Chapter 5: Security in the Contemporary World

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Match the terms with their meaning: (i) Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); (ii) Arms Control; (iii) Alliance; (iv) Disarmament. (a) Giving up certain types of weapons; (b) A process of exchanging information on defence matters between nations on a regular basis; (c) A coalition of nations meant to deter or defend against military attacks; (d) Regulates the acquisition or development of weapons.

(i) CBMs - (b); (ii) Arms Control - (d); (iii) Alliance - (c); (iv) Disarmament - (a).

Q2 Which among the following would you consider as a traditional security concern / non-traditional security concern / not a threat? (a) The spread of chikungunya / dengue fever; (b) Inflow of workers from a neighbouring nation; (c) Emergence of a group demanding nationhood for their region; (d) Emergence of a group demanding autonomy for their region; (e) A newspaper that is critical of the armed forces in the country.

(a) Non-traditional concern: epidemics like AIDS, bird flu and SARS spread across borders and threaten human lives. (b) Non-traditional concern: migration is linked to poverty and conflict and can create friction between states; whether it is a real threat depends on its scale and context. (c) Traditional concern: a demand for separate nationhood threatens a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, an internal security matter of the kind separatist movements raise. (d) Not a threat, as long as it is raised democratically: the chapter says democracy lets groups voice grievances and share power, so autonomy demands can be accommodated politically. (e) Not a threat: criticism of the armed forces is a normal part of democratic debate and does not endanger core values.

Q3 What is the difference between traditional and non-traditional security? Which category would the creation and sustenance of alliances belong to?

Traditional security sees military force as the main threat and the main means of safety. The danger comes from another country that threatens sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and the state is the referent, the thing to be secured. Its tools are deterrence, defence, balance of power and alliances, though it also accepts cooperation such as disarmament, arms control and confidence building. Non-traditional security goes beyond military threats to include dangers to the conditions of human existence, such as terrorism, poverty, migration and refugees, epidemics, human rights violations and environmental degradation. Its referent is wider: individuals, communities and all of humankind, which is why it is called human or global security. These threats are usually tackled through cooperation rather than force. The creation and sustenance of alliances belongs to traditional security, since alliances are coalitions of states formed to deter or defend against military attack.

Q4 What are the differences in the threats that people in the Third World face and those living in the First World face?

After the Second World War, the powerful First World countries felt their internal security was largely assured, so they worried mainly about external threats, especially a military attack from the rival Cold War bloc. Third World countries faced a mix of threats. Many feared neighbours more than the superpowers, and quarrelled over borders, territory and control of populations. They also faced internal threats from separatist movements that sought independent states, and sometimes a neighbour backed these movements, merging external and internal threats. Some feared attack by former colonial rulers. The Cold War also drew them into wars, and most of the wars it caused were fought in the Third World. Internal wars now make up over 95 per cent of armed conflicts. Third World countries also suffer more from poverty, rapid population growth, refugee flows and diseases such as HIV-AIDS.

Q5 Is terrorism a traditional or non-traditional threat to security?

Terrorism is generally treated as a non-traditional threat. It is political violence that deliberately and indiscriminately targets civilians, and international terrorism involves the citizens or territory of more than one country. Terrorist groups try to change a political situation they dislike by force or the threat of force. They choose civilian targets to terrorise the public and use its unhappiness as a weapon against governments. The referent of this threat is people and societies, not just the state. Its source is often a non-state group rather than another country's army, and it is global in nature. It is classed with new sources of threat, such as human rights violations, poverty and epidemics. Military force may have a limited role against terrorists, but the chapter says collective international action is far better than one country acting alone.

Q6 What are the choices available to a state when its security is threatened, according to the traditional security perspective?

According to the traditional perspective, a government facing the threat of war has three basic choices. First, it can surrender, though governments never advertise this as their policy. Second, it can prevent the other side from attacking by promising to raise the costs of war to an unacceptable level; this is deterrence. Third, if war actually breaks out, it can defend itself so as to deny the attacker its objectives and turn back or defeat the attacking forces; this is defence. Security policy is therefore concerned with preventing war (deterrence) and with limiting or ending war (defence). Beyond these, states also maintain a favourable balance of power, build alliances, and may cooperate through disarmament, arms control and confidence building.

Q7 What is 'Balance of Power'? How could a state achieve this?

Balance of power is a component of traditional security. States watch the strength of other countries, because a bigger and stronger neighbour may become aggressive in future even if it shows no sign of it today. Governments therefore work to keep a favourable balance of power with other countries, especially those close by, those they differ with, or those they have fought before. A state can achieve this mainly by building up its own military power. Economic and technological power also matter, since they are the basis of military power. A state can also join or form alliances, which increase its effective power relative to a rival country or alliance.

Q8 What are the objectives of military alliances? Give an example of a functioning military alliance with its specific objectives.

A military alliance is a coalition of states that coordinate their actions to deter or defend against military attack. Countries form alliances to increase their effective power relative to another country or alliance. Most alliances are formalised in written treaties and rest on a clear identification of who constitutes the threat. They are based on national interests and change when those interests change; for example, the US backed Islamic militants in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s but later attacked them after the 11 September 2001 attacks. The chapter does not name a currently functioning alliance. A well-known example from outside the text is NATO, which commits its members to collective defence against armed attack on any one of them. During the Cold War, the US-led Western alliance faced the Soviet-led Communist alliance.

Q9 Rapid environmental degradation is causing a serious threat to security. Do you agree with the statement? Substantiate your arguments.

Yes, with the qualification the chapter itself makes. Environmental degradation is a global threat, like global warming, that no country can solve alone. Its burden also falls unevenly: a sea level rise of 1.5-2.0 metres due to global warming would flood 20 per cent of Bangladesh, inundate most of the Maldives and threaten nearly half the population of Thailand. For the Maldives, with much of its territory at risk of being submerged, this is a threat to its very existence, which meets the minimum test for calling something a security problem. Such degradation can also drive migration and add to poverty and conflict. The chapter warns that not every distress should be counted as a security issue, or the concept loses coherence. Environmental damage qualifies where it threatens the survival of a state or group. Because the problem is global, international cooperation, such as the Kyoto Protocol, is vital, even though it is difficult to achieve.

Q10 Nuclear weapons as deterrence or defence have limited usage against contemporary security threats to states. Explain the statement.

Nuclear weapons serve deterrence and defence against another state's military attack. Many contemporary threats, however, are not of that kind. Poverty, migration and refugee movements, epidemics such as HIV-AIDS and bird flu, and environmental degradation cannot be solved by military force, and in most cases force would only make matters worse. Terrorism comes from non-state groups, and force has limited use even there. Nuclear weapons are especially hard to use against such groups, since they cannot be aimed at a hidden network and would harm civilians. These threats are global and need cooperation among states, international organisations and other actors, not military confrontation. Arms control treaties such as the NPT also show that even states with nuclear weapons try to limit them. So nuclear weapons offer little help against the threats that now affect ordinary people most.

Q11 Looking at the Indian scenario, what type of security has been given priority in India, traditional or non-traditional? What examples could you cite to substantiate the argument?

India's security strategy combines both kinds, but traditional security has long had clear priority. The first component of its strategy is strengthening military capability, because India has fought neighbours: Pakistan in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999, and China in 1962. Surrounded by nuclear-armed countries, it tested a nuclear device in 1974 and conducted nuclear tests again in 1998, justified as safeguarding national security. Non-traditional concerns are also addressed. India supports international norms and institutions, joined the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases and sends troops on UN peacekeeping missions. It meets internal threats from militant groups in Nagaland, Mizoram, Punjab and Kashmir through a democratic system, and works to lift citizens out of poverty and reduce inequality, though only partially successfully. So, the military and nuclear emphasis shows that traditional security has been prioritised, with non-traditional concerns growing alongside.

Q12 Read the cartoon below and write a short note in favour or against the connection between war and terrorism depicted in this cartoon.

Model answer on the connection between war and terrorism. In favour: war and terrorism feed each other. Wars create insecurity, anger and displaced populations, conditions in which militant groups can grow. Alliances are also shifting; the US backed Islamic militants in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union in the 1980s and later faced terrorist strikes from Al Qaeda on 11 September 2001. Both war and terrorism also hit ordinary civilians. Against: the two are not identical. Terrorism is political violence that deliberately targets civilians, usually by non-state groups, and it long predates 11 September 2001, with attacks in the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and South Asia. Treating terrorism only as a matter for war ignores its causes, and the chapter adds that military force has limited reach here. Collective international action is the better answer, and war alone does not end terrorism.