Collective Security and the Persian Gulf

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Collective security has long been recognised as a useful system for the maintenance of international peace. It purports to build up such a combination of power that no state or combination of states would dare pose a threat to international peace and security. It aims at the preservation of the status-quo. "One for all and all for one"[1] is the watchword of this system. Here peace is no longer the responsibility of an individual state, rather the responsibility is shared by the entire community of states. It can be argued that this is an attempt on the part of the sovereign states to centralize the decentralized nature of our legal regime. The concept gained currency in international relations after the First World War.

Led by the idealist President of the United States (U.S) Woodrow Wilson, there was world-wide condemnation of the age-old device of peace maintenance—Balance of power—as the major cause and breeder of war. Instead of this traditional device, the novel and noble principle of collective security was accepted. This was incorporated into the Covenant of the League of Nations

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as its Article 16. The post-war world of 1945 again accepted this principle for peace maintenance, through its incorporation into the Charter of the United Nations when an entire Chapter i.e. Chapter VII was devoted for this purpose.

Collective Security, indeed, is an ideal principle. Its logic seems to be flawless. It does not smack of division of power or power politics. It talks of security and peace which is to be preserved through the united efforts of the states concerned, an objective for which human-kind had strived all through the ages.

A cursory look at the present-day international relations would however, confirm the view that collective security too has failed in achieving its objectives. The system suffers from built-in limitations. It conceives of a world that is too simplistic and general. It does not take into account the differentations existing among nation-states. To be operative it requires homogenized security environment. The system is based upon the following assumptions :

a)   The defenders of the system must at all times be more powerful than the aggressors. The idea is to deter the aggressor from attacking.

d)   The defenders of the system must share the same perception of threat and security.

c)   They must be willing to subordinate their con-flicting political interests to the collective interest of the community.[2]

In a world governed by competing concepts of nationalisms and interests, the above three, are require-ments that can be met under very rare and extraordinary

circumstances. Keeping this rationale in perspective, and taking into account the regional security environment ; threat perceptions of the indigenous actors ; interests of the super-powers in the region and finally the security options available to and opted for by the indigenous actors, this paper suggests that Collective Security can not be considered as a probable or realistic option for the Gulf states. Instead it contends that a viable regional security framework for the Gulf should evolve along the functional logic ; emphasize on increased communications among the societies in order to facilitate the accommodation of their procedural and structural differences and thereby build a "Security Community."[3] The purpose here is not to deemphasize the military dimension of the problem. Rather it is argued that a genuine security community would serve as a firm and sound base for the creation of a viable Collective Security system.

Security Threats of The Gulf States

There is a veritable mosaic of security threats to the Gulf states. These emanate from domestic, regional and extra-regional sources. The Gulf is a region where politics so far has remained volatile and unstable. Geographical boundaries do not often coincide with the ethno-linguistic boundaries. The region has a non-legalistic tradition. Thus no confrontational issue can be treated as inherently unimportant or settled. Most of the time they remain dormant. A change in the power position of a state or a change of regime that in its wake brings a new set of values might reactivate the issue.[4] These

conflicts have the propensity to spread over the region. In the absence of a viable regional framework for their settlement, military means are at times opted for or intra and extra-regional alliance sought. The Super-Powers too, because of their stakes in the region, remain more than willing to act as 'protectors' in the region. Thus sub-systemic conflicts have the potential of turning into systemic ones. The major sources of threats can be identified as the following.

(a) Domestic Threats

—Like most of the Third World states regime stability and Nation-building are two of the major preoccupations of the Gulf leaders. They constantly have to seek a balance between the conservatives and the western educated class. This educated middle class is frustrated with the narrow political base of the ruling elites. The widespread demonstrations in Bahrain in 1980, which was followed by a coup attempt ;[5] the seizure of the Holy Ka'bah in 1979, are manifestations of this frustration. In order to ensure the process of nation-building and domestic political stabilty, the Gulf states would have to evolve a genuine democratic political system.

—The politics of crude oil production and management of resources is another source of conflict. Many in Saudi Arabia believe that Saudi production of oil of over 6 ml b/d is a waste of the country's natural resources and should be saved. They hold that the large cash inflows result in corruption in high ranks and forces the country to spend large sums faster than it can control.[6]

—The large body of expatriate workers is often cited

as a source of threat. It is argued that this work force in Iran had acted as a catalytic agent in disseminating liberal ideas.[7] One can argue that this potential threat, has somewhat been exaggerated, for these workers themselves have a vested interest in regime stability. Therefore it is most unlikely that they would indulge in political activism.

—The Palestinian presence is regarded as a political problem, especially in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There they enjoy high ranking and important governmental and commercial positions. It is argued that the continued failure on the part of the regional states to take effective action against Israel might induce them into aligning themselves with the radical and extremist elements.[8]

The Shia-Sunni cleavage impedes the process of nation-building. In the majority of the Gulf states Sunni regimes rule Shias. They in fact are in majority in Iraq, Bahrain and Dubai. In Saudi Arabia the Shia community is concentrated in the sensitive oil-producing area at Hara province.[9] In the wake of the revolution in Iran, this problem has assumed an intra-regional dimension.

(b) Regional Threats

—The revolution in Iran had far reaching implications for regional security. It had upset the traditional calculus of balance of power in the region. In Ramazani's analysis :

> The fall of the Shah was bound to have region wide repercussions. Pax Iranica, in effect, had helped to ensure the preservation of conservative monarchical regimes against leftist threats such as the South-Yemeni supported Dhofari rebellion in Oman and,

especially, Iraqi Bathist subversive activities in the smaller Gulf nations. The downfall of the Shah's regime was seen in Riyadh not only as toppling the balance forces in the area even further against monarchies, but also as raising serious questions about Iran's traditional role as an anti-Soviet and anti-communist buffer against the nearly Soviet colossus.[10]

The focus of threat thus shifteds from Iraq and South Yemen to Iran. Apart from the above, her concept of an Islamic Republic is in conflict with the Saudi concept of an Islamic state. Since the Saudis claim themselves to be the defenders of religious purity, this definitely is a disconcerting development for them. Besides, states with significant Shia-populations—specifically, Iraq, Kuwait and Bahrain too perceived this revolution as a threat. They were concerned over statements from Tehran's ruling circle which called for the 'export' of the Iranian revolution throughout the region.[11] This gave the issue an Arab-Persian connotation.

—Territorial disputes and irredentist claims are endemic problems of the region. These claims are made on the basis of historical and ethnic factors, but the economic value of the territory can also be considered to be a prime motivating factor behind making these claims. The outstanding territorial disputes are those of :

—Iraq and Kuwait over their common frontier, and the question of control over Warbah and Bubiyan, two strategic islands lying in their offshore waters ;

—Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar island group located in their offshore waters, and over the village of Zabarah on the west coast of the Qatar peninsula ;

—The dispute between Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia over the demarcation of their common frontiers.

—Iran and UAE over Iran's occupation of Abu Musa and the Tunb islands.

—Oman and the UAE over the Musandam frontier.

—Border disputes within the UAE, between :

—Abu Dhabi-Dubai

—Fuyairah-Sharyah

—Dubai-Sharyah

—Ra' sal-Khaimah and Sharyah.[12]

Apart from these territorial and sectarian issues, the state of Israel continues to remain a constant source of threat for the region. The Gulf states would have to evolve an acceptable formula for dealing with this sensitive issue. Israel's attack on Iraq's nuclear installations, her readiness to exploit the regional differences and weaknesses are tacit reminders that she would strike if she perceives her security as threatened.

(c) Extra-Regional Threats

The enormous strategic value of the area has compounded the problem for the region as a whole. The Super-Powers especially the U. S. has a tremendous stake in the stability of the region. (will be discussed later). Since the super-powers possess the capability to project their power globally, if they think that their vital interests are being threatened, or are at stake so a probable scenario of their physical intervention can not be ruled out. There exists a certain degree of willingness on the part of the regional states to let these states intervene on their behalf. This lends their role as 'protectors' with a certain

amount of legitimacy. However, owing to a divergence in their threat perception, one discerns a divergence in the regional alignment pattern. This pattern again is susceptible to manipulation and change, depending on the actor's level of expectations and gains. It is to an examination of this area, that this paper now turns.

Super Powers Role and The Regional Alignment Pattern

Geography is regarded as "the prince of disciplines, combining the fruits of geology, metrology, anthropology, sociology, economics and dozens of other specialities".[13] In no other part of the world is this more true than the Gulf. The region is regarded as strategically important for elementary reasons of geography. It lay athwart major routes from Europe to the Far East and from Asia to Africa. It is, as it were, on Russia's doorstep. Domination or control of particular parts of the Gulf region can give either of the superpowers a decisive military advantage both in times of peace and war. Therefore the Super Powers seek a favourable balance of forces in the region. About 60 percent of the worlds known oil reserves are in this part of the world. A free flow of oil is vital for the economies of the western developed world and that of Japan. A disruption of this flow can have adverse repercussions for the western alliance system. The Persian Gulf states' combined imports market represents one of the most lucrative in the world. The foreign currency holdings and investments of the Gulf states in Europe and America are staggering.[14] The region therefore is important both in strategic and economic terms. In the context of super power rivalry this importance has acqui-

red an added significance.

It is not a novelty for the regional actors to have their security managed by extra-regional powers. Great Britain had performed this job for about a century. It maintained security of navigation in the area, kept the super-powers remote and restrained the ambitions of the regional powers through its presence in the small shiekhdoms of the Gulf's Arab littoral-Bahrain, Qatar and the seven principalities that now comprise the UAE. This British presence came to an abrupt end when in 1968, the Labour government announced that within three years it would terminate its 19th century treaties of protection with the Gulf emirs which formed the political and legal basis of the British position.

In the wake of this British decision, the U. S. government had two choices. One was to assume the British role of protecting the security of the Gulf states. The other was to evolve a system that would devolve the the responsibility upon the regional powers, while Washington would oversee it. The Nixon government already in the throes of Vietnam and disillusioned by the results of overcommitments in South East Asia opted for the latter strategy. President Nixon had laid out the essence of what came to be known as the "Nixon Doctrine". It held that the U. S. should no longer fight other people's war or assume direct responsibility for preserving security in all corners of the world ; but would rather strengthen regional actors to play the primary role in assuring the stability of their area. In the Gulf this took the form of what came to be referred to as the "Twin Pillars" policy. The essence of this policy focussing on Iran and

Saudi Aarbia was spelled out by Joseph J. Sisco, former
Under Secretary of State in the following terms :

> ...Our whole policy ... has been based on the major
> premise that the two key countries in this area are
> Saudi Arabia and Iran and that to the degree to
> which the U.S. could promote co-operation between
> these two major countries we would be contributing to
> stability in the area. We believe that arms policies
> that we have pursued in relationship to Iran and
> Saudi Arabia in particular have contributed not only
> to this greater regional co-operation, but to help to
> meet what they considered and perceive to be their
> security concerns in the area."[15]

Under this arrangement Iran assumed responsibility for
overall security and for Gulf navigation, while the Saudies
took responsibility for the Sheikhdoms. The U. S. under-
took to bolster their defence through its arms sales.
Between 1973 and 1980 Iran and Saudi Arabia ordered
arms worth $ 30 ml. Arms became the central component
of this relationship, because they were at once tangible,
symbolic and available.[16] But the fall of the Shah's regime
in Iran in late 1978, and its replacement by a theocratic
regime having strong anti-U.S. bias, changed the situation
for the worse for the U.S. and her allies in the region.
It was further complicated by the Soviet invasion of
Afghanistan in late 1979. In the wake of that action, the
U.S. undertook a revision of its earlier position. The
"Carter Doctrine", spelled out on March 23, 1980,
assumed direct responsibility for the defence of the
Persian Gulf region and declared the region as vital for
the U.S. interests. This provided the context for the

development of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF).

The Iran-Iraq war broke out during September, 1980. It was in the context of that war that President Reagan later reaffirmed the Carter Doctrine, continued the build up of the RDF, and established the new Central Command (CENTCOM) on January 1, 1983. Reagan expanded the Carter Doctrine to include : (1) a U.S. interest in dealing with any threat of any kind to the Saudi regime ; (2) readiness to keep open the strait of Hormuz if the Iranians should try to stop shipping through the water way.[17]

On the other hand, the other super-power, the Soviet Union, had not been able to gain a comparable foothold in the region. The region is in proximity to the Soviet Union, so she considers it to be within her 'legitimate' interest. Her policy towards the region had been guided by defensive and offensive considerations. Since the region is in proximity to the Soviet-Union, her foremost defense consideration is to prevent the use of this region as a probable launching platform for an attack on her. Foremost among its offensive considerations is the objective to deny the region to the West. She recognizes the dependence of the West on Gulf oil and since the supply of oil has a political linkage, a Soviet leverage over the issue can also be a major gain for her. Soviet Union further recognizes that in future the East European countries too would become dependent on Gulf oil. So should she be able to obtain some leverage or to gain concessionary rates for Gulf oil, her future difficulties in this matter might be alleviated. The Soviet Union had established diplomatic relations with Kuwait in 1962, and had signed Treaties of Friendship and Co-operation with Iraq in 1972

and South Yemen in 1979. But she failed to make any major breakthroughs in the region. She had tried to make inroads after the collapse of Shah which had raised questions about the credibility of the U.S. as a friend. It also made issue of the U. S. support to Israel. But these did not pay off. The longstanding ties between Gulf elites and the West ; ideological and religious distaste for communism ; their distrust of the Soviet's for their support of revolutionaries, Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, and the inability of the Soviets to provide the high technology and consumer goods wanted by these countries could not make the Soviets more attractive to the Gulf states.

But the Iran-Iraq war changed the calculus. As Iran mounted its pressure on Iraq, the Gulf conservative states turned not only to their traditional friend U. S. for military protection, it also sought the help of Soviet Union. By 1982, the Soviet Union had relations with Kuwait, Oman, Iraq and the UAE. It also had public relations with Riyadh. By virtue of leasing three oil tankers to Kuwait in 1982, Moscow was involved in protecting Gulf oil exports. It was a new role for her. The basic reason for these Soviet advances was the perceived erosion of U. S. ability to protect the Gulf conservatives once Iran gained the upperhand in this war.

The U. S. was neutral at the beginning of the war. It even tried to reach an arms for hostage deal with Iran. But once the inherent contradictions of the American policy became clear, it took a decisively pro-Iraqi stand. Diplomatic relations had been re-established with Iraq in late 1984. The U. S. committed itself to the protection

of Kuwaiti oil tankers and the strait of Hormuz.[18]

Apart from seeking extra-regional protection, the Gulf states also undertook a reappraisal of their regional ties. Perception of a common threat i. e. – Iran– prompted such Gulf states as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman to form the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) in May 1981. The Council involves itself with military, social and economic matters. The GCC states have improved their internal security arrangement and also increased the size of their internal security organizations.[19] This signals a new determination on the part of the regional actors to take matters in their own hands, as stated by the Secretary General of GCC : "The world may laugh at us when we say that the Gulf countries alone are authorized to defend the region, but whatever our capabilities may be, we insist that this is, the basic principle for achieving security and peace for our people."[20]

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, the pattern of regional politics in the Gulf can diserned. These states do not share a common perception of threat ; sources of their threats are primarily domestic and regional. For security they had traditionally turned to regional and extra-regional sources. The region so far has failed to evolve a viable and effective Regional security system (RSS). However, there is a growing awareness among the indigenous actors of the need for such a system. They endeavour to keep the super-powers at a distance ; on their part the super powers too aim at conciliation. They had worked together

to ensure that the Iran-Iraq war did not escalate and had endorsed the legitimacy of the GCC. The Iran-Iraq war has come to an end, a new leadership is at the helm of affairs in Iran. The post-Khomeini leadership is more responsive towards the existing international order. This signals the beginning of a new era in Iran's foreign policy. How the new regime moulds its policy towards the region and the two super-powers would to a large extent determine the shape of future politics in the Gulf. But if one may venture to pick up the signals and threads strewn over the landscape of politics, one can project a scenario where there will be greater co-operation both at the systemic and sub-systemic levels.

The formation of the G. C. C. is undoubtedly a positive development, but it is not quite adequate. The organisation was formed in response to the Iranian threat, hence its membership excludes Iran and Iraq. Now that the war has come to an end, the G. C. C. would need to reappraise its position in the context of new developments in the region. A comprehensive RSS for the Gulf would have to accommodate Iran. Her exclusion from a RSS would only complicate things and would institutionalize the existing divisions in the Gulf along the Persian Arabian lines.

The Gulf states would also need to take into consideration the fact that a RSS along military lines can not be expected to cope adequately with the entire range of potential security threats. It can police the region settle intra-regional military disputes, check rebellions, but it can not defend the region from an external attack, especially if either of the super-power or a major power

is involved in such an attack. This would require them to seek external help. Such help usually has political costs which is not desirable. And since a purely military security system is most of the time controversial, the regional states would do well to avoid this kind of an arrangement. Besides, such a system also does not address itself to the real threats and security needs of the region which are essentially social and political in nature.

A viable RSS for the Gulf would therefore have to be comprehensive, non-controversial and be empowered to deal effectively with the real security needs of the regional actors. In this context, this paper suggests the creation of a Regional Organization along the functional logic. Such an organisation can help the states sort out their bilateral and multilateral differences. Under its auspices a Regional Peace Keeping Force (RPKF) too, could be created. This organisation should endeavour to pursue a 'genuine' non-aligned policy and pursuade the two super-powers to act as co-guarantors of the region. The conciliation of the Super-Powers at the systemic level does not preclude such a possibility at the sub-systemic level too. The organisation should be vested with a certain amount of political power to facilitate the settlement of territorial disputes.

Such an organisation can contribute towards the task of Nation-building, as it is expected to create a stable and favourable regional environment for the indigenous actors. Greater communication among the elites and people of the society can contribute towards genuine international relations. Through shared ventures in social and economic matters one can develop shared perceptions of threat as

well. Above all, such an organisation with its seemingly non-controversial character is better able to accommodate the interests of the regional and extra-regional actors, and go a long way towards neutralising the local and regional sources of threats. However, it is argued here that without a genuine democratic set up, the Gulf states can not hope to attain national integration nor enduring stability.

The paper does not intend to overstretch the benefits of this approach, but it does contend that a RSS along functional lines can endow the region with a certain degree of prodictability and stability, that is so essential for creating a 'Security Community'.

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