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**‘The Third World and World Order in the Twenty-first Century:  
The Impact of Intrusive Regionalism’**

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*A dominant perspective in international relations has argued that the end of the Cold War would unleash substantially greater regional disorder in the Third World. However, regional order and disorder in the post-Cold War era depend on other factors besides the international distribution of power. The differential impact of the end of the Cold War on regional order in the Third World can be explained by the varied interplay of regional norms. Traditional norms of sovereignty and non-interference that always played a significant role in Third World regionalism are now under duress. The redefinition of these norms may be traced to the fact that some Westphalian norms have been internationally undermined in the post-Cold War era. The changing nexus of regionalism, sovereignty and security is likely to produce different regional orders across the Third World.*

As part of the polarity-stability debate, various realist perspectives have argued that the end of the Cold War would precipitate greater regional instability in the Third World. This regional disorder would derive mainly from the lifting of the security umbrellas of the superpowers and associated problems of multipolarity and aspiring regional hegemonies. While it is true that changes in the international distribution of power affect regional order in the Third World, its effects vary across regions, and depend on the changing interplay of norms of inter-state sovereignty.

In the Cold War era, regional order in the Third World was determined mainly by the internal security predicament of Third World states. Problems of weak statehood and regime legitimacy defined this security predicament (Ayoob, Buzan and others). The impact of superpower rivalry was mediated through the imperatives of sovereignty and regime survival. The emphasis on the preservation of state sovereignty became a distinguishing feature of Third World regionalism. It is noteworthy that proposals for greater inter-state regional co-operation that challenged the sovereignty principle yielded few successes. Examples of such failed attempts include Nehru’s Pan-Asianism, Nasser’s Pan-Arabism, and Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism.

Within the sovereignty principle, the Third World found two alternative conceptualisations of regionalism that it could adopt. First, regionalism could be based on superpower patronage and manifested itself in Cold War alliances. Second and alternatively, regionalism could be based on aspirations of regional autonomy. Regional organisations based on the second conceptualisation pursued three key norms: non-interference, pacific settlement of disputes directed towards the maintenance of territorial status quo, and ‘regional solutions to regional problems’. Countries that chose to preserve regional security under the umbrella of a superpower, soon became aware of the problems of such a strategy. They included the arbitrary and weak commitment of the superpowers and other adverse consequences of relying

on external protection. But the second conceptualisation did not go unchallenged either. The main challenges came from the more extreme versions of regional autonomy that sought to protect regional autonomy at the expense of non-interference and the preservation of the post-colonial territorial status quo.

Most regional experiments in the Third World were unable to reconcile these conflicts: 'The best protection against outside interference came from pan-nationalist frameworks, but to rely on this could only mean compromising on non-interference and territorial status quo'. Usually, countries opted for a weak regional order that protected their sovereignty but reduced the efficacy and credibility of regional organisations that had started out with much broader aims.

A few parts of the Third World were able to escape these contradictions. For example, groupings like the ASEAN and the GCC adopted the three norms but gave primacy to the goal of regime security. Non-interference here represented a commitment to mutual support against internal threats. Politico-security concepts were devised to downplay the extent of the actual reliance of some members on bilateral military alliances with outside powers. These groupings demonstrated that regime security could serve as a powerful catalyst for regional security cooperation, even when inter-state disputes existed and there was no consensus against the nature of the external threat.

The end of the Cold War has disrupted the carefully struck balance between the three norms in the ASEAN and the GCC. However, the Third World has not fallen prey to the regional disorder and chaos that had been predicted by the realists. The differential response of various regions in reordering the norms that underpin their existence determines the extent of regional order or disorder in the post-Cold War era.

The decline in superpower rivalry precipitated several changes in the international order that necessitated a redefinition of the security roles of regional organisations. It allowed a challenge to existing regimes by an unprecedented focus on human rights and democratisation. The rise of regional hegemonies and internal conflicts, accompanied by a strategy of selective engagement by the outside powers, particularly the US, also created new regional threats necessitating regional solutions. The Westphalian pact struck by members of a region needed some redefinition.

The response of the Third World to these challenges has been varied depending on the balance of perceived threats. Some regions in the Third World, such as Latin America, have chosen a more 'intrusive' form of regionalism based on the CSCE/OSCE model. The OSCE model, however, has its origins in European integration; that is, a movement away from Westphalian sovereignty, with distinctive political roots, towards a higher level of institutionalisation. The Asia and Pacific region has been the most reluctant to redefine the existing balance of norms.

## **Discussion**

The discussion highlighted the extent to which new international norms, such as humanitarian intervention, are contested and do not represent linear developments.

Taking the ASEAN case as an example, a participant asked if the resistance of some ASEAN members to the new norms of constructive intervention might not threaten the existence of the organisation. The speaker's response was to cite the example of 'the ASEAN way' and its growing disjunction with global norms. ASEAN-led attempts at joint economic surveillance present a relative departure from the imperative of sovereignty. Intrusive regionalism might disrupt the ASEAN, but it might also result in a new and more stable regional order with a stronger base in civil society.

The discussion also pointed to the strong normative assumptions of the enquiry. Counter to the emphasis on the three regional norms presented, it could be argued that there exists some real disagreement about the roots of regionalism. In recognition of the divisive impact of a deeper regionalism, a world order of bandwagons led by the US, as opposed to regional orders, might be just as plausible. The speaker recognised the normative basis of his enquiry. However, he argued that the work made a methodological contribution through its attempt to show how differences in regional orders might be explained by differences in regional norms, as opposed to domestic norms or structural change. One consequence of the analysis was that regional orders that were able to adapt might be more stable than before, but others that fail to adapt are likely to be less stable. Furthermore, the increasing regionalisation of security and the differential responses to the new international conditions, are likely to yield regional orders and security communities that are much more differentiated than in the Cold War era.

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