoft, General Motors, etc. They make huge profits, and the annual turnover of some of the MNCs is higher than many less developed countries. NGOs are those bodies formed by individuals in their private capacity without direct involvement or role of governments. YMCA, Rotary International, International Red Cross, are a few examples of thousands of NGOs active today at local, national and international level. They work in the areas of environment protection, development and human rights.

In the light of realities, you may wonder how the situation could be described as world order. No doubt, a lot is unsatisfactory, but it is also true that a lot more in world affairs is

World Order and the United Nations



Notes



Political Science

orderly which is not readily noticed. For example, exchange of diplomats, rules regarding wars, postal communication, air and sea traffic, treatment of foreigners, exchange of currencies are part of international order. These and other aspects of international affairs are regulated through customs and traditions, and also by rules laid down in various international agreements and treaties. It is also common that states having differences seek the help of another country or an international agency for reaching a compromise. The talks currently in progress between India and Pakistan mirror these features of the existing world order. That a world war has not taken place after 1945 speaks about the positive side of the world order.

Let us recognise that world order cannot be idealistic ignoring the realities completely. Political and other conditions continuously influence the nature of the world order at any time. The world order in turn evolves gradually in response to these developments by making necessary adjustments. The order does not completely break up to give place to a new order; it only makes changes as per the actual trends in the world. These changes may be good or bad, minor or major. In other words, major developments like the end of the Cold War necessitate change *in* the existing order, not change *of* the existing order.



Intext Questions 29.1

- (1) Who are the main players in world affairs?
- (2) Are states equal in their size and strength?

29.2 Bipolar Order during Cold War

As you can imagine, Europe remained the theatre of world affairs up to the Second World War. European countries maintained peace by forming alliances in order to ensure that no single country (like France, Great Britain, Germany) could dominate the rest. The system so prevailed was known as the balance of power. Britain mastered this policy for very long. However, the method collapsed in the beginning of the twentieth century with the First World War. In the meanwhile, the rise of countries outside of Europe – such as the United States and Japan – extended the nature and scope of world politics.

The Second World War ended with the defeat of Germany, Japan and Italy in the hands of the alliance comprising mainly Great Britain, Soviet Russia and the United States of America. In the last stages of the war, the United States produced and dropped nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war had produced effects of long-term importance. The United States with its economic wealth and the military strength, no doubt, made a matchless contribution to the victory in the War. It was felt that the strengths and leadership of the United States would be needed to maintain peace in the post-War world, too. Without surprise, Britain, France and other European countries became dependent on the United States for economic recovery and military security. Having contributed significantly to the victory in the war, Soviet Russia was not to be sidelined; the country claimed equal say in deciding on European problems.

Soon after the Second World War, the erstwhile allies, viz. the United States and the Soviet Union developed differences about working together for the peace and stability of Europe. There were political and ideological reasons for these differences. The United States practised and preached democracy and free market enterprise as the desirable



model of governance. On the other hand the Soviet Union believed in and sought to spread the merits of governance by single (communist) party and of state-controlled economy. These differences led to feelings of one being threatened by the other. So began the bipolar phase in the world order immediately after the War. The United States and the Soviet Union stood out as two opposite poles around which, to begin with, the European politics revolved. While the countries of Western Europe joined hands with the United States and called themselves the “Free World”, countries of Eastern Europe became part of the Socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. These two leading countries of rival camps were clubbed under the exclusive, new category of “super powers”.

The term “super powers” is distinct from the term “great powers”. Whereas the world identified only two countries, viz. the erstwhile Soviet Union and the United States as the super powers, the history of Europe records the existence of great powers like Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, etc. The super powers individually possessed military capabilities and economic resources far superior to other countries in the rest of the world. With nuclear and other destructive weapons in their possession, they were able to influence events in many parts of the world and policies of many other countries.

Relations between East and West were never cordial. Short of going to war directly, the two camps indulged constantly in political and military competition. This state of affairs was widely called as the “Cold War”. The Cold War was marked by a great deal of competition in forming military alliances, viz. the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the arms race through sophistication of nuclear weapons.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in 1949 with the United States and Canada and 10 countries in Western Europe (like Belgium, Britain, Netherlands, West Germany, etc.). NATO members formed themselves as an alliance to treat aggression against any one of them as aggression on all of them and fight the aggressor together. The Soviet Union then cleverly offered to join the alliance. But NATO turned down the offer because NATO’s real purpose was to stop the spread of the Soviet influence and ideology. The Soviet Union set up in 1955 its own military grouping (called the Warsaw Treaty Organization) with its allies in Eastern Europe to counter NATO.

Soon the two Cold War rivals grudgingly acknowledged that each could destroy the other in a nuclear confrontation many times over. In the face of such dangers, the bipolar relations assumed new dimensions. On the one hand, the two camps got involved in local conflicts in West Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Central America, and southern Africa. As a result a good deal of military “aid” flowed to the newly found or prospective allies. At the same time, attempts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and deny their access to other countries started in 1960s.

There were also some positive effects of the bipolar world order. Foremost, movements for independence from European colonial rule gained great momentum in Africa and Asia, as both Cold War blocs feverishly encouraged the trend in order to gain goodwill of the native people. Beginning in 1960 nearly 100 new countries were born. However, these countries did not want to compromise on their newly won political freedom by joining this or that military bloc. Hence they launched the “Non Aligned Movement” which tirelessly advocated world peace, nuclear disarmament, and economic advancement of the less

World Order and the United Nations



Notes

developed countries. (India played leadership role in this effort.) Their collective voice and influence could not be missed in the working of world forums like the United Nations. Great many initiatives were undertaken to pressurise the super powers for disarmament, and also calling for creating just and equitable economic order. Side by side, the clout of the oil-rich countries (in West Asia and elsewhere) asserted their importance by manipulated production and price levels.

By 1970s, significantly the bipolar world started yielding place to multipolarity. Scholars and statesmen perceived presence of not two but many centres of power and influence in world affairs. Apart from the collective bargaining strength of the Third World there were many more interesting developments. The West European countries after enjoying the economic and military protection from the United States recovered as part of regional integration process known as the European Union. These countries have become a major competitor for world markets to the United States. In East Asia too, economic rise of first Japan and then China, followed by the Asian Tigers (like South Korea, Singapore, etc.) loosened the grip of the bipolar world order. Interestingly, concerned over the challenge from these new “poles”, the bipolar powers briefly tried reconciliation – known as “détente” – during 1970s but they failed to sustain it. The bipolar world order continued till the totally unexpected collapse of socialism in East Europe and the Soviet Union, which spelled formal end to the Cold War era in the beginning of 1990s.



Intext Questions 29.2

- (1) Name the victorious countries in the Second World War.
- (2) Is it true that the importance of Europe declined after the Second World War?
- (3) Which two countries were known as the super powers?
- (4) Identify two military alliances formed during the Cold War era.
- (5) Did the super powers attempt reconciliation? What was that process called?

29.3 Unipolar World after the Cold War

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of the two Germanys set in motion a series of stunning developments in Europe. Mobs in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and other countries in Eastern Europe rose against socialist dictatorships and the regimes fell like a pack of cards in quick succession, as the then Soviet Union under Michail Gorbachev’s leadership was uninterested to militarily intervention. Soon the fever for freedom shook the master of the socialist camp itself. The Soviet Union broke up into Russian Federation and 14 other Republics in 1991. All these new states abandoned socialism and embraced Western ideology of democracy and free market economy. It was regarded as a grand victory for the United States. While Warsaw Treaty Organization was disbanded, the NATO continues and is engaged in military activities in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, something not originally planned.

With victory in the Cold War, the United States became an object of both admiration and fear. The US became the single remaining super power with the fall of socialism and break up of the Soviet Union. To illustrate the domination of the United States, it may suffice to cite just one area, arms exports. Although the arms exports markedly shrank by



nearly half after the Cold War, the US share has remained dominant, approximately two-thirds of the total value of arms exports.

To many observers, the dominance of one single country – unipolarity – aptly describes the world order since the time the Cold War ended 15 years ago. The United States has no challenger in claiming the top slot. The erstwhile enemy, the Soviet Union, is now an ally, a partner of the United States in matters of arms control, international security, settlement of regional conflicts, trade and investment. Despite occasional tensions, Europe is nowhere near challenging United States power. China has achieved impressive economic progress after abandoning the socialist model long before the end of the Cold War, but has limitations in matching the United States power. The Nonaligned Movement has become less relevant. Many socialist-oriented countries among the nonaligned too embraced free market ideology. Economies were liberalised to attract foreign/Western investment. The role of International Monetary Fund has become a key instrument of the United States in supervising the adjustment process of these economies to market forces.

The new power realities are aptly brought to bear in the functioning of the United Nations – a body designed to work for democratic and just world order. The United Nations began playing “activist” role in restoring peace and security. The important security-related organ, the Security Council earlier known for disagreements between the two super powers, is transformed into an active agent of the US while other permanent members either collaborated or looked the other way. Transparency and democratic functioning of the UN suffered. The role of the United Nations during the first Gulf War to vacate the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s stands out as the best example of the new trend. Nearly a decade later, an impatient US invaded Iraq in 2003 unilaterally without caring for the United Nations. The functioning of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General too suffered due to the domineering attitude of the United States.



Intext Questions 29.3

- (1) Which country suffered defeat in the Cold War?
- (2) Name the leader of the Soviet Union when the Cold War was declared over.
- (3) Which country emerged as the most powerful country after the end of the Cold War?
- (4) Did the emergence of the unipolar world help functioning of the United Nations?

29.4 Instability under Unipolarity

Regrettably, peace and stability in the world do not accompany unipolarity. An important feature of the post-Cold War times is the multiplicity of challenges to the nation state. Unlike in the bipolar times, many countries now face threats to their existence from internal as well as external sources. Prior to 1990, territorial unity of countries was guaranteed as an essential condition for stability. The Soviet disintegration encouraged demands for separate statehood based on ethnic, linguistic or religious identity. The founding member of the Nonaligned Movement, Yugoslavia broke up into five pieces in a bitter process, and so formed states like Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina too soon faced serious threats of further disintegration on narrow ethnic lines. Soon afterwards, Czechoslovakia was split into two.



Political Science

Eritrea got independence from Ethiopia after prolonged struggle for exercise of 'right to self-determination', although problems over border have brought the burden of a new war between the two poor nations. East Timor is the latest in the list of territories that successfully claimed right to self-determination in a violent atmosphere. No one could say that worst is over.

The idea of "right to self-determination" aims to enable a population, under foreign occupation or domination, to freely choose their own system of government. The American War of Independence and the French Revolution in the 18th century promoted this idea. After the First World War, new states like Austria, Yugoslavia came into being by applying the right to self-determination in central Europe. After 1945, the colonized people in Africa, Asia and Caribbean successfully demanded the right to self-determination to gain freedom from their colonial masters. Of late, some disgruntled groups (like in Kashmir) are interpreting the right to self-determination to secede or separate from the existing state. There are widespread fears that agreeing to such demand would lead to break of many countries on ethnic, linguistic, religious lines. It could even pose a major danger to the contemporary world order.

Regimes in many countries are fighting civil war against one or more rebel groups, and as a consequence state machinery has ceased to function or even exist in these unfortunate countries. Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia are among the victims of this kind of instability. Some of them have been branded as "failed states" – a source of worry to the rest of the world. At the same time some countries continued to face threats of interference and military intervention from outside. The delicate situation of Georgia in Europe and Zaire in Africa illustrates this trend.

The civil wars are being fought in the most brutal and uncivil fashion. Reports are available about reckless use of small arms (like AK-47s), hand grenades, and landmines, which have brought misery to the millions of unconnected and innocent men, women and children. Nearly 20 million lives were lost in violent clashes in the past 15 years. According to estimates 95 out of a hundred deaths in these wars are innocent civilians. Clearing a city or town of ethnic minority groups through mass killings, forcible use of children as soldiers, gang rapes of women are key and inhumane features of the civil wars. Human rights violations by the official troops or rebels have now become a central concern for those interested in security and stability as components of the post-Cold War global order. The focus clearly shifted from the state security during the Cold War era to human security.

On the other hand, a number of countries fear that human rights could be used as a pretext for foreign military interventions. In 2003 the United States invaded and occupied Iraq after accusing the regime of Saddam Hussein of using deadly weapons against Shia and Kurd sections of Iraqi population. A vast majority of countries criticised the US action as illegal and unjustified, and also accused the US of misusing the human rights plank for its own selfish interests. Ironically thousands of Iraqis and Americans lost – are losing – their lives because of the continuing warfare between the American coalition and the Iraqi resistance forces. There are apprehensions that the Iraqi venture could turn out as the biggest mistake of the United States comparable to its defeat in the war against Vietnam (1963 – 73).

Among other factors, religious intolerance is contributing to instability in the contemporary world. Though religious extremism is commonly identified with Islam, it is not true that it is confined to one religion alone. Many of these groups enjoy wide network of patronage cutting across national boundaries encompassing supply of military hardware and funds.



This network is said to include mafia connected with drug trafficking, arms dealing, etc. In other words, the internal disorder faced by many countries often has cross-border linkages.

It is these linkages that made international terrorism the most dangerous aspect threatening security of not just one or the other state, but the world order at large. Al Qaeda under the leadership of Osama bin Laden is one of the most feared terrorist organisations in the world today. We all are familiar with the daredevil attacks planned and organised allegedly by Osama bin Laden's followers against the World Trade Center in New York and other locations in the United States on 11 September 2001. Although terrorism as a menace existed much before 11 September 2001, the incident demonstrated on the television screens how the mightiest power on earth was so easily shaken. In South Asia, India and Sri Lanka have been fighting terrorists for more than a decade. And now terrorism has spread to other countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan in South Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia in Southeast Asia, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt in West Asia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan in Africa and so forth. In a shocking incident in September 2004, Chechnya-associated terrorists seized a school in southern Russia and in an unfortunate showdown with Russian commandos caused death to 350 young school children.

In short, these aspects of instability point to the need to look at security in a new way. The scope of security has expanded; it includes not only absence of foreign aggression but also internal stability. Security does not just mean building up strong military force to protect state; it has to ensure economic, social, environmental well being of people. Moreover, all these problems including terrorism cannot be tackled alone by a state but by all countries together.

**Intext Questions 29.4**

- (1) Did unipolar era spell stability in the world order?
- (2) Name some of the countries that were divided territorially.
- (3) Give examples of countries under the spell of civil wars.
- (4) Innocent population remained unaffected by wars and violence. True or False?

29.5 Positive and Negative Effects of Globalization

No doubt, the twenty first century world is in the thick of globalisation which is chiefly economic in focus, although there are striking cultural and political dimensions also. The end of the Cold War and near universal adoption of privatisation and economic liberalisation as the only route to growth and development served as the right setting for significant changes in the conduct of economic or business transactions during the 1990s. There were other developments, which contributed to the deepening of globalisation. Advances in information and communication technology that are associated with use of computer and internet have heralded the "electronic age". Along with the existing financial institutions of the world like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank whose power and reach now have become global, an equally powerful new organization dedicated to promotion of free trade has come into being. It is the World Trade Organisation. The whole world has become a single market allowing foreign investments and free flow of goods across national boundaries. In the new climate, multinational corporations have gained global respect and access.



Political Science

Globalisation is a process of integrating the world into one market to enable easy movement of capital, goods, information and even workers across borders with no barriers. Private firms can invest and disinvest at will, locate production centres at a profit yielding or cost reducing anywhere in the world, hire employees of foreign origin on cheaper rates, assign work to far away people with the desired skills and experience, and flood markets in the developing countries with consumer and other goods for sale at rates competitive to local products, and safely take back profits. All this is happening with the help of technology access to which is not yet universal or equal. The globalisation process as manifested in the activities of multinational corporations, media giants and non-governmental organisations has considerably undermined the sovereign prerogatives of the state structures in the Third World. Territorial borders identified with nation states have become less effective to check ill effects of globalisation.

The bulk of the world community – the developing countries - has become part of globalisation with great hope. Let us look at India’s experience. With strengths like well developed and highly competitive computer software industry, the availability of technical and skilled work force and its potential as a very large middle class market, India has hopes to benefit in the era of globalisation. Since 1991, India changed the orientation of its economic policy by injecting pronounced features of privatization, liberalisation of rules for foreign investment, and disinvestment of public sector companies. Customers are flooded with an amazing choice of goods in the market – from motor cars to food products. India’s exports have gone up especially in service sector, investments have come into the country, and our foreign exchange reserves are extremely comfortable. Overall, India during globalisation has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Though India is open to beneficial aspects of globalisation, it is concerned over the adverse effects. American companies, currency, TV channels and weapons have taken over the world. Many local companies are being shut down causing unemployment to millions even in the advanced countries. Withdrawal of Governmental support through subsidies in fertilizers, electricity and other essential needs has added to the misery of rural and farming sections. The income gaps between the rich and the poor both among and within countries have sharply widened. Nearly one half of the world population (concentrated mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia) are in terrible poverty. While official aid from the rich donor countries has not grown, the debt burden of the developing countries has increased to worrying levels. On the other hand, the assets of top 3 billionaires in the world are said to be greater than the combined national wealth of all the least developed countries put together. Goods of the least developed countries are denied preferential access to markets in the advanced countries. Moreover, our life styles are undergoing significant shift embracing meaningless consumerism. Thanks to globalisation, nations live with the fear about the spread of the diseases like AIDS. The initiatives taken so far to address the above problems have proved insufficient. There is need to provide human face to make globalisation just and even-handed in its effects. Otherwise the credibility of contemporary world order may come under question.



Intext Questions 29.5

- (1) Globalisation is confined to economic areas alone. (True or False)?
- (2) Private companies in the West benefited most from globalisation. (True or False)?
- (3) Globalisation is aided by revolution in information and communication technology. (True or False)?
- (4) Income gaps between and within countries increased. (Yes or No)?



What You Have Learnt

Multi-ethnic states with differences in size and capabilities have traditionally constituted the bulk of world order. The few powerful countries have played significant role in shaping the world order by setting certain rules and principles to guide relations among countries. Peace and development have become the most important goals of the world order for the past century. But these goals have been ill served by the Cold War and the emergence of the bipolar world for nearly half a century during 1945 – 1990. During this period, however, the European Union and the Nonaligned Movement gained some influence and tried to make the world multipolar. The end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as the most powerful country made the world unipolar. This shift in the world order has only added problems especially in the context of political instability in different parts of the world. The economic globalisation, which has swept the world like a hurricane, has only induced income inequalities between peoples and countries.



Terminal Exercises

1. Outline the meaning and basic features of world order.
2. How did United States and the Soviet Union fight the Cold War?
3. Elaborate how the bipolar world gradually gave place to multipolarity?
4. Describe civil wars and terrorism as features of the unipolar world.
5. Discuss the negative effects of globalisation.



Answers to In-text Questions

29.1

- (1) States, commonly known as countries.
- (2) No.
- (3) Regulation of relationships among countries through observance to accepted principles and rules.

29.2

- (1) The United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain.
- (2) Yes.
- (3) The US and the Former Soviet Union.
- (4) NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation.
- (5) Yes, it was known as Détente.

29.3

- (1) The Soviet Union.



Notes

**World Order and
the United Nations**



Notes

- (2) Mikhail Gorbachov.
- (3) The United States.
- (4) No.

29.4

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, etc.
- (3) Afghanistan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Yugoslavia, etc.
- (4) False.

29.5

- 1. False
- 2. True
- 3. True
- 4. Yes

Hints for Terminal Exercises

- 1. Refer to Section 29.1, paragraphs 1 and 3.
- 2. Refer to Section 29.2, paragraph 4
- 3. Refer to Section 29.2, paragraph 6
- 4. Refer to Section 29.4, paragraph 3, 6
- 5. Refer to Section 29.5, paragraph 3