PEACE BEGINS AT HOME

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT: A DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITY

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False Perspectives

It seemed to me in the immediate Post-War II period, when India, then countries in South East Asia, followed by colonies in Africa, achieved their independence, that the future of world society would trend away from precarious power alliances and power balances toward independent units which would pursue their own independent policies guided by their own perceptions of national interest. The longer-term interests of these new states would be in collaborative rather than power political or adversarial relationships. They were economically and militarily weak, and they would not be in a position to pursue the traditional power politics of the imperial age. They would separate themselves from the ambitions and from the economic and political interventions of the great powers. It seemed to me that peace would begin at home through independence. Some years later, I wrote about a general theory of international relations that focused on nonalignment as a universal trend, promoting peaceful relationships.

In 1966, I edited a book on nonalignment (Burton 1966) putting forward these views, and I managed to persuade some of my colleagues at University College London of this perspective. We wrote together a short book with the title Britain between East and West, arguing that such nonalignment could be a global policy, not just one affecting newly independent and weaker states. Britain as a nonaligned state would contribute to peaceful relations (Burton et al. 1984).

Clearly my colleagues and I had placed tremendous faith in independence and in new leaderships, not appreciating that it is relatively easy to be a charismatic Nehru, Tito or Nasser while struggling for freedom from external control, but very difficult to provide constructive leadership once the responsibilities of office are assumed. Furthermore, it was impossible for a genuinely independent state to exist in the domestic and international conditions that then prevailed.

How wrong can one be- In 1974, we published a short working paper, "A Study of World Society" in which nonalignment did not get a mention. The emphasis was on decision making, legitimacy, the structural violence of non-legitimised institutions, and the generic nature of conflict. We were beginning to see that there was probably no such thing as international conflict other than the spill-over of domestic conditions. This represented a complete about-turn in our thinking.

Getting the hypothesis right

I wish to pause here to make an observation. We can study situations, history and the history of thought; we can readily get involved in conflictual relationships and seek to remedy them by one means or another. All this can be a waste of effort and lead to further misunderstanding, rather than more understanding of conflict and its remedy, if we do not continually challenge the basic hypotheses reflected in whatever thinking we are observing. We can have carefully thought-out policy and applied practice, but can still experience failure, leading on to more of "the same medicine" and on to even more costly failure. Drug policies and gang policies are examples of this. The sources of the problem are not being tackled. At the international level Vietnam was an example of the rule that "more and more of the same" made the position increasingly worse.

Policy and practice must be derived from basic hypotheses and theories. The hypothesis that Vietnam was an example of a communist threat proved to be false. Rather, Vietnam was a continuation of a struggle for independence that originated under French rule and matured under Japanese occupation. An alternative policy would have been for the U.S. to support the movement and to assist in its development. Surely there are many other such untested "hunches" masquerading as hypotheses that should be examined. The point I make is that a sound original hypothesis, and the wider explanation derived from it, must be the basis of policy and action. If, having moved logically from hypothesis to theory to policy to practice, there is failure, then this is new information that must not be ignored. It must be fed back into the hypothesis, and the analysis must start again. The sacrifices of Vietnam will be justified only when policy makers derive lessons from the experience so that the same policy mistakes are not made again in other theatres, such as Colombia or the former Yugoslavia.

Enter a human dimension

Returning to nonalignment and our false hypotheses, my colleagues in London and I eventually turned more and more to the fundamental problems underlying conflicts between persons and groups, meaning by this the nature of legitimised authorities and systems, and the institutions governing relationships. This meant challenging the

traditional assumptions of classical political philosophers that remain a part of our feudal heritage. We were questioning the traditional legal assumption that there are those who have a right to expect obedience, and others who have a moral obligation to obey, to quote Lord Lloyd (1964). We were questioning the economic and political assumptions that were implicit in this legal assumption. We were questioning notions of democracy such as majority government that left high proportions of citizens (frequently ethnic minorities) discriminated against, fearful for their cultural future, and left outside the political process. We were inevitably led to question whether institutions or individuals were, in practice, the unit of power: whether, that is, institutions had to be adapted to human aspirations if there were to be harmonious relationships domestically and internationally.

The human dimension

In that age of power politics, any truly human dimension was virtually eliminated from political and economic theory. International Relations theory held that "man was aggressive, therefore the state was aggressive". Not liking this conclusion, many of us at the time argued that international relations behaviours, that is the behaviours of states, were different from the behaviour of individuals, and that the man-state relationship was merely an analogy and did not prove the state was aggressive.

Initially, it did not occur to us to challenge the assumption that man was aggressive. Every discipline made this assumption: it was conventional wisdom. There was socialized man, economic man, legal man, and other constructs designed to fit the requirements of theory within separate disciplines, all of which assumed the need for an authoritarian framework designed to contain the aggressiveness of man.

Empirically, however, these constructs were proving wholly unrealistic. We had to explain events in Northern Ireland, Vietnam and Korea, which demonstrated that the power of human needs is far greater than police and military power -- something the last few years in Europe have demonstrated even more dramatically. We were forced out of our cosy assumption that man is aggressive by nature.

We were forced to come to terms with the reality that man is indeed "aggressive" in conditions that confront human needs and that actually provoke aggression, and to try to isolate those conditions.

Furthermore, it was becoming clear that the struggles for independence and autonomy, an assertion of separate development, were continuing struggles in all societies and at all societal levels. Such struggles occurred in the family, in industry, in the community, in social life no less than in international relations. The increasing incidence of ethnic conflicts was an obvious example of continuing imperialism within states. As they were

obvious, they threw further light on social struggles generally, including class struggles, and on the interplay between economic, political and human conditions.

In short, we were seeking a theory that would explain what was apparent, though still denied. That is, we sought a theory that explained the power of human needs -- a phrase now the title of a book (Coate and Rosati, 1988). To do this, it was necessary to be clear on what we meant by "conflict" as distinct from familiar human "disagreements" and to have an explanation of conflict by being clear about the nature of its origins.

The Nature of Conflict

The destructive conflicts that interested us nationally and internationally were not concerned with management problems, though these sometimes attract the term "conflict". In management, there are common goals, and arguments about means, but such struggles should not be classed as conflict. Nor were we concerned with disputes. Disputes are about material issues on which there can be compromise and settlement by arbitration or negotiation. We were concerned with conflicts that occur through the pursuit and denial of human needs -- recognition, identity, and developmental needs generally -- in relation to which there cannot be compromise. Conflicts are situations or processes in the course of which persons are prepared to sacrifice themselves as martyrs, become "terrorists" or even starve themselves to death.

It seems clear now that there are some human needs, such as those of individual and group identity and recognition that will be pursued regardless of costs and consequences. They are ontological and not within the control of the individual or identity group. The only effective control of the pursuit of such needs is another need, that of valued relationships. Only if there are valued relationships with authorities -- that is to say legitimised relationships -- can there be social harmony at any societal level from the family to the international. This, we concluded, was a political realism far more realistic than the theories of the so-called "political realists" of power politics.

From Power to Conflict Resolution as a Means of Control

We had to conclude that if conflicts could not be suppressed even by military might, they had to be resolved. If something was to be done about conflict there had to be some problem-solving process by which there could be a deep analysis of the total situation, bringing to the surface the underlying generic human needs of development and recognition of separate human identities, and the discovery of options that satisfied these needs. So we were led away from the traditional "human aggression" thesis into the unexplored field of conflict resolution. There had to be decision making processes at all

societal levels that made possible the costing of consequence of conflicts, leading to problem-solving means of anticipating these and removing their sources.

Some experiments

The question was then how to demonstrate the practicality of such an analytical approach to problems of conflict in a world dominated by power political thinking. It became urgent for us as teachers of International Relations to resolve this question. There was a critical meeting of teachers in the field. We were challenged to take a case and to demonstrate that our theoretical framework was more "realistic" than power politics.

We were invited to take Cuba, then the topic of concern, as a test case. However, we could not base our work on reports of situations, as the power political framework had been employed in their description. We chose to experiment with new cases.

There was in the early 1960s the destructive Malaysian-Singapore-Indonesian conflict centred in Borneo. Nonaligned countries were virtually at war. The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, could not persuade the parties even to come together to discuss the matter. Agreeing to meet was regarded by each as a symptom of weakness in the military confrontation. With Wilson's encouragement, we - at the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict at University College London - invited each head of government to send to London three nominees to discuss their problem in our academic framework. They all came within ten days. Discussions lasted for as long. Discoveries were made when a Malaysian nominee observed that all were equally at fault in trying to avoid dealing in a constructive way with some shared domestic problems. I emphasize that they were domestic problems - in actuality problems relating to ethnicity - at the source of this international conflict. Some time later we received virtually identical messages from all three parties that relations were normal. We followed up with several other situations where the United Nations Secretariat had not been able to bring parties to a conflict together.

The Domestic Nature of Conflict Resolution

We thus found ourselves on another track. Was the problem of international conflict essentially a spill-over of unresolved domestic problems? Was such informal, quiet, face-to-face, non-negotiating, problem-solving analysis a means by which to reveal the sources of problems of conflict?

Now we can see far more clearly that this is the case. Take, as a modern example, the drug "problem" in the United States. It is a consumer problem, brought about by circumstances of life within the United States. Within that society there are high levels of tension experienced by those wishing to "make it" in a competitive system. There are alienation problems that lead young people to gangs and behaviours that they would avoid if there

existed valued relationships in the main society. There are unemployment problems in ethnic ghettos. To deal with such problems would require major changes in educational, health and housing policies, and major changes, also, in cultural orientations towards "making it". It is much easier politically, and in the short term cheaper, to blame the suppliers, and to use overwhelming force to take control of supplying countries. Furthermore, leaders obtain credit for showing how a declining imperialism can assert itself internationally, as the British Government did in the case of the Falklands, and the U.S. has tried to do in the case of Colombia.

For an even more dramatic example we could go back to World War II and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Britain had an empire that served as a guaranteed market for its Manchester textiles. Competition from Japan in particular threatened the British industry. One solution would have been to retrain labour and redirect it into the then growing electrical or light engineering industries. It was politically much easier to blame Japan, and to close colonial markets to Japanese competition. Japan, deprived of raw materials and markets essential for such an island with its large population, had little option but to seek its own co-prosperity sphere. A domestic problem of Britain was exported, with consequences we all now know.

In Vietnam, the early intervention by the United States into the affairs of what was French Indo-China was a spill over of a domestic problem, a severe anti-communist witch hunt in the U.S. There was no analysis of independence movements, and even President Kennedy was led to warn nonaligned states that "if you are not with us you are against us". That intervention was wholly misguided, but again the product of domestic conditions. We could rewrite history from this perspective. Certainly in this thermo-nuclear age we must face the future realizing that peace begins at home, and that domestic problems when exported produce disastrous reactions, even from militarily powerless people.

There is nothing greatly profound in such observations. We know that personal problems lead to conflictual relationships. Insecurities of identity groups and their own in-fighting, be they Protestants in Northern Ireland, whites in South Africa, Jews in Israel, or children and parents in the family, lead to aggressive behaviours.

Conflict Resolution and Its Institutionalisation

Within a human needs framework, a deep analysis of a conflict can reveal common goals, goals of human development and autonomy. Conflict is over means chosen to achieve these objectives and values held in common. There is no scarcity factor. The more recognition the one party enjoys, the more others will experience. Conflict, therefore, is over satisfiers, over means, and these are a matter of discovery. For example, separation of

different ethnic communities, as in Cyprus, could be a means of arriving at collaborative relationships and provide a basis of security from which there could be functional cooperation and degrees of integration.

If this is so, it is absurd for a government to side with one party to a conflict in another country. A no-fault and problem-solving approach is required.

It was absurd for external governments to take a position on Fiji where the Indian population, originating with workers indentured by colonial powers, have become a majority: there is a problem there that has to be solved outside the traditional Western framework of majority government. It was absurd for India to try to coerce Tamils in Sri Lanka who were seeking local, cultural autonomy within the wider Sri Lankan system, as Turkish Cypriots seek autonomy within Cyprus. It was absurd to take punitive action against the Government of South Africa, when what was required is some innovative means by which a minority can maintain its autonomy within a wider political system without the unrepresentative implications of one-man-one-vote. In all these cases, it was a problem-solving approach to domestic and foreign conflict situations that was required.

The Irrelevance Of Ideologies

It is interesting that ideologies and cultures become irrelevant in such a conflict resolution framework. They relate to means, not shared goals. It follows that notions of conservative and radical, left and right are irrelevant. In practice they do not enter into discussions when parties interact in a facilitated situation. Short term sectional interests remain, and these have to be negotiated when a resolution is proposed in relation to a particular situation; but they have to give place to the universally held, non-negotiable and longer-term human needs involved.

The general conclusion is an obvious one, but one of which we were not aware in the post-war reconstruction period. There is no institutional "ism" that is a solution. Nonalignment was no more than a reaction against colonial attachments. We still have to get down to the task of adjusting institutions to human needs. So far we have failed, and failure has led authorities to contract out and to hand over decision making and government to the market place. Health, education, housing, child care and developmental needs generally are being neglected as the market diverts human energies to increased resource exploitation.

I find myself moving toward the Greens, not in their focus on the environment, though that is important, but in their focus on provention, that is, forward looking decision making that places obligations on authorities to provent those conditions that lead to conflict. The Greens, however, have not discovered a human needs philosophy that would take them out of their narrow focus, out of adversarial politics, and into a non-ideological problem solving

approach to the conditions that destroy the environment, and also the quality of life and the development of peoples.

This was the mistake the nonalignment movement made: the focus was too narrow and goal oriented, without getting at the ultimate causes of their problems.

Institutionalisation

A further question that has emerged in recent years is how to institutionalise problem-solving processes. Academic bodies can experiment, but they cannot be a legitimised agency as is a court, nor do they have the necessary resources to persevere. In the mid 1980's, my colleagues and I at George Mason University, Fairfax, had two four day meetings with Ambassadors to the United Nations representing Middle Powers - that is relatively stable and legitimised governments. The hope was that such a group could take initiatives that the UN Secretariat could not take. But competing loyalties were revealed, despite support from a senior Secretariat member. It was a challenge that could not be met within the United Nations framework in which many authorities represented are on the defensive domestically.

The institutionalisation problem can be solved only when there is some fundamental change in the power political consensus that dominates political and legal decision making. Institutional and precedent-based legal norms must give place to human need norms. For this to happen there must be a far clearer understanding of the nature of conflict, and a change in consensus thinking.

The Responsibilities of Scholars

Universities have a responsibility for civilization's plight. The separate disciplines, based on constructs that reflect the authoritarian past and a disregard for not only females and minorities, but for individuals generally and their identity and development, are beginning to be replaced by research, and institutionally by degree-giving centres, that know no disciplinary boundaries. In time this could make a difference. But do we have the time?

Conclusion

It will easily be seen that I have two negative prejudices. First, adversarial politics that negate problem-solving approaches to problems held in common; and second, separate disciplines. In a human needs framework both are illogical and dysfunctional.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that we must constantly examine and re-examine every one of our assumptions, hypotheses and theories, even at the risk of being a dissenting voice, with all its career consequences. Even with such dissenting voices themselves, one must extract from them the implicit hypotheses and the behavioural

theories that they reflect. Gandhi with his nonviolence, Martin Luther King and his "dream", leaders in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and others -- what are their assumptions, on what basis can their thinking, policies and activities be evaluated?

One conclusion that might be reached is the conclusion implicit in the title of this article: "Peace Begins at Home". I would conclude with the argument that not until domestic policies within states cater to the human developmental needs of peoples can there be social harmony, and in the absence of that social harmony within states there will be a dangerous spill-over into the international system.

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