GlTr Chapter Five

Major Contemporary Global Issues

5.1. Survey of Major Contemporary Global Issues

- Important dynamics of the 21st century is the shift in focus from International Relation global relations and Issues. The world today is distinctively different mainly because of the end of the Cold War (the post-Cold War period).
- The distinctiveness of the post-Cold War period rests upon the transformation of the agenda of the world politics (predominance of new issues). No longer is world politics dominated by issues arising from East–West relations – the threat of nuclear war, the ideological struggle between liberal democracy and Marxism– Leninism, crisis diplomacy, and so on.
- The international community is now preoccupied with other issues such as the search for a ‘New World Order’, the impact of terrorism, the disparities in wealth between developed and developing countries, environmental issues and so on.

- **What makes an issue a global issue?**

What makes an issue a global issue?

- The answer to this question is found in addressing the following four interlinked questions. These are:
- i) what is the extent or scope of an issue? Does it affect large parts of the global arena or it is confined and contained to a narrow scope? For example, this is the kind of question often asked about civil wars and other limited conflicts. How far are they likely to spill over into the broader arena, and thus become of concern to a wide variety of actors?
- ii) what is the urgency or intensity of the issue? For instance, on the issue of global environmental change, it is quite clear that such an issue has different levels of urgency for different political actors, who will as a result give it different degrees of priority, attention and resources

What makes an issue a global issue?

- iii) what is the salience or visibility of a given issue? This question relates to the roles of the media or other actors who confer urgency or intensity, and
- iv) What is the centrality or location of an issue? This is partly an objective issue of geography, implying that the closer the issue is to important actors the greater the attention and significance it will acquire.
- These are the criteria the cluster of four major contemporary global issues discussed in this chapter are selected

5.1.1. Global Security Issues

- In the security arena, there are two main issues and challenges facing the emerging new world order. These are: terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

I. Global Terrorism

- Terrorism an be defined as a global security problem characterized by the use of violence in the form of hostage taking, bombing, hijacking and other indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets.
- In the world there are four different types of terrorist organizations namely: left wing terrorists, right wing terrorists, ethno-nationalists/separatist terrorists and religious terrorists.
- Global communication and transport physical technologies helped the terrorists develop capacity to conduct attacks across the globe. However, terrorists have not yet acquired and used radiological, biological or chemical weapons so far.

Factors Conducive to Terrorism

The most widely perceived courses or conducive factors for terrorism are:

- Socio-economic cause (poverty in the sense of economic and political isolation, feelings of hopelessness, violations of human rights, and the lack of democracy provides a fertile breeding ground for terrorism);
- Political cause (legitimate grievances and the failure of governments to adequately address these problems often foment terrorism.
- Lack of democracy, and widespread and systematic violations of human rights contributes to the rise of terrorism)
- psychological cause (humiliation is another factor conducive to the use of terrorism).

Types of Terrorism

Although the types of terrorism tend to overlap, commonly observed types of terrorism are

- Domestic terrorism: occurs within the borders of a particular country and is associated with extremist groups.
- Nationalist terrorism: is closely associated with struggles for political autonomy and independence.
- Religious terrorism: grows out of extreme fundamentalist religious groups that believe that God is on their side and that their violence is divinely inspired and approved.
- State terrorism: is a cold, calculated, efficient, and extremely destructive form of terrorism, partly because of the overwhelming power at the disposal of governments.
- Global terrorism: is partly an outgrowth of the forces of globalization, which enable the different kinds of terrorism to spread worldwide.

II. Nuclear Weapons and their Proliferations

- Fear of nuclear war dominated security planning during the cold war, and enhanced security was sought through arms control agreement (Treaty of Non-Proliferation of nuecler weapon) between the two super powers. The end of the cold war has led to a decrease in concern about the dangers of nuclear war between the super powers.
- In the post-cold war period there is greater concern about nuclear proliferation – that is, the spread of nuclear weapons themselves and the technology and knowledge required to build them.

Events that increased fears about horizontal nuclear proliferation

- First, in the aftermath of the 1991 gulf war, UN Weapons Inspection Teams discovered alarming evidence of the extent of the Iraqi nuclear program. This led to the recognition that existing non-proliferation strategies had failed
- Second, the demise of the Soviet Union and emergence of new states which retain sectors of the Soviet military industrial complex and which face severe economic problems, led to increased fears that their nuclear technologies and scientific knowledge will be sold off to the highest bidder

- Third, a nuclear arms race began in South Asia after nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998.Fears are heightened because the two states have a history of hostility and are engaged in a protracted conflict over Kashmir. Furthermore, both states have missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons within range of each other’s capital cities.
- Fourth, in 2003 the International Atomic energy agency (IAEA) uncovered an illicit supply network in an investigation triggered by US-led concerns that Iran had an illicit nuclear weapons program. This has then further strengthened the concern of the international community about the possibility of increased trend of weapons proliferation in the world.

Reasons for the Proliferation of Weapons

There are strategic, economic, and political motivations for weapons proliferation. These include:

- **Super-power Rivalry during the Cold War***:* Geopolitical considerations influenced the United States and the Soviet Union to transfer weapons to their respective allies. For example, both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact justified the proliferation of weapons in terms of collective self-defense.
- **Military Burden Sharing:** Reluctant to engage in direct military confrontation, both superpowers provided weapons, technical assistance, and arms production technologies to their allies so that they could defend themselves. An example of this was the Nixon Doctrine, which supported weapons transfers to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian countries.
- **Regional Balance of Power***:* Arms sales are often defended on the grounds that such transfers contribute to regional stability and diminish the likelihood of war.

- **Political, Military, and Economic Influence***:* Given the dependence of the United States on petroleum supplies from the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, arms transfers are instrumental not only in bolstering these countries' security but also in enabling the United States to gain and maintain access to these countries' political, military, and economic elites.
- Economies of Scale: Many countries export weapons to obtain resources to finance the development and production of more advanced weapons.
- Self-Reliance: Many countries develop their own weapons to preserve or enhance their independence.
- Economic Factors: Much of the global weapons trade is motivated by financial considerations.
- Ethnic Conflicts: Ethnic conflicts generate demand for weapons transfers.
- Authoritarian Regimes: Governments that rule without the consent of the people generally rely on military force to exercise control.

5.1.2. Global Environmental Issues

- Many, if not all, problems of environmental degradation are trans-boundary in nature and therefore need an international solution.
- National policy measures essentially cannot cope with international environmental problems because the source of pollution or the impact of pollution may not be within a particular state’s jurisdiction.
- Since the 1970s the number of international environmental agreements (IEAs) has risen, however, the problem is as it is. The most pressing contemporary global issue related to the environment, i.e., climate change and global warming.

I. Climate change and Global warming

- Climate change poses numerous and harsh challenges for sustainable development and its effects are be felt in all regions of the globe. But degree of vulnerability varies, particularly with developing countries and the poor which have contributed the least to global warming but are suffering the most.
- The 18 session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Doha in November and December 2012 also illustrated, global climate change mitigation efforts are insufficient.
- In Doha, countries agreed and launched the second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol that was commenced from 1 January 2013 and will end on 31 December 2020. However, several countries that had ratified the **Kyoto Protocol** for its first commitment period withdrew from it and decided not to join the second commitment period.

- The greenhouse gas reduction goals set out in the Kyoto Protocol remain largely unachieved. Most of the developed countries have failed to achieve their reduction targets.
- Countries that apparently have achieved their targets have often done so mainly through off shoring greenhouse gas-intensive production operations to developing countries.
- Meanwhile, since production technologies in developing countries are generally more green-house gas-intensive, off shoring has led to an increase rather than a decrease in the total (global) volume of emissions, thus frustrating the very purpose of the Protocol.

5.1.3. Global Socio-economic Issues

- Global Inequality and Poverty - **Does Inequality matter?**
- The existence of inequality is not automatically major problem, especially when the economy is growing and there are many opportunities for upward mobility. As long as the standard of living is improving for those on the bottom of the economic ladder, concerns about inequality tend to diminish.
- The last two decades of the 20th century and the 1st decade of this century were characterized by a widening gap between rich and poor.
- For example, in USA the financial and economic crisis increased inequality and heightened awareness of the concentration of wealth held by the top 1%t of Americans. That awareness led to “We are the 99 percent,” a battle cry of the “Occupy Wall Street” protests against financial inequality that began in New York City and spread around the world.
- Persistent inequality and enduring poverty challenge beliefs in the equality of opportunity and the possibility of upward mobility, which led to challenging the legitimacy of the economic system and political and social institutions at national and international level.

Extreme inequality perpetuates poverty and the concentration of economic and political power and reduces economic efficiency. It strengthens inequality-perpetuating institutions in three ways:

- Inequality discourages the political participation of poor people, which, in turn, diminishes their access to education, health care, and other services that contribute to economic growth and development.
- Inequality often prevents the building and proper functioning of impartial institutions and observance of the rule of law.
- Inequality enables the wealthy to refuse to compromise politically or economically, which further weakens poor societies in a global society that requires relatively fast responses to economic developments.
- These consequences of inequality combine to ensure that poor societies will remain poor and unequal, trapping most of their inhabitants in a destructive cycle of poverty.

- Growing inequality among as well as within nations has direct and indirect implications for globalization. Inequality could undermine globalization by influencing countries to adopt protectionist policies and disengage, to the extent possible, from the global economy. **But the ramifications extend beyond economic issues to problems such as terrorism, the environment, and the spread of infectious diseases.**

Migration and refugee problems

- International migration and refugee (including asylum seekers and Internally Displace Peoples)have become more prominent on the international agenda in recent years both because of their increasing scale and growing impact on international affairs. Several factors account for these developments:
- First, the number of states in the international system has steadily increased since the end of the First World War. As the number of international boundaries containing the new state has increased, so too has the volume of international migrants and refugee.
- Second, rapid increase in the world's population, and it continues to grow led to over exploitation of regional resources, and catastrophic famine and population movement.
- Third, the revolution in communications and transportation has made people aware of conditions and opportunities in other parts of the world, as well as making travel to those areas easier. Finally, the turmoil and uncertainty of the turbulent and unstable

- Until recently, migration and refugee were not seen as central political issues by most governments in the world. It was only in the 1980s, as the effects of past migrations and refugee crises begun to be felt both domestically and internationally, and as their pressures on developed states increased, that the issues rose to the top of the international political agenda
- Nowadays, migrants and refugees to most advanced countries are becoming the target of animosity from right-wing groups (e.g. Le Pen in France, Neo Nazis in Germany and Austria and extreme-rightist in Britain) who blamed them for the high level of unemployment and decline in general living standard.

- The inability of states to maintain complete control of entry to their territory, or to prevent the formation of migrants and refugees with extra-territorial connections and affiliations, is also pointing to an erosion of sovereignty.
- States are no longer able to exert control over their own destinies.
- The growth of non-indigenous ethnic minorities is helping to blur all distinctions between domestic and international boundaries.
- Migration and refugee also highlight the importance of economic issues in contemporary world politics, because of close association between economic pressures and the motivations for and responses to migration and refugee. Thus migration and refugee contributes to, illuminates and reinforces the interdependent nature of world politics.

5.1.4. Global Cultural Issues

Cultural Imperialism

- Cultural imperialism is the result of cultural globalization- a process whereby information, commodities and images that have been produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to ‘flatten out’ cultural differences between nations, regions and individuals. This has sometimes been portrayed as a process of ‘McDonaldization’.
- McDonaldization is the process whereby global commodities and commercial and marketing practices associated with the fast-food industry have come to dominate more and more economic sectors.
- Cultural globalization is fuelled by the so-called information revolution, the spread of satellite communication, telecommunications networks, information technology and internet and global media corporations.

- The popular image of globalization is that it is a top- down process, the establishment of a single global system that imprints itself on all parts of the world. In this view, globalization is linked to homogenization as cultural diversity are destroyed in a world in which we all watch the same television programmes, buy the same commodities, eat the same food, support the same sports stars,etc.
- Globalization has in some ways fashioned more complex patterns of social and cultural diversity in developing and developed states alike.
- In developing states western consumer goods and images have been absorbed into more traditional cultural practices through a process of indigenization. **Indigenization is the process through which alien goods and practices are absorbed by being adapted to local needs and circumstances.**

Cultural (civilizational) clash and identity conflicts

- Culture and nationalism have generally been closely intertwined.
- By understanding this, leaders usually draw upon cultural similarities to diminish tensions and, conversely, upon cultural differences and hatreds to promote conflict.
- Given that all societies directly or indirectly promote their values as positive and desirable while, simultaneously, devaluing those of other societies, ethnocentrism as a behaviour is likely to develop, i.e., each society may view itself as the center of the world and perceive and interpret other societies within its peculiar frame of reference, and invariably judges them to be inferior.

- The more culturally distinct the other society is perceived to be, the more inferior it is often deemed to be and thus suitable for negative treatment. This perception is at the heart of ethnic conflicts and international wars. In line with this logic, the famous political scientist S.P. Huntington has also developed what he calls ‘clash-of-civilizations thesis’ which explains contemporary global conflicts in terms of cultural differences.
- For Huntington, civilizations will be the dividing lines in future global politics and it is the clash of these civilizations that would primarily define the feature of 21st century global order.
- And, Huntington argues that there are eight major civilizations in this game namely: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African.
- The clash-of-civilizations theory thus stresses that there exists and will continue to exist conflict instead of cooperation among civilizations.