

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System.* By Mohammed Ayoob.**
London: Lynne Rienner, 1995. xvi. 216 pp.

With the end of the Cold War, increasing attention is being paid to the problems of internal and ethnic conflicts in the Third World that have not only caused disruptions and breakdowns in the countries directly affected but have also threatened to vitiate and endanger peace and stability in the immediate region around them as well as the world at large. A comprehensive study of Third World security and its implications for peace and order at the regional and global levels has been in order. In this respect, Mohammed Ayoob must be complimented for making a courageous and pioneering attempt. In this book under review, he not only addresses himself to the theoretical questions of what security means and what are the sources of insecurity in the Third World, but also looks into the policy alternatives for achieving credible and lasting security. In doing so, he keeps in perspective the regional and global contexts within which Third World countries have to operate. He also does not confine his enquiry to post-Cold War developments alone but travels through a long and difficult period of the bipolar Cold War which had considerably complicated the security situation in the Third World.

Security for Ayoob is a multidimensional concept. After a careful and critical evaluation, he dissociates himself from the Western view of security which he finds "system-centric", militarist, and "external oriented". Instead, he pleads for taking a broadbased view which "must remain firmly rooted in the political realm while being sensitive to

variables in other realms of societal activity that may have an impact on the political realm and may filter through into the security calculus of Third World states because of their potential to influence political outcomes" (p. 12). Accordingly, he would reject the notions of environmental or economic security, but would incorporate those environmental and economic concerns that decisively impinge on political priorities and values in terms of security. The only problem in accepting this definition is that, as Ayooob himself admits, it is rooted deeply in the entity of State and is not much concerned with the security of society as a whole, though this society props up and protects the State. Since there is no reliable criteria for assessing the security needs of the State, they become what the controllers and managers of the State — regime, in other words — define it to be. Accordingly, with the change in the character and composition of the regime, the security of the State may, and does change.

Like many other Western scholars, Ayooob also locates the insecurity of the Third World in the processes of State-making, which are fragile, distorted and incomplete. States that have failed also generate insecurity in the Third World (Chapter 2). The unexpressed but underlying assumption of this approach is that with the process of decolonization, or in the post-World War II period, the newly liberated countries launched their respective State-making ventures which, in most cases, have yet to reach their successful culmination. Many Third World states do fall into this category, but not all. It is erroneous to assume that the pre-colonial Third World had no structures of governance. In fact, a number of Third World states, particularly India, China and Egypt, had developed civilizations and political structures. A process of ideological and institutional de-construction and re-construction of these structures and states has been going on in the Third World and it is this process which is mistakenly described as State-making. Ayooob should therefore have gone beyond the parameters of State-making and extended his analysis to the character of the State in Third World societies and how this character has been undergoing continuous, and sometimes rapid transformations, precipitating insecurity. Afghanistan's transformation from a feudal to a socialist to a religious/sectarian State (nay, failed state!) may be seen as leading to a complete breakdown of political institutions. Similarly, the responsibility for ethnic conflict and internal insecurity in Sri Lanka must be shared by the rising sectarian (Buddhist/Sinhala) State from its post-colonial democratic and secular character. Similarly, would Pakistan have broken into two if it could govern itself through democratic institutions rather than leading towards a martial law character?

This takes us to the repeated assertion in Ayooob's book that sources of insecurity in the Third World are invariably internal. And this is done after a useful analysis of the role of regional and global forces and factors for Third World security. Several questions arise here. Are internal State-making and related political processes in the Third World as autonomous as the author assumes them to be? How would one measure this so-called autonomy against the many and diverse forces of intervention, like economic (aid, trade, investments, technologies), ideological (notions of self-determination, human rights), military (arms transfers and security support, proxy wars) and direct military intervention (with or without the United Nations' umbrella, or peacekeeping pretexts). Ayooob ably discusses many examples of these forms of intervention and even underlines the destabilizing role of the great powers and their strategic priorities in the Third World, but he shies away from reaching logical conclusions. He is happy concluding that external forces only exploit and intensify the already existing roots of conflict in the Third World. Generally and broadly, perhaps the situation looks like that but firm conclusions of this type must be based upon a deeper scrutiny of the political processes in a subordinate system, which the Third World is, in relation to the global order constructed, defined and preserved by the great powers. One hopes that the author is not creating an easy escape route for the forces of hegemony and dominance by over-emphasizing the internal nature of insecurity in the Third World. He succinctly underlines the "Contradictory Third World Approaches towards the Global North" but does not tell us about vice-versa (pp. 73-75). He is conscious of the possibility of the erosion of the "limited degree of political and economic autonomy" enjoyed by the developing countries during the era of bipolarity, if "a concert of powers dominated by the United States becomes a long-term reality and effectively controls the political, security and economic agendas in the post-Cold War world" (p. 121), and yet he avoids a critical evaluation in this respect of the systematic manner in which this concert of powers is institutionalizing their desired norms of global governance to control the destinies of the rest of the world through non-proliferation, free trade, and human rights regimes.

Ayooob's treatment of the Third World's place in the post-Cold War global balance is refreshing and insightful. He is right that the end of the Cold War is not a sure way to peace and prosperity in the Third World. He cautions us about the danger of "substituting economic determinism for strategic determinism" (p. 117), and presents before us the ways and means through which the external factors complicate the

Third World's security situation. He discusses Russia's role as a security manager in the CIS region (pp. 143–45), but avoids a similar discussion about the U.S. role in the Asia-Pacific and Gulf regions, or China's role in Southeast Asia. On the internal dimension of the "Third World's Post-Cold War Security Predicament" (Chapter 8), his analysis of secessionist and ethno-nationalist forces is balanced and incisive. His attack on the selective (only for the developing world), and perhaps designed erosion of international norms "that guarantee the integrity of states" (p. 174) is apt and timely. He also cogently argues that for resolving ethnic conflicts, approaches of self-determination and ethnic cleansing are fraught with serious dangers that can, in the long run, vitiate even international peace and security (pp. 169, 180–82).

Where then lies the answer to the Third World's security predicament? Ayooob does not provide us with any clear answer, or even direction. His unstated assumption, perhaps, is that if insecurity emanates from State-making processes, as was the case with similar early stages of State formation in Europe, then we have to wait until these processes are successfully completed. This implies that the Third World neither has a fate different from that of Europe nor are the prospects for peace promising in the foreseeable future for the Third World. This is not only a grim conclusion but is unwarranted. He defends his position on the Third World following the European path in security and State-making by saying that everyone in the Third World wants to be like the developed State. But "development" in itself is a debatable issue and there are several alternative paths being explored and intellectually designed about the future course for the Third World. There is, in fact, an urgent need for the State in the Third World to be strengthened through international efforts, the opposite of what, according to Ayooob, is taking place in the post-Cold War order.

The present study is a must for all those who are interested in international security and Third World affairs. Some might fault Ayooob for the use of the term "Third World" but it remains relevant and effective as a tool of analysis. Ayooob has provided a cogent and stimulating argument on a problem that is central to security studies but has not been fully explored. One hopes that this study will encourage further debate on the issues raised and that many more of such studies would be produced to fill a vital gap in the field of contemporary international and strategic affairs.

S.D. MUNI
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi, India