

**President of UNAS Prof SC Tham Speech as Guest of Honor
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Two years ago, the UN celebrated its 70th Anniversary. What has change since then?
What on-going challenges remain and what new emergent ones that it has to resolve?
How can global peace and security be maintained in a rapidly changing world?

PREVENTING WARS AND CONFLICTS

To be sure, the impact arising from the recent election of Mr. Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States is beginning to be felt all round. Mr. Trump has promised Americans that he would make America great again. His America First Agenda would imply withdrawal from international obligations perceived to jeopardize America's national interests. He has rejected the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement; demanded that America's allies contribute their share of the cost for defense and to conduct a comprehensive review of all international trade agreements. He has accused China of "currency manipulation" and for raping America economically. To protect America's security he has initiated legislation to ban the entry of travelers from 7 Middle East countries including the building of a wall at the Mexican-United States border to quell the immigration tide. He has also stated that America's contribution to the UN's Operating Budget and the Peace-Keeping Budget will be cut by a third of its current contribution respectively. Last, but not least, the latest bomb dropped is the announcement that America would withdraw from the Paris Climate Change Accord of 2015. Finally, the domestic challenge arising from the accusation of Mr. Trump's detractors and critics to his and his inner circle's perceived collusion of Russia in influencing the last presidential election is riddled with many uncertainties with global implications.

It would appear that making America great again implies the abnegation of multilateralism as a mode of problem solving between states. As such America may veer more towards unilateralism as Ms Vikki Haley, the US Permanent Representative to the UN in a heated exchange has threatened that "if the UN fails to act, America will do so outside of the UN."

The prospect of closer co-operation between the Permanent Members of the Security Council has ebb further. The issues pertaining to the Ukraine and Syria in particular (not to mention North Korea and the South China Sea) has split the permanent Five into two camps viz., the US and its allies, with the U.K. and France on the one side and China and Russia on the other.

It is sad that the words and actions of president Trump's administration thus far do not conduce towards the search for fair and mutually beneficial solutions. Indeed, the

question being put by some observers is whether the US has a cohesive foreign policy. This does not bode well for the United Nations nor does it the United States. As of the moment the play in town is the blame game. In all this, the hope and promise of the Arab Spring lauded as the sweep of democracy in the Arab heartlands, has proven to be a mirage. The lack of a shared strategy in dealing with Islamic extremists namely Al-Qaeda, ISIS (DAESH) has only allowed them to spread their terror and destruction to many parts of the world including Southeast Asia. The case of North Korea is entirely different but no less important to regional and global peace and security due the regime's determination to defend and protect its survival by whatever means.

It is clear that each of the Permanent Five of the Security Council (as indeed every member of the UN) has its national interest to uphold and protect. However, as big powers, they are likely as always to demand a greater say in shaping outcomes especially those that are seen as their core and strategic interests. Thus, the veto power reserved for the Permanent Five would be meaningless if it is not so. This means that their core and strategic interests are either defended or legitimized by what they see as correct and justifiable in terms of political and historical precedents and their willingness to defend them. Hence, any attempt to alter the status quo would be resisted. The prospect of the Security Council, as it were to solve the problems of peace and security is therefore unlikely to be promising being as it is still caught in the grid-lock of power struggle.

The world is now going through major structural changes. There is a global wide redistribution of power - political, economic and strategic. The political alignments are shifting and changing without clear signs of their stabilization. This brings great uncertainties and is a challenge to the resilience of the UN. By this, we do not mean merely that the UN needs reform such as expanding the membership of the UN Security Council or increasing the number of permanent members. It can be expected that the contestation among the Permanent Members of the Security Council will remain problematic unless they establish a working relationship based on negotiated outcomes, shared responsibilities and guided by the rule of law. As it is at the moment, the lack of a common purpose and strategy and the contravention of international law in prosecuting the war against international terrorism is a concern.

PEACE AND SECURITY: SOLVING THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The peace and security that the UN seeks is not solely confined to the resolution of conflicts and wars. Underlying the issue is an even greater, deeper and more onerous challenge. This refers to the poverty, misery and marginalization of millions throughout the world due to poor governance, economic stagnation and access to basic resources. Many are left behind by rapid and unregulated globalization despite its many benefits. These are the millions who are vulnerable and fall into the poverty trap. Theirs is a world of misery, uncertainty and the lost of human dignity – a world within the world. It is a world marked by starvation, poor health, pandemic diseases, lack of access to clean drinking water and sanitation. How can they be helped? What further efforts are needed?

In 2001, the UN General Assembly declared the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as an answer to the challenges listed above. They are:

- (1) Eradicate Hunger and Extreme Poverty
- (2) Achieve Universal Primary Education
- (3) Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- (4) Reduce Child Mortality
- (5) Improve Maternal Health
- (6) Combat HIV/Aids, Malaria and other Diseases
- (7) Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- (8) Develop a Global Partnership for Development

In 2015 after 15 years of implementing the MDGs, a new Development Agenda was adopted on 25th September 2015 and termed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The revision and inclusion of nine additional goals was in recognition of the urgency to address the threats to the environment and in extension the consequences resulting from climate change.

The new sustainable development goals include:

1. Clean Water and Sanitation
2. Available and Clean Energy
3. Decent Work and Economic Growth
4. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
5. Reduced Inequalities
6. Sustainable Cities and Communities
7. Responsible Consumption and Production;
8. Climate Action
9. Life below Water
10. Life on Land
11. Peace and Justice strong institutions
11. Partnership for the Goals.

The 17 SDGs thus supersede the 8 MDGs in incorporating all MDG goals and the addition of 9 SDGs. It was to kill two birds with one stone though so to speak “Birds of the same feather.”

The operating precept adopted by the UN General Assembly is that you can't have peace and security if millions are bereft of a share of natural resources and created wealth. It is an issue of equity and redistribution. The foregoing have to do with upholding human dignity which entails three basic freedoms viz., freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to choice in the pursuit of self fulfillment. In existential terms, human rights represent all those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights without which social tensions, resistance and conflict will arise – thus insecurity and a threat to peace.

To-day, the UN has declared the Right to Development to drive home its message on behalf of the poor and neglected. Peace and security as advocated by the UN is an all encompassing tapestry of needs in which every part is inter-connected. Failure to realize any part will have a knock on effect on the others. This solemn pledge to transform the globe and improve the lives of millions in the interest of peace and security by 2030 is much more than a milestone. On it, the lives of millions depend.

THE TICKING BOMBS

Climate Change and Nuclear War

The threat to peace and security posed by climate change or a nuclear war is a “clear and present danger.” In the case of climate change opinion as to its adverse effects is divided between its proponents and its detractors. After numerous global wide meetings, the latest in Paris last year a Climate Change Accord was reached by the majority of the delegates with the biggest polluters such as China, the US and India making land mark pledges to reduce green house gases as well as stay the rise of global temperature to 2 degrees Centigrade. The terms spelt out in the Paris Accord are not legally binding – as in the case of most UN conventions and protocols. This obviously is a shortcoming as it is left to each member state to take the bull by the horns, so to speak to, to fulfill the terms of the Accord. It can be surmised that it will be a long drawn process to produce the desired outcome. A great deal in this regard will depend on the efforts and commitments of the major polluters and the help, financial and technical, made available to the poor countries especially in helping to mitigate natural disasters. What is clear is that the death and destruction caused by climate change cannot anymore be taken lightly. If not addressed there will be many more millions of climate refugees due to rising temperatures, desertification, melting ice, rising seas, salinity of the oceans, massive crop failures, spread of diseases etc. The peace and security sought by the world would be jeopardized. The development credo emphasizing “Sustainability” is the way out of the mess that has been created. It promises results and equally protects the rights of all future generations to the enjoyment of the earth’s bountifulness.

The death and destruction that a nuclear war can caused defies imagination. All 5 of the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council are accorded the status of Nuclear States. In this they not only enjoy the freedom to use or test atomic/nuclear devices in accordance with the needs of their national security. They also enjoy the right to reject the sale and transfer of nuclear materials which carry risks or the danger of it being misuse.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is the body administering the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT.) Its given tasks is to promote the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes whilst acting as a watch-dog against the illegal use of nuclear materials for the production of nuclear weapons. The watchful role of the IAEA has so far been effective though the number of nuclear weapon states has increased over the years with North Korea the most recalcitrant.

Efforts have been made in mitigating the threats posed to peace and security by the UN as well as by regional bodies. They include the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which has yet to enter into force because of the non-corporation of the five nuclear powers. The UN has also enacted conventions to ban the use and manufacture of weapons of mass destruction including, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Regional bodies have also set up nuclear weapon-free areas which include:

- (1) The Treaty of Rarotonga in the South Pacific, 1985
- (2) The Treaty of Bangkok in ASEAN, 1995
- (3) The Treaty of Mongolia, 1992
- (4) The Central Asian Nuclear Weapon –Free Zone Treaty, 2006
- (5) The Treaty of Pelindaba in East Africa, 1996
- (6) The Treaty of Tlatelolco in South America, 1967

Other UN sponsored international treaties include: The Outer Space Treaty, 1967; the Antarctic Treaty, 1959; and the Sea-Bed Treaty, 1971. In addition there is the UN Convention Prohibiting the Illegal Sale and Manufacture of Small and Light arms; the Convention on Cluster Bombs; and the Convention on Land Mines.

The foregoing are important initiatives in attempts to curb nuclear proliferation and protect vast areas of the world from a nuclear holocaust. However, the key to avoiding a nuclear conflagration lies with the big powers especially the US and Russia who between them possess enough nuclear devices to destroy the entire world many times over. Thus far several rounds of negotiation between them have terminated without any sign of a break through. The questionable presumption widely shared is that there would be no winner would prevent such an event from occurring. This is the gist of what has been termed Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). It is a dangerous presumption as it does not assure full safety. This can only be attained by a complete and irrevocable dismantling of all nuclear weapons.

It is a sad commentary on how human beings manage their affairs and the use of the earth's resources. Military spending continues to escalate. In 2010 world military expenditures amounted to US\$1.63 trillion of which the US exceeded the rest of the world by five times the amount. It is estimated that less than 2% (roughly US \$20 billion – US\$40 billion) of the amount spent on armaments is all that is needed to solve the problems associated with the New Development Agenda stressing sustainability, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty.

In terms of the nuclear threat, the number of warheads stored in silos by the US amounts to 2150 deployed warheads; those by Russia amounts to 2427 deployed warheads; those by the UK amounts to 160 deployed warheads; and those by France, 290 deployed warheads. China, India Pakistan and Israel are reported to have other warheads not deployed.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The tasks before the member states of the UN are clear. We can shame the world leaders and adopt a moralizing tone for their failures to meet the challenges of peace and security. However, in doing so, it is good that we are reminded of a cryptic saying of Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, 5th UN Secretary-General of the UN that “War begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that peace may be sought.” The UN is a Peoples’ Movement in support of peace and security. In them lies the future of peace and security. This calls for active and consistent support for the UN and what the Charter represents.