

Perilous Interventions: The Security Council and the Politics of Chaos by Hardeep Singh Puri, Noida: HarperCollins, 2016, pp. 264, Rs 599

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Article 108 of United Nations (UN) Charter states that the Charter can be amended if it is adopted by two-third members of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of the members of UN, including the five Permanent Members, also known as the P-5. Changing international dynamics and the need for including hitherto unrepresented quarters further call for the restructuring of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The role of UNSC has changed over the years and Hardeep Singh Puri's book discusses the role of UNSC in resolving the crisis spanning Asia and Europe. As a former Indian Foreign Service officer who chaired the Security Council in 2011–12 during his tenure as the Permanent Representative of India to the UN, he had access to the first-hand account of the deliberations taking place on the ongoing crises in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. He has collated these experiences in *Perilous Interventions: The Security Council and the Politics of Chaos*, giving readers a glimpse of the workings of the UNSC from within. Puri's interviews and conversations with the Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and other political representatives in the UNSC enrich the discussions in various chapters, and provide an insight into the formation of the Council's policies and decisions. He has used conflicts in Libya, Syria,

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Yemen, Ukraine and Sri Lanka to showcase the inefficacy of UNSC and emphasise on the need for reform.

Puri defines 'perilous intervention' as whimsical and reflexive decision making, which has a far-reaching impact without being mindful of the consequences. Sincere and trained diplomats are co-opted by the system and make such decisions succumbing to short-term pressures. States use collective responsibility and noble intent to cloak decisions that lead to loss of human lives and wastage of billions of dollars. The actual intent behind these decisions range from geopolitical domination to curtailing an opponent's hegemony. Sometimes, unseating an undesirable regime and establishing a more favourable one is the main motive; often cloaked in virtuous motives of global economic stabilisation, stopping genocide, and destroying weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The role of the UN is important in allowing such interventions, though states have not always toed the line prescribed by the UNSC endorsing Vattel's *Law of Nations* (1758)¹ and the Brezhnev Doctrine (1968).² The P-5 get away with actions that suit their interests while vetoing otherwise; this is even as non-permanent members are demanding a restructuring of UNSC and representation for Africa and South America in the Council. Puri argues that if the UNSC is allowed to function as it is currently, it will bring further discredit to the cause of peace and security (p. 3).

The author gives a detailed account of the 2011 military intervention in Libya and mentions that Gaddafi's lack of regional allies led to it. Permanent representatives from the United Kingdom (UK) and France were compelled to take a stand against Gaddafi due to the systematic demonisation of the Libyan President in the mainstream Western media (p. 66). The UK tabled Draft Resolution 1970 allowing use of all necessary means to contain Gaddafi. The United States (US) substantially changed the draft, emphasising on the authorised use of force. The resolution was passed by the UNSC after the US agreed to remove the amended paragraph that shifted the focus of the draft from Article 41 to Article 42. This was because Article 42 had the potential of being read as 'authorized use of force' (p. 69), whereas Article 41 authorised the UNSC to decide on measures that did not involve use of armed forces.

Brazil, Russia, India and China, and Germany abstained, while Arab Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Yemen supported the intervention. India chose to be circumspect but was concerned about its citizens working in the region. Indeed, India's primary concern during the Libyan crisis was to put an end to the killings. The role of Bernard

Henry Levy, a noted intellectual, in influencing France's position on Libya cannot be ignored. He organised a meeting between former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Mustafa Abdul Jalil, the head of Libya's National Transition Council, on the precondition that France would support the rebels. In the meeting, Sarkozy promised that he would either gather international support and work towards obtaining a UNSC resolution on Libya or go ahead with the mandate of the UK, the Arab League, the European Union, and the African Union.³ Following this, Sarkozy recognised the opposition as the legitimate government of Libya without consulting with the French Foreign Ministry or taking Alain Juppe, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, into confidence (p. 75).

As far as Syria is concerned, it appeared in the beginning that the Libyan model would be followed, and that Assad would meet Gaddafi's fate as well. However, the Syrian case was distinct and, according to Puri, the reduced bonhomie between the US and Russia was one of the major factors that prevented sanctions (p. 109). He mentions that a lack of appetite in the US for military intervention, the reluctance of China and Russia to sanction use of force in Syria, and historical factors, including the Hama massacre (1982) and sowing seeds of discontent through Sykes-Picot (1916) and San Remo (1920) agreements, prevented intervention in this case (p. 111–13). However, Russia's Aleppo offensive of December 2016 changed Assad's fate and the course of the Syrian crisis. India presided over the UNSC in 2011 and managed to obtain a unanimous presidential statement for ceasefire and an all-inclusive peace process. The arming of rebels by external actors caused extensive damage to Syria. An IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) delegation found that Assad was ready to engage with rebels and reconsider the uncalled reaction. However, the opposition was not willing to meet Assad halfway as it was emboldened by the support of external actors (p. 125).

The UNSC has also been disregarded, abused, and violated a number of times. For example, when Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Yemen, with American support, in the beginning of 2015 on the pretext that Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi had requested help, it was not an anomaly. Saudi Arabia invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter to justify its intervention in the neighbouring state of Yemen. According to Puri, first, the justification was erroneous as Article 51 deals with threat from outside and Hadi had lost his legitimacy by that time, as he had already resigned and fled Yemen. Second, Hadi's request for help contradicted Articles 37 and 38 which necessitate parliamentary approval

and a decision by National Defense Council presided by the elected President of Yemen. Third, the use of illegal weapons by Saudi Arabia violated the 'laws of war' and demonstrated complete disregard for the UNSC (p. 143). Moreover, as a consequence of the internationalisation of the conflict by Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda's hold in the region strengthened. The passive and inert role of the UN in this context is worth analysing. The UN appeared helpless and incapable of adopting a stricter stand against unlawful intervention and ended up siding with the aggressors by adopting UNSC Resolution 2216, reiterating its support for efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in assisting political transition in Yemen (p. 151). Instead of penalising Saudi ruler Mohammed bin Salman, who had tied his political future with Operation Decisive Storm, the UN established a partnership with the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre. The UN relegated itself to irrelevance to an extent that Saudi Arabia did not even seek authorisation for the 'use of force' in Yemen.

Similarly, when Russia intervened in Ukraine, it did not deem it fit to get authorisation from the UNSC. Legally, Moscow breached Ukraine's sovereignty; however politically, it merely preserved Russia's strategic interests. Putin's disregard pointed to the erosion of the sanctity of Westphalian sovereignty and the passiveness of the UN (p. 163). The UNSC delayed its response and abstained from issuing a press statement at least for a month. Ultimately, it issued a press statement only after the declaration of Crimean independence on 11 March 2014. Seven weeks after Russia vetoed UN draft resolution S/2014/189 aiming to reaffirm Ukraine's territorial integrity, the UNSC adopted Resolution 68/262 derecognising Crimea's new status. Russia exercised its veto power, while Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) abstained. Following this, a bloody conflict erupted, but the UNSC remained dormant.

The author concludes that the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), which has been used as a cover for intervening in internal and external matters of sovereign states, does not hold ground as it is mere re-ordering of societies from outside using military force. Bernard Kouchner, former French Foreign Minister, has characterised it as the 'doctrine of humanitarian intervention'. There is also little agreement on how R2P is to be implemented due to the closely related concept of 'Protection of Civilians' that falls under UN's peacekeeping operations. Puri emphasises that if R2P is to form the basis of UNSC, it must be

anchored in the concept of ‘Responsibility while Protecting’ (p. 208). In the end, he calls for an urgent reform of the UNSC and improvisation in composition of permanent and non-permanent categories as per the changed international political and economic dynamics.

In the book, Puri’s experienced voice dares to question the motives of intervening powers, be it the US, the UK, France, Russia or regional powers like Saudi Arabia as well as multilateral fora like BRICS. An Indian perspective on the ongoing crises lets the reader gain an insight into our foreign policy and interests in the region. However, the book would have been well-rounded if the author had delved deeper into the solution along with stating and explaining the problem.

Anecdotes in the text enrich the narrative as well raise questions. For instance, when Puri quotes the statement of then Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike (p. 170), ‘I will call my sister in New Delhi and ask her to look the other way whilst I sort out this Tamil problem’, it exhibits how states and head of states behave in international relations and how an individual loses his/her importance as an entity. Interests of the state become paramount and human rights violations are seen through the lens of self-interest.

Perilious Interventions addresses the complicated issue of UN reforms in a lucid manner. The book would appeal to academic scholars as well as general readers interested in knowing the inner functioning of the UN. The book raises serious questions about loss of lives and human rights violations that follow interventions in the name of noble causes like spreading democracy or finding WMDs. It underscores the need to improve the functioning of the UN and enhance its credibility. It is recommended for those interested in UN reforms and also those who want to understand the politics behind interventions.

NOTES

1. Monsieur de Vattel, *Law of Nations*, Philadelphia, available at http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/Lieber_Collection/pdf/DeVattel_LawOfNations.pdf, accessed on 3 August 2018.
2. ‘Brezhnev Doctrine, Speech by First Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev’, 13 November 1968, available at <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1968BrezhnevDoctrine.pdf>, accessed on 3 August 2018.
3. Steven Erlanger, ‘By His Own Reckoning, One Man Made Libya a French Cause’, *New York Times*, 1 April 2011, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/world/africa/02levy.html>, accessed on 2 January 2019.

