

The half century that has passed since China and India 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.

These Five Principles—namely non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence, encapsulate the quintessence of the rules of International law on the rights and duties of states to save the world from the scourge of war and guide its peoples towards peace and development.

Over the years, China has amplified the Five Principles to include rejection of hegemonism and power politics, the right of every state to choose its own political, social and economic system, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful and just settlement of international disputes. Integral to peaceful coexistence is also the promotion of an international economic order of justice, equality and mutual benefit with a key role for the United Nations.

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 characterises them. 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 entente has withstood the vicissitudes of internal as well as external challenges.

If I may be forgiven a personal recollection, I was privileged to be involved in some six months of negotiations on the delimitation of the common boundary. Pakistan will always honour the memory of Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi who, in a spirit of mutual accommodation, made possible the conclusion of the accord in December 1962, signed in March 1963. This was the event that inaugurated an epoch of enduring friendship between Pakistan and China.

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 hegemonism has won for China their trust, removing any friction in its peaceful ascension to world power status; But China's famous aversion to haughtiness is such that it insists on describing itself as a developing country.

In December 1953, when the Five Principles were first put forward by Premier 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 the posture of gladiators poised for mutual assured destruction. Non-aligned nations were yet to institutionalise their nascent movement. China had not taken its rightful place in the United Nations. Decolonisation had only begun.

Today, the world is unipolar, with all nations co-existing uneasily with the sole super power that bestrides the world like a colossus. It has achieved unchallengeable military and technological supremacy. The enlarged European Union can compete in economic power with the United States but has still to forge an independent foreign and defence policy that could promote a multipolar world order. The Non-Aligned Movement is preoccupied in reinventing a rationale for its continued existence.

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. Continuing repression in Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya 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 war on Islam.

The horrendous atrocity of 9/11 was unanimously condemned by the United Nations. It evoked worldwide sympathy for the United States. A large number of states joined the war on terrorism and they continue to participate in efforts to eradicate the scourge although many states believe the coercive strategy needs to be combined with a remedial approach to address the root causes of terrorism.

Reacting to 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 unloose the full force of its military power against terrorists 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 forcing 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.

Several among the major military powers have seized upon the US doctrine to assert for themselves the same right to the pre-emptive use of force. 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 right of self defence against armed attack as recognised by the Charter as also the Five Principles that emphasize the principles of non-aggression and non-interference in internal affairs.

Within weeks of 9/11, Afghanistan was attacked for providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime overthrown. Some 13000 US soldiers are still on search and destroy missions against the remnants of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

In March 2003, Iraq was invaded and the Baathist Saddam regime terminated. Iraq still remains under a US-UK led military occupation.

Both occupations are encountering growing resistance. In Iraq it is assuming a nationalist character. As Sargio de Melho, the UN envoy said before he was killed in Baghdad last year, occupation is the cause of resistance.

World opinion was outraged by the contempt implicit in the US-UK refusal to wait for authorization of use of force against Iraq by the Security Council. The allegation that Iraq continued to possess weapons of mass destruction in defiance of earlier UNSC resolutions was exposed as false. While few mourned the overthrow of Saddam Hussain, the world watched with consternation the destruction of Iraqi administrative and economic infrastructure and the killing of thousands of innocent civilians. The scandalous abuse of Iraqi prisoners of war has confirmed the ruthlessness of the occupation and galvanized demand even in the United States and United Kingdom for an end to unilateralism and interventionism.

The unilateral pre-emptive use of force against Iraq without the authorisation of the UN Security Council has unravelled the broad coalition in the war on terrorism.

Why did Washington not emulate the strategy followed in Afghanistan of giving the United Nations the lead role in ensuring internal security and managing the transition to democracy? Neo-conservative 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”.

It has since become all too clear that such an imperialist design cannot be acceptable to the Iraqi people and indeed world opinion in the post-colonial era.

II

The counter-productive consequences of unilateralism and pre-emption in Iraq are manifest. This strategy if pursued against North Korea to eliminate its nuclear weapons by military action, 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.

Collective action under the aegis of the UN Security Council alone can salvage the occupation of Iraq which, in the judgement of some US foreign policy establishment figures, is untenable and that settling a date for its withdrawal is therefore critical.

How successful has unilateralist pre-emption been in achieving the geopolitical aims of the US in its Afghanistan and Iraq wars?

In Afghanistan, change has brought into power, through the Bonn process, a legitimate and sovereign government, but its effective authority remains to be extended beyond its capital territory. Security is still not nationwide. Warlords’ militias need to be disarmed and demobilised. Illicit production of opium has risen to 75% of the world figure. Reconstruction is slow, impeded by insecurity. Preparations for elections in September to install a representative government could become problematic because of increasing resistance.

In Iraq, it remains to be seen if the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi will be accepted by Iraqis as legitimate and sovereign. The Security Council resolution of 8 June sets the end of January 2006 for withdrawal of the occupation. It does not eliminate doubt about the full sovereignty of the interim government in its relationship with the US led coalition forces in regard to major military campaigns. Also ambiguous is its sovereignty over the management of Iraq's oil resources, internal security and command over the new Iraqi army. Civil war from ethnic and sectarian power struggles could imperil Iraq's unity and territorial integrity. The road to elections and establishment of a representative government in Iraq also is beset with problems.

The prisoners' abuse scandal in violation of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, in Abu Ghraib prison and other secret detention centers, has dealt a blow to America's moral credibility in promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights in the region.

Earlier assertions of the use of military power to impose democracy and free market economy on Iraq as prototype for reshaping the internal political and economic order of the greater Middle East, are now softened by emollient talk of partnership between the G-8 grouping and the regional states to propel the region towards such a transformation. Arab leaders on the other hand maintain that participation in political governance, the place of women in society and other liberal reforms must be specifically related to the circumstances and traditions of their own societies and contingently, to the Quartet's Israel-Palestinian road map to a negotiated peace settlement for a viable Palestinian state.

Underlying the US urge to reform the Middle East is its belief that the main cause of terrorism is, besides poverty, the lack of freedom and democracy in the region. Hence its sense of messianic mission as an "exceptional" and "indispensable" nation to morph the Arab world into accommodating American principles and interests. Only this metamorphosis it is asserted, would make the region safe for the US and Israel and hold a promise of hope to dispel the despair and anger rife in the "arc of crisis" – the greater Middle East – that breeds hate and spawns terrorism against the West.

The political ethos that prevails in the US is such that policy makers and public opinion are impervious to an alternative conviction – that hatred and terrorism could spring from the injustice of Israel's unending occupation of Palestinian territories and their colonisation by Israeli settlements.

The US has achieved two of its strategic war aims – Iraq has been eliminated as a potential military counterweight to Israel's dominance over the region. Second, the Palestinians have been so isolated and suppressed by disproportionate use of force that all that may be on offer for them is a few Bantustan enclaves in the West Bank instead of the promise of a viable Palestinian state.

Despite these geopolitical dividends for the US and its strategic ally, the limits to unilateralism and preemption manifest from the problematique of Iraq and North Korea, make imperative a return to the multilateralism premissed 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 decolonisation even though many of them suffer authoritarian rule, poor governance, disrespect for human rights, corruption and grinding poverty.

This regression, despite their independence, has encouraged a new school of historians in the West to advocate imposition of a new US imperialism on the Third World on the model of the British empire of 19th century, even as they bemoan the lack of a "will to empire" in the American people.

III

Adherence by Pakistan and India to a bilateral pact committing themselves to the Five Principles would provide a conducive context for the normalisation of Pakistan-India relations. Several times, over the past decades, Pakistan did propose a non-aggression or no war pact only to be rejected by India.

Rejection of hegemonism, embrace of peaceful and just settlement of disputes through a dialogue process to find an equitable solution of the fifty-six year old Jammu and Kashmir dispute – the cause of two wars and perennial tension between the two-countries- could well produce 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; therefore unacceptable.

Unlike real estate or territorial disputes, Kashmir involves the destiny of twelve million people who have been struggling and sacrificing their lives for freedom for over half a century. Should their wishes be

ignored by turning a cease-fire line or line of actual control into a permanent border? The right of self-determination, pledged to them by Pakistan and India and consecrated by the international community itself, is at stake.

Presently, the atmospherics are right for a dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve their outstanding differences and disputes including the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. Confidence and security-building measures including a nuclear restraint and a nuclear risk-reduction regime form part of the agenda.

Given the contiguity of the two countries, flight-time for missiles would be two to three minutes only, ruling out sufficient early-warning time to identify if a launch is accidental or unauthorized. It would only be prudent in this situation to keep warheads unassembled and separated from missiles, not mounted for immediate firing. However 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 CBM.

The significant contribution made by China to the US-led diplomacy to defuse the military confrontation in 2002 between India and Pakistan and persuade them to enter into dialogue, has been acknowledged by the international community.

China's miracle of growth since its opening to the outside, of its economy in 1978, 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 worldover.

Phenomenal economic growth has made China a twin engine with the US, that is now driving the global economy. Growth over two decades averages about 10%. GDP is over 1.4 trillion dollars and percapita income exceeds \$ 1000. No less than 400 million of its people have been uplifted from abject poverty of earning less than one dollar a day, enabling this mass of humanity to march towards the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. As Premier Wen Jiabao stated at the Shanghai International Conference in May, "this will go down as one of the most remarkable feats in history."

IV

Pakistan is in the vanguard of the war on international terrorism. It is pledged to preventing extremism and terrorism from operating from its soil. China also, has thrown its weight behind the US-led global offensive. According to the London Institute of Strategic Studies, the clones or loose affiliates of Al-Qaeda number as many as 18000 men, in 60 countries. Iraq has become a new focus of terrorism.

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 deprived Muslim countries, for the root cause of terrorism lies in the political injustice done to them. President Musharraf cites inter-alia the Kashmir freedom struggle and the Palestine intifada as a result of denial of justice.

Will the West deliver its side of the prong?

More than three decades of Israeli occupation of the Arab territories continues under a regime of brutal repression. The injustice of Ariel Sharon's plan of disengagement from Gaza at the cost to Palestinians of Israeli territorial aggrandisement and expansionism in nearly half of the West Bank, is a standing example of the failure of the West to deliver.

In Bosnia, had deliverance come in time and not belatedly, much less than 200,000 lives would have been lost to ethnic cleansing. In Chechniya, the disproportionate use of force continues. The Kashmiris, who have sacrificed more than 80,000 lives for their freedom have been waiting for fifty six years for the delivery of their self determination.

V

Wars between states have receded into history but violent internal 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 the pre-emption or prevention by the UN Security Council of such massive violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Extremist security doctrines of attack, invasion and over-throw 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 the existing rules of international law are deemed inadequate to combat international terrorism more aggressively 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 marginalised in the shaping of the post 9/11 international order. The roles of China and the enlarged European Union would be critical to moderating the excesses of unilateralism and power politics in the new era.

----*Agha Shahi*