

20 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall – A View from India

Ummu Salma Bava

1989 has gone down in the annals of history as the year the world changed, opening up endless freedom of possibilities to people and states. Just two years earlier when US President Ronald Reagan spoke at the Brandenburg Gate on June 12, 1987 saying “We hear from Moscow about a new openness,” he also said “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” That, events would soon lead to the wall coming down and with such speed was never predicted.

The Berlin Wall, the symbol of Cold War was also a grim reminder of how the world and people were divided. From 1945 as the World War came to an end and with it came the era of decolonization, it also brought in its wake a new balance of power at the global level. This was the beginning of bipolarity that was to be tested all around the world and which was acutely felt in Europe and in particular in both the Germanies. Political barriers had created new borders not only for Germany but for the world as well.

As a newly independent country in 1947, India faced tremendous developmental challenges, foremost being the task of nation building. As a fledging republic, it was also pulled into the undertow of global politics and bipolarity. It was under these circumstances that India took the lead with other similarly inclined newly independent countries to launch a third way in global politics- and so was born the idea of Non-Alignment. The three leaders Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India, President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt and President Tito of Yugoslavia were bold enough to charter a new course in 1955 in global politics by not being aligned to either blocs.

However, India was acutely aware of the global divide. At the political level, India and West Germany have a long established partnership. This made India very aware of the political

developments surrounding West Germany and when the Wall came down, India supported German reunification.

FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL AND CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Undoubtedly, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 created new scenarios in the international world. The events of 9 November 1989 changed the world, a continent, a country and a city and more importantly the lives of millions of people around the world. As Germany celebrated unification in less than a year's time on 3 October 1990, it was hard to imagine that geopolitics would get another major shock when the Soviet Union imploded in December 1991. These tectonic shifts were bound to affect all countries and people.

At a political level, the familiar bi-polar structure which had so determined political outcomes on the chess board of global politics gave way to the rise of the sole super power- the United States. With out any counterbalance or opposition of equal dimension, the US emerged as a hyperpower and continued to straddle global politics from 1991 to 2001.

The end of the Cold War in 1990 was also heralded in the West as the end of Communism and the victory of the liberalism and capitalism. In an article that made headlines at that time, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama called the moment as 'the end of history,' signalling thereby that the ideology of the west had triumphed over the east. In many ways, democracy, liberalism and capitalism became the buzz words for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union.

Within Europe, the newly unified Germany was aware of the reaction that unification had on its neighbours. Despite 40 years of strong democratic traditions in West Germany, its past history was subjected again to scrutiny. Amidst this backdrop of cautious optimism on the part of its neighbours, Germany rededicated itself to the European project that would lead to the establishment of the European Union in 1992. As the 'paymaster' of Europe, it strongly endorsed the vision of Jean Monnet and Schumann that took Western Europe from conflictual dynamics to peace dynamics. It was this philosophy endorsed in equal measure also by France that led to a new writing of history in Western Europe from 1949

to 1989 and the creation of the most successful process of regional integration.

Although the Berlin Wall was symbolic of the division of Europe, within the western side, the barriers to movement of people, trade and goods was slowly dismantled. In a break from the history of conflict, from 1949 -1989, Western Europe had managed to redefine its relation to the word 'sovereignty'. When the Cold War came to an end in 1990, the West Europeans were able to demonstrate to the world what cooperation between states and people could achieve – a building of a new and joint political and economic future.

INDIA AND THE WORLD AFTER THE END OF COLD WAR

In South Asia where the impact of Cold War was also acutely felt since the two main protagonists- India and Pakistan were on the opposite sides of the fence. India was supported by the Soviet Union and Pakistan was part of the American camp. In this context, India's foreign policy choices till 1990 were circumscribed by Cold War politics that defined its political, economic and security relations with other states. As India welcomed German unification in 1990, it had to adjust to an extremely transformed external reality and an emerging internal financial crisis. Both these factors had a tremendous impact on shaping the emerging Indian politics and economy.

Post-Cold War global politics presented India with opportunities and challenges. For the first time in its history it was no longer contained in South Asia by the Cold War rubric. Although history is a selective recall or narration of memories and we pick and choose what we want to privilege, it would be no exaggeration to say that the fall of the Berlin Wall actually opened a new path for Indian foreign policy. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 left it without a trusted partner and friend but also presented opportunities for new relationships and partnerships.

The economic crisis on the other hand forced India to restructure and liberalise its economy and open the various sectors to private players and investment. Both these factors have profoundly impacted India politically and economically.

At the global level as the world is witnessing changes in power equations between and among states, India is no longer seen

as being on the periphery of international politics, This shift in perception was largely driven by the dramatic change in the Indian economy after liberalisation that speeded up the economic growth and sent India up on the list of new emerging economies. This also meant that India could now reconfigure its political relations with many countries, where this had been weak.

With the fall of the Wall and the end of Cold War, India has emerged as ideationally the country closest to Europe and the US. Endorsing common political and economic values, India and the West now find each other on the same side of the table, although the means to achieve certain common goals are expressed differently.

The liberalisation of the Indian economy and its integration into the globalised world economy was also enhanced when bi-polarity came to an end. It is in this context that India's engagements with the regional and global levels have also been transformed. With a strong growth in the economy and a sustained democratic tradition and performance, the end of the Cold War has catapulted India to the forefront of the developing countries into a new league of emerging powers or emerging economies.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of bi-polarity has not signalled an end to conflict and problems. Rather, with the global spread of political and economic liberalism, globalisation has led to a growing interdependency today as compared to the past when the world was divided. India along with other countries is faced with new threats to security. In the post Cold War world security threats have become diverse and diffused. If bi-polarity divided the world into battle lines of the known enemy, then today, the world is coming together to fight the new threats collectively. Whether it is climate change, terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, organised crime and trafficking and narcotics and the list goes on, only collective action can lead to a successful outcome. In that sense the fall of the Wall has also tied together all our futures even more.

CONCLUSION

In 1945 when the World War came to an end, a new beginning was made at the global level that quickly fell foul to the Cold War. The vision of the UN Charter remained a vision till 1989 when the Wall came down, opening since then the possibility to construct a new kind of global politics.

India's potential to play a global economic, political and security role depends on developments in the international structure and regimes, regional stability and its own domestic economic growth and internal political stability. India, which was brought up on the concept of "balance of power", which was part of the bi-polar structure is confronted with the "power of dependence" as emphasised by growing international trade and economy. Freed of the structural limitations of the Cold War, India is today trying to build strategic political and economic alliances at the bilateral, regional and global level so that it will bring it additional security dividends.

More significantly, while the wall symbolised bi-polarity, division and borders, its fall signalled the ending of barriers especially in Europe. The dismantling of Check-Post Charlie and its conversion into a museum is a sharp reminder that barriers were a reality till only 20 years back. In stark contrast, South Asia still grapples with conflict and barriers. The end of the Cold War, which should have facilitated a new political relationship between India and her neighbour- Pakistan, is today caught in a new conflict because of the rise and threat of terrorism in the Af-Pak region. However, in a globalised world, just as India engages the world, India is also being engaged by the world. India's foreign policy today shows a mix of balancing and hedging of interests.

In the backdrop of the fall of the Wall, India both as a developing country and an emerging power is negotiating two different spaces. India's changing aspirations and its pursuit to emerge as a significant player is also constrained by the limitations imposed by world politics and its own domestic challenges.

20 Years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world is more free and connected, barriers have been dismantled and opportunities created, However, many a new global challenge and the ability of states to respond to them draws attention to the asymmetry still present in global politics.

Ummu Salma Bava is Chairperson and Professor of European Studies at the Centre for European Studies, and Co-ordinator, The Netherlands Prime Minister's Grant, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is also an Associate Fellow of the prestigious Asia Society, New York, USA.