

Foreword

An aspiration for a world of peace, long rooted in global rhetoric, is quickly giving way to despair and cynicism. International organisations, forged in the wake of the carnage of the World War II, have been instrumentalised by the great powers, and have failed to act with fairness in the many conflicts around the world over the decades that followed. Lesser powers have clustered together, not around shared values, but opportunities, leveraging numbers for deals, bartering influence, reducing the high mandate of global organisations to a lobby, a forum for influence peddling and low politics. Expediency, rather than any considerations of principle, now appears to dominate global affairs, even as new ‘Great Games’ destabilise large parts of the world, provoking great bloodshed.

The unprincipled use of international instrumentalities is manifest in the gross biases in international responses to excesses committed by the great powers across the world, which are overwhelmingly ignored or weakly resisted. On the other hand, blind inflexibility has often characterised global institutional responses to lesser powers, even where strong extenuating circumstances exist. Three papers in this volume directly address some of these contradictions.

The increasing use of drones, in purported ‘counter-insurgency’ operations by the ‘great powers’, particularly the Western powers led by the US are a major challenge, both of morality and of policy. The fact that many of the conflicts where indiscriminate use of

drones, and other forms of aerial or remote warfare, have resulted in massive civilian casualties – unceremoniously dismissed as ‘collateral’ damage – are the result of unconscionable and unauthorised wars initiated by the West, has often been buried under the rhetoric of the ‘war against terrorism’. Even where evidence of confirmed bombings of civilian targets – including hospitals and schools – in these campaigns has been ample, there is a deafening silence, or a trivialisation of these ‘errors’ or ‘unintended consequences’. On the other hand, strident condemnation of every action of the adversaries of the West piles up relentlessly.

The campaign against Sri Lanka for alleged human rights violations during the terminal phase of the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is an example of the one-sided hectoring of a small country and the visible double standards that are applied to states outside the privileged club of the great powers and their satellites. The paper documents the dubious processes followed in the various ‘investigations’ and the sequence of deception, often outright fabrication, that attended these.

High rhetoric has rarely been matched with principled action in the global arena, and the R2P – the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ – discourse illustrates this divergence. Where it is intended to enable the international community to intervene in order to protect populations against the worst of crimes against humanity – genocide, ethnic cleansing and large-scale war crimes – not only have global institutions failed to respond to some of the worst of such exigencies, particularly where great powers have been directly or indirectly involved, R2P provisions have often been abused. These reflect the questionable motives of intervening states, visible inconsistencies in the application of the principle and, in some cases, “Machiavellian subversion”.

The essential lesson of unreliable international interventions is that states need best to protect themselves, where possible, both in intra-and inter-state conflicts, rather than to depend on the dubious ‘good offices’ of international institutions or great power

interventions. Sagacity and a desire, in good faith, to resolve conflicts without, or with a minimum use of force, can yield a range of resolutions, and there is significant experience of such outcomes in theatres across the world. The remaining two papers in this volume focus on the experience of such resolution, in one case, of an inter-state conflict, and in another, of the efficacy of policy alternatives in domestic counter-insurgency.

In a global environment of moral collapse and rising conflict potential – despite evident declines in manifest conflict – states, policy makers and analysts must focus on their own capacities to address existing and emerging conflicts, as faith in the international system and great power intercession rightly diminishes. This volume underlines this challenge, even as it explores some alternatives for resolution.

Ajai Sahni

July 13, 2019