

Making U.N. a mass movement

A WAR ends, but its aftermath lingers on in proportion to its intensity, duration and the areas involved. The after-effects of a modern war would be marked by unconventional sequels, the chief among them being its impact on environment and the morale of humanity.

The Gulf war's effects on the environment are palpable; only its gravity in terms of the future awaits a thorough evaluation. However, what may not be immediately perceptible is the impact on the morale of humanity. Once again, it exposes man — at least one aspect of his character — that he can turn a brute in a vitiated climate, that Auschwitz is not a junk yard of history, it is a state of mind living and kicking only a layer beneath the surface of civilisation and can kick the surface off any time, be it through the Iraqis in Kuwaiti homes or the multinational forces tearing the fleeing Iraqis to shreds.

With the vast expansion of media, the cynicism spawned by the revelations of war atrocities is sprayed into the minds of those who think. Has mankind been unable to evolve any means to ward off such outbursts despite all the bitter experiences of the past?

Laudable U.N. objectives

At the outset of a quest for an answer to this annoying question, one cannot but confront the United Nations, still looked upon by many as a custodian of mankind's conscience. Indeed, the Gulf war had several unique features, but the foremost was the banner of the U.N. dominating the scene. And here is the irony, for the aim of the U.N., as its Charter declares, is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all people."

Since its founding in 1945, the U.N. had never figured so prominently at the background of a massive conflict as it had done

in regard to the Gulf war. Neither any member-country of the United Nations nor any of its officials could have consciously wished for it, but the events forced it almost into the role of a party to the conflict whereas its *raison d'être* is to steer the nations clear of clashes.

Petty interests

But were self-interest, vested interest, balance of power, international one-upmanship, etc., the stimuli in the major partners of the 38-nation allied forces? Can we just pooh-pooh the fact that certain nations value the ideals of freedom, democracy and national sovereignty and can they have a moral right to oppose ambitious leaders who have held their countries to ransom and desire to hold the world to ransom?

If the League of Nations was a "declaration of love without the promise of marriage" as Admiral Von Tirpitz had put it, the U.N. was a step closer to a 'marriage' among nations. No one visualised its potential and limitations more candidly than Sri Aurobindo, who wrote in a post-script chapter (1950) to his *Ideal of Human Unity*:

"A strong surviving element of oligarchy remained in the preponderant place assigned to the five Great Powers in the Security Council and was clinched by the device of the veto; these were concessions to a sense of realism and the necessity of recognising the actual condition of things and the results of the Second Great War and could not perhaps have been avoided, but they have done more to create trouble, hamper the action and diminish the success of the new institution than anything else in its make-up or the way of action forced upon it by the world situation or the difficulties of a combined working, inherent in its very structure. A too hasty or radical endeavour to get rid of these defects might lead to a crash of the whole edifice; to leave them unmodified prolongs a malaise, an absence of harmony and smooth working and a consequent discredit and a sense of limited and abortive action, cause of the widespread feeling of futility and the regard of doubt the world at large has begun to cast on this great and necessary

institution which was founded with such high hopes and without which world conditions would be infinitely worse and more dangerous, even perhaps irremediable"

After discussing the possibility of the emergence of a more effective alternative to the U.N., he observed, "But for that, it will be necessary to build, eventually at least, a true World State without exclusions and on a principle of equality into which considerations of size and strength will not enter. These may be left to exercise whatever influence is natural to them in a well-ordered harmony of the world's people safeguarded by

The U.N. ideals should serve as the basis for a world movement for mutual understanding and world peace.

the law of a new international order. A sure justice, a fundamental equality and combinations of rights and interests must be the law of this World State and the basis of its entire edifice."

Does such a vision seem far-fetched? Ideals and prospects, which used to appear remote or even no better than mirages, such as the collapse of orthodox communism, re-union of divided nations and floating of certain concepts of continental unities, are a reality of this "hour of the unpredictable."

Peace and cooperation

There can be nothing amiss in humanity hitching its wagon to a star. Even as the great war-hero Winston Churchill declared, "If the human race wishes to have a prolonged and indefinite period of material prosperity, they have only got to behave in a peaceful and helpful way toward one another and science will do for them all they wish and more than they can dream."

If the U.N. has so far been obliged to act often as a witness, a protesting witness, if not a mute one, to several man-made holocausts, it is because it has been a forum for the leaders and nothing more. It is diplomacy emanating from the brains of traditional poli-

ticians hypnotised by their own power games, that has formulated its policies and not the aspiration and goodwill of the masses or the intelligence and wisdom of the intellectuals and lovers of mankind.

Commitment to forum

Organisationally, the U.N. has to continue to be a rendezvous of the representatives of the Governments, but its ideals must be allowed to serve as the basis for a world movement for mutual understanding and promotion of peace, inspiring people and mobilising their support. To make the U.N. a mass movement, to carry its vision to the hearts of the people — through education, cultural activities and political awareness — should become the next logical step of this organisation. A commitment to the U.N. should become a part of an individual's culture, not a red-tape file for one's Government alone. It is difficult to foresee a Government violating the U.N. mandate while its citizens voiced their support for the mandate.

It is time to revise Henry Cabot Lodge's definition of the scope of the U.N. that it was "created to prevent you from going to hell and not to take you to heaven". True, nothing can take us to heaven if we refuse to go there or, to be more realistic, if we refuse to create it for ourselves.

At every critical moment in the recent past, the U.N. has been subject to criticism either for its action or inaction. Its position *vis-a-vis* the Gulf war is no exception. Even if we assume the critic's angle, we should remember what Mr. George Bush had said (and he too should remember) years before becoming the President: "To write off the United Nations' achievements in keeping the peace because of its inability to be effective in Czechoslovakia or Vietnam, would be like writing off medical science because it has not yet found a cure for cancer."

Till today, the U.N. is guided by the principles of consensus or majority. That way it can hardly rise above the law of averages and give a lead to humanity. It must become something greater.

Manoj Das

Professor of English Literature,
Aurobindo International Centre of Education,
Pondicherry.