

Redefining Security: An Environmental Approach

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The multi-dimensional conceptualization of 'security' has rescued it from its excessive militaristic connotations. It is gradually being realised the world over that to be secure militarily is not enough. Security in other fields like economy, society, polity and even environment are regarded as important as military security in recent years. Of these, environmental security has assumed enormous significance today and discussions have intensified at the multilateral fora keeping the urgent necessity of evolving an international consensus over this issue. Unfortunately, the powerful nations of the world, as the chief polluters of environment, have resisted such multilateral efforts and refused to commit themselves to the standards set in the Kyoto protocol. This paper deals with the theoretical moorings of the concept of environmental security and argues in favour of wider civil-society movements to bring pressure upon the recalcitrant developed states to accept international standards and ensure environmental security for whole of humankind.

[Editorial Board]

“The Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed”
Mahatma Gandhi

The word security has been defined by scholars in different ways in different periods of history. As the global scenario keeps on transforming, the discourse in international politics on the definition of security also changes its track. “In its generic and literal meaning, security conveys the state or feeling of being free from fear, care, worry threat, danger etc., ensuring a sense of safety.”[1] However, the concept of security has changed its connotations over time. During Nineteenth century, it was primarily defined in terms of state security and the government was solely responsible for upholding the security of the state. This concept of security underwent further change in the aftermath of the First World War, which threatened the security of nations and this compelled the global community to look for a multilateral organisation which will make security a collective concern. This led to the establishment of the “League of Nations” in 1919 and it was anticipated that it would work in averting another war. The League soon proved ineffective and the world witnessed yet another World War. The experiments with collective security were however not abandoned and by 1945, the UN was established as a multilateral body to ensure international security and peace. Nevertheless, the concern with national security or security of the state defined primarily in military security terms was central to the concept of

security and it was not until the close of the twentieth century that the concept broadened its scope to include non-militarist dimensions of security within its conceptual domain.

The years following the Second World War led to a more complicated insecure world because of the initiation of cold war. During this period the term security was primarily defined on the basis of military and nuclear strength. “Cold war understandings of security emphasised military, ideological and technological definitions of social problems. Security was connected with state secrecy, nuclear power and military strength.”[2] “The state was the primary actor and the dominant interpretation was that if the state security was assured, individual security was of little consequence.”[3] The deterioration of environment and occurrence of natural calamities during 60s made the scholars of International Relations(IR) to review the definition of security. No substantial progress was made on this front other than creation of United Nation Environment Programme, UNEP following the 1972 Stockholm Conference. It worked as catalyst in generating awareness over environmental issues, which gradually led to shift in the paradigm of security.

The major shift in the paradigm of security was witnessed after the end of cold war, one of the issues that became significant was environmental security and led the scholars to state that ‘welfare not warfare’ will shape the rules and “global threats like ozone holes and pollution will dictate the agenda”. It is said so because “extensive deforestation, desertification, salination, denudation, water scarcity etc., are no longer seen as local, state or even regional problems, but have broader international ramifications; for they undermine the economic base and social fabric of weak and poor states by generating or exacerbating intra-inter state tensions and conflicts”[4] .

The importance of environment security in IR has led to, “growing participation and importance of non-state actors in global environmental politics. International governmental organization, Non governmental organization, advocacy groups have all become vital players in the process of international environmental regime formation.”[5] The complexity of environment problem has provided increasing role to these advocacy groups. It is now almost universally accepted that global environmental threats can be successfully addressed only through the active cooperation of these key actors.

Theoretical Aspect

The diminishing role of state in the global order coincided with the shift in emphasis from ‘Realist’ to ‘Neo-liberal Institutional’ perspective at the conceptual level. “Realist (perspective) emphasised on fashioning national interest in terms of power, war or threat perception, (in contrast) the Neo-realist (perspective) begins by proposing a problem-solving approach, seeking to help develop, the concept of system’s structure which at once bounds the domain.”[6]

The realists believe that international anarchy fosters competition and conflicts among states inhibit their willingness to cooperate even when they share common interests. They, while focussing on states as units of analysis, do not take into account the environmental issues and tend to downplay internal factors as well as indirect transboundary effects of environmental

degradation. The realists also favour unilateral action if an environmental problem is recognised as a potential threat in order to optimise the state's access to scarce resources of water, oil and soil.

On the other hand, the 'Neo-realist' perspective enables the policymakers to see how the structure of the system and variations in it, affect the interacting units and the outcomes they produce. Thus, 'Neo-realist theory', "helps us to focus on the conflicting aspects of the negotiations, and elucidates some of the reasons why co-operation has been difficult to achieve." [7] It leads the policymaker to think in terms of a collective action problem, through its conceptualisation of anarchy. However, the neorealist also has drawbacks and its primary weaknesses are its neglect of international institutions and domestic politics, and its effective structural determinism, which leaves us unable to account for the process and for agenda setting.

The neo-liberal institutionalist has appropriately elucidated the role of international institutions in solving the global problem. They argue that the realists have overemphasised conflicts and underestimated the capacities of international institutions to promote cooperation. Neo-liberal institutionalists believe that "states cooperate to cope with environmental problems by creating new international regimes and organisations." [8] These institutions always reinforce their legal sovereignty and very often enhance their problem-solving capacity as well. They believe that even in the prevailing state of anarchy in global order, states can work together and can do so especially with the assistance of international institutions.

For the neo-liberal "security is essential, and institutions help to make security possible. Institutions provide guaranteed framework of interaction; they suggest that there will be an expectation of future interactions. These interactions will occur not just on security issues but on a whole suit of international issues, including human rights, the environment, immigration and economics." [9] Therefore, the neo-liberal institutionalist perspective is appropriate to deal with the issue of environmental security in the international relations.

However, there are divergences among countries regarding their approaches to security. Some are influenced by the realist and some by the neo liberal institutionalist perspective. For example, the US position on environmental security is influenced by the realist theory and argues that it would be irrelevant for it to take substantial action on environmental issues if developing countries would not also undertake similar commitments. It is exemplified by the act of US walking out from the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001. It proves that US has no faith in the framework prepared by the International Organization (IO). On the other hand, the developed and developing countries have shown faith in IO to solve the menace emanating from environmental degradation. These countries have taken number of mitigation and adaptation measures suggested by the IO.

The Gulf war of 1991 and ongoing war in Iraq at the moment for the control of oil resources proves that US actions are influenced by the Realist perspective, as it favours unilateral action to optimise the state's access to scarce resources.

Environmental Security

Environmental security as a concept encompassing non-military aspects was officially mentioned for the first time in the *International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development*, convened by the United Nation General Assembly in New York from 24th August to 11th September, 1987. In the conference, there was unanimity among the member states that recently non-military threats to security have moved to the forefront of global concern. The Palme Commission, suggested “that there are global dangers which threaten the community of nations and which cannot be solved by mere boundary protection. By emphasizing common dangers, it bases its appeal for co-operative behaviour, not altruism, but on a larger sense of collective self-interest.”[10] In the similar vein the report entitled, “*Our Common Future*”, released during World Commission on Environment and Development, pointed out that, environmental stress is both a cause and effect of political tension and military conflict. It also maintained that traditional notion of security is no longer applicable.

The inclusion of environmental threat to security has significantly expanded the scope of the instruments by which security threats can be addressed. It has also cast a shadow on the existing national priorities and challenged the prevailing notions of security. There has been a slow but steady realisation that environmental threats may have serious socio-economic and human costs; hence, they cause insecurity and that they cannot be solved by the unilateral decisions of states. In simple word one could say that post-cold war security was defined from the perspective that includes measure to enhance the long term health and welfare of the human family reducing human suffering to the minimum.

Environmental security unlike the cold war period has raised question of “who takes initiatives, coordinates cooperation and shoulders costs”[11] . During cold war period developed countries were seen at the fore-front in shouldering the global problems and military power was the solution for everything. However, when the world is reeling under severe environmental degradation there is no unanimity among the countries regarding tackling the menace, as a result of which many global conventions under the auspices of United Nation are yet to be implemented.

Acknowledging the threat emanating from environmental degradation and to make the global community secure, the UNGA on 20th December 1987, passed the Resolution 44/228. The resolution recognised that the members of the international community must act together to address global environmental challenges and to prevent the occurrence and escalation of international environmental conflicts. It also decided to convene the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

Since then, scores of conferences have taken place but very little headway has been made due to differences between developed and developing countries. Developed states were of view that it is a common technological and economic problem. It could be tackled by providing aid and encouragement of new technologies in developing states. On the other hand, “South states were of view that it is a western problem. It is caused by consumption patterns. It cannot be dealt with without looking into the problems inherent in the development paradigm and at distribution issues.

Apart from this issue, developing countries have apprehension that in the name of eco-friendly objectives, developed countries would try to impose various restrictions on the developing countries that would implicitly impede their development process. Most notable amongst these are trade, access to natural resources, restriction on forest resources on which many depend for their livelihood. It would indirectly promote interference in internal matter of developing countries. These are basic issues and due to these issues, the multilateral organisations have failed miserably.

Apart from international organisation there is a need for a role to be played by non-state actors. The success of Vienna Convention was possible due to convergence of scientific and political opinion for regulatory action. "It was in 1970s scientists discovered that depletion of the ozone layer was being caused by human made chemicals called cholo-flouro-carbons(CFCs)."[12] The scientific evidence led to serious action, which ultimately led to the phasing out of the ozone depleting substances.

One could perhaps say that 'the absence of certainty, i.e., scientific evidence, has created dilemma on the issue of climate change. Other important non-state actors are the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They work as a pressure group and influence the environmental negotiations at large extent. Best example could be cited of the Indian NGOs, it is primarily their contribution that today India has the largest non-polluting CNG transportation fleet in the world.

Other important group is the corporate sector. The significance of corporate sector in the conservation of environment was lauded by UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, during World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg, 2002. He stated that, "today there is growing recognition that lasting and effective answers can only be found if business is fully engaged. And more and more we realise that it is only by mobilising the corporate sector that we can make significant progress."[13] It is to be seen how this community is going to play an active role for the conservation of environment because it has been found that they influence the US stand on environment as they play an important role during electioneering period due to their economic might. For example the industry lobby group, the 'Global Climate Coalition', have spent \$13 million a year since its establishment in 1989 persuading people and politicians that the threat of climate change was exaggerated, and fanning fears about the costs of taking action.

One more very significant aspect that has come out into sharper focus with the redefinition of security is the importance of the role played by women groups in various movements aimed at conservation of the environment. Earlier Feminists were of the view that discourses on security have neglected women, making them feel insecure in society. It was so because military and national security of the state, have always been viewed from a masculine perspective. Now when the security is getting re-defined in multidimensional terms, they have joined the global movements with renewed zeal and enthusiasm.

Apart from the role of the aforementioned groups, the role of the government is of immense importance. It is found that the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are unable or unwilling to enforce the hundreds of regulations and state promulgations aimed at environmental protection primarily because the elites in these countries lack the sense of

responsibility in these matters. Many Asian countries have written environmental protection policies into their constitutions and even made environmental laws legally enforceable. However, in reality, there is a clear enforcement-lag in this field due to state commitments to high rates of economic growth and other more pressing problems like poverty, unemployment etc. It was rightly stated by then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, during Stockholm Conference of 1972 that “Poverty is the biggest pollution”. There is need for integrating environmental issues with social issues, which ultimately influence the policies of developing countries on environment. Developed countries can contribute meaningfully in this domain by providing financial assistance and green technology to the developing countries and most vulnerable countries, i.e., the coastal countries whose existence are at stake due to rise in sea level and frequent occurrence of natural hazards.

Conclusion

In conclusion one could say that the players who were earlier excluded from the security paradigm have been entrusted with major role to play in the changed scenario. The threat of environmental security has brought both the developing and developed countries to the negotiating table. It has become clear that co-operation is required between developing and developed countries to minimize the threat. ‘Pressure Politics’, which was earlier used by the developed countries have lost relevance; instead parity with equity has gained importance, and consequently spectacular trans-formation has taken place in the field of ‘International Relations’. It is also being— slowly but surely— realized that the issue of global security can ignore the environmental security issues only at its own peril.

The issue of environmental protection has thus assumed tremendous importance in recent years and generated world-wide civil-society movements compelling governments to forge environment-friendly policies into their developmental agenda. The pressures on developed countries are mounting and the realisation is fast gaining ground that environmental pollution anywhere is a threat to human existence everywhere. It is very likely that very soon there will be an integrated approach to address this issue, involving key stake holders— local governments, NGOs private-sector groups, and those segments of the population directly and indirectly affected by proposed projects or policies.

Endnotes

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