

The New International Parameter And the New World Order

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The new world order or new international order has been a most debated topic of late. This is especially true after the Gulf crisis. George Bush mentioned the term a number of times. Indeed, it has raised important questions. What is the new world order? What would it be like? Would it be a better order for all the nations or would it be an order in which a few major nations led by one superpower reign supreme for their own benefit? How would the smaller nations enjoy the benefit of such an order? These questions have to be addressed by the various parties concerned.

But the one sure thing is that the new world order will be the major theme of discussion for scholars of and practitioners in the international arena. It will set the framework for policies and activities among those leaders at the negotiating table. It will become an issue which will capture the energy of those who are involved in international relations.

The new world order can be looked at from different perspectives. It could be viewed from its natural developmental process as a realist would usually view the situation. It could be argued from the philosophical standpoint as an idealist would usually like to see the situation analyzed. But the most rewarding approach is to view it from the backdrop of reality, then proceed to chart its desirable trajectory based upon ideal and philosophical principles. This is the approach of this short essay.

Major Trends in International Politics

Observers of international politics and domestic development of the countries of Asia cannot fail to notice that there are at present two distinctive trends. The first is political liberalization. Demands for a more open political system have taken place here and there. It is in essence a demand for democracy. The second trend is economic development. Invariably, most countries are engaged in the attempt to transform their economy into a modern industrialized one. The talk of gaining a newly industrialized country (NIC) status is commonly echoed in seminars, in the media, and in government policy statements. The focus is on economic development with a projective growth rate.

The two trends above are not confined to the "free" countries of Asia and elsewhere but even the big giants of the socialist states are no exceptions. The "Four Modernizations" and the "Open Door" policy in China, glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, the combination of planning and a commodity economy or the market mechanism advocated in Hanoi testify to the seriousness of the trend. The unification of the two Germanies, the swift political change in Eastern Europe, the demand for democracy in Burma which is under a military dictatorship, etc., are also signs of such a trend.

The five derivatives of these two trends are: the decreasing role of ideology, the changing relationship between the powerful and the medium-sized states, the internationalization of the economy, the increasing role of science and technology, and the development of trade blocs. A brief discussion of the five derivatives is in order:

The role of ideology is now on the decrease. Indeed, political ideology has been de-emphasized to such an extent that very few political statements have been issued along the fixed pattern of argument based upon ideological doctrine as it was once the case. Most noticeable is China. The once strong Maoist ideological fervor of class struggle is now replaced by a more pragmatic, issue-oriented framework of analysis. The focus is, as one may be tempted to argue,

how the cat catches mice, regardless of the mice's color, white or black.

Strong ideological differences prevailing during the Cold War period are waning. The more prevalent atmosphere is "to be friend to all, malicious to none, and co-exist with all nations regardless of differences in political systems or ideologies." This has significant implications because it means that real politics based on a practical diplomacy characterized by low cost, low risk considerations has become the choice of the powers. Direct confrontation of a "brink of war" type of situation is now a remote possibility. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is an example par excellence. There was more or less a consensus on the policy toward the issue among the powers.

The second derivative is the development of more equal relationship among nations. This is a result of the change in the power configuration starting from the shift from a bipolar to a multipolar international political arena, to the waning of the political and economic power of the US and the Soviet Union and the rise of medium-power nations. For example, the US - Thailand relation has shifted from a patron-client relationship into one of more equality. Thailand's vote in the UN Security Council condemning the US in the latter's bombing of Libya is a testimony to this. But this new situation also means that conflicts between the powers and the medium-sized countries which are becoming more economically powerful may take place.

The third derivative is the internationalization of the economy. In many countries which are undergoing a process of industrialization, there is the tendency to hook up its production with the world market. Gone are the days of autarky. A nation can only lead its economy to ruins if it chooses to become a hermit kingdom such as the case of Burma. On the capital formation side, one sees the globalization of capital. Many high-tech products are joint ventures of two or three nations. Multinational corporations have increased in number.

Capital will go where it begets profit, nationalistic sentiments notwithstanding. The common language of optimization of profit has become a world business language. Thus, one sees investment made by China in such country as Thailand in construction, hotel, and other industries and services. On the other hand, investors from the capitalist countries through the socialist states where profit is expected to be high. The internationalization of production, capital formation, and trade which cuts across ideological lines is a very clear phenomenon. International politics is marked more clearly by trade competition rather than power politics or ideological confrontation as it was once before.

The fourth derivative which is closely related to the process of industrial development is the role of science and technology. There is an increasing awareness of the role of science and technology in the production process and high quality production. Science and technology policy has been viewed as part of national development. Material, electronic, com-

puter science, bio-tech, and genetic engineering are given due attention as an integral part of industrialization and agricultural production. Most importantly, communication and transportation are now taken as a *sine qua non* of the modern society especially where high-tech is the order of the day. Facsimile has rendered telegram outdated. Cellular telephone where one can call anywhere across the ocean is a common phenomenon.

Indeed, it is said that the 21st century will be the age of information. Information technology will be highlighted as the most significant development of the coming age. Any nation which controls information will control economic and political power. As technological know-how is an important piece of information, the issue of intellectual property rights (IPRs) which is closely tied in with economic development has thus become a thorny issue between the US and other countries. The US offense in this context can be viewed as an economic onslaught on those countries which have become a challenge to the US in economic and trade matters in the same way that human rights issues raised by the US can be viewed as a frontal attack against those socialist countries whose violation of human rights have become their political weakness. Be that as it may, the role of science and technology and the IPR issue will continue to capture the scene for some time.

The development of trade blocs is another sub-trend which merits serious attention. The 1992 movement in which Western Europe will become a single market will mark a significant component in international relation. Similar movements are taking place among the US, Canada, and Mexico. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a well-known case. The Pacific-Rim Cooperation is another example. The proposal made by Malaysia for an East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) and Thailand's concept of the *Suwanaphum* or the Golden Peninsula in which Thailand will serve as the hub are to be reckoned with.

The two major trends of political liberalization and industrialization and the five derivatives, namely, the decline of the role of ideology, the change in the power configuration, the internationalization of the economy, the increasing role of science and technology and its related IPR problems, and the development of trade blocs are the backdrop against which one has to view the development of world politics and the new world order.

The New World Order

When one talks about the new world order, one has in mind an order of the world's political and economic structure as it would evolve. It is more or less dictated by the evolving new reality. It is an order which would come about through its natural course given the various components developed in the international arena. One may also talk about a new world order which is desirable, an ideal order in which nations, both weak and strong, poor and rich, will benefit. It corresponds to an ideal, a desirable order which nations can shape, most especially the major powers whose economic and political

clout can make a difference. Indeed, the concept of a new world order has been given greater attention after the Gulf crisis in which the US as the leading power among the allies has become the protagonist of such a concept. It is even viewed as an order in which the US would serve as the banner carrier.

As for the new world order, or what will likely evolve in the near future, it is best summarized by Matin Zuberi as follows:

The world after the cold war will be multipolar but without any resemblance to the past. The poles will have various currencies of power in military terms: the Soviet Union will remain a major power; in economic and financial terms Japan and Germany are already reckoned as global giants; and the United States will continue to remain the only military and economic superpower. Demographically at least, China and India will loom large on the horizon. As the utility of military prowess has been reduced, economic power will play a greater role in the new world. Security in this world will depend on the relationship between these poles.

The global economy has also changed significantly. The old system of trade liberalization and stable currencies no longer exists. There is a growing trend towards protectionism, upheavals in monetary and financial markets and regionalized world economy which is coalescing along three poles: the European Common Market towards which Eastern and Central European countries are being drawn, the United States, Canada and Latin America, and an amorphous grouping in the Asia-Pacific region centered upon Japan. The boundaries of these groupings are porous and memberships overlapping. Other countries will have to reposition themselves in these groupings. It is difficult to envisage the place of China or India in this arrangement. The escalating cost of technological development, the importance of economies of scale and the spread of protectionism have made participation in the three groupings a necessity for multinational corporations and has resulted in intercorporate alliances. Another factor is the fragmentation of the production process and the location throughout the world of various stages of component production and final assembling of components. Borders have, therefore, become porous and information travels at lightning speed without customs and duties.¹

Indeed, the long passage above describes the kind of world order which will likely emerge in the foreseeable future. But then one would be led to the basic question of whether nations behave in accordance with the system which governs them or differences can be made by concerted effort which can exert some degree of control on the system. In other words, is there a role for nations to play in shaping a new world order or do they just have to follow its natural course of development? It is commonly accepted that men create a system. As such, despite the systemic influence, it can always be changed by new policies or measures.

1. Matin Zuberi, "The New World Order and the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace," *The Indian Ocean News and Views*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (May 1991), p. 15.

Major powers with economic and political clout can have a bearing upon the development and direction of the world order. This point was buttressed by Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu in Beijing recently. Kaifu, in effect, said that the world community has begun a collective effort to build a "new international order" after the historic changes in the last two years. "The Japanese people are determined to participate actively in this collective undertaking because of the global responsibility concomitant with their country's economic strength and a constitutionally enshrined desire for peace and equality."

The Japanese prime minister described the ideal new world order in these words:

The new international order we seek is the one where peace and security are ensured, where freedom and democracy are respected, and where world prosperity is guaranteed through open market economies. In addition, it is an order which preserves an environment in which all people can lead rewarding lives and where stable international relations are created on the basis of dialogue and cooperation.²

What the Japanese premier tried to get across was the message that Japan would play its role in shaping a desirable international order. At the same time, the Japanese premier outlined what a desirable world order should look like. First and foremost is peace and security with an open political system and a market economy which hopefully would generate economic vibrance.

But the big question is how to bring about such an order. As already mentioned, an order of any sort will be worked out by two factors. One is the effort asserted by human beings. After all, a system which involves human activities will not be devoid of the human element. But at the same time, there is the natural course which may govern how the system will develop and that in turn may affect human behavior. In the international order, the two factors are intertwined. Powerful nations or a concerted effort of small nations may change the scenario. At the same time, the order may, if it is allowed to develop unchecked, hamper any change which will bring about a fair share of benefit among nations, be it in the economic, political, or technological realm.

If one takes the major and sub-trends in the international arena as the backdrop, the realist's appraisal of the natural development of the new world order, as persuasively argued by Martin Zuberi, and the role that can be played by members in the family of nations, especially the world powers, one may conclude that the development of a new world order is governed by both ideal and reality. Thus, if there is any attempt to create a desirable new world order, it has to combine idealistic and realistic elements. Admittedly, this is easier said than done.

2. *Bangkok Post*, August 12, 1991, p. 6.

A desirable new world order will have to be guided by a philosophy based upon a most important tenet -- common interests with a fair share for all the members. This will involve a number of variables.

First, if the new world order is to serve the ideal objective for humankind, it has to be an order, as expounded by Kaifu, in which peace and political stability are ensured. The UN should serve as the organization which can realize this ideal. This should be started with an effort to lessen political tension and conflict through negotiations. Peaceful co-existence and a de-emphasis of ideological and political-economic-social differences should be the prevailing attitudes among leaders of the various nations. Confidence-building and goodwill should be the standards for international relations. In short, what the new world order should witness is a world marked by peace and stability, mutual trust, and goodwill.

Second, the new world order should be an order in which trade and economic cooperation among nations will proceed along a fair pattern. Protectionist policy will be reduced to a minimum. Trade problems such as trade deficit will be tackled in earnest by all the nations concerned. Scientific and technological cooperation will be promoted. All these are to create an amicable atmosphere for a free trade system which should boost economic growth with the various nations sharing equitable revenue and the benefit therefrom. International economic cooperation commissions, trade and tariff agreements, IPRs, international financial policy, economic development agencies and institutions should become active in bringing about such an order.

Third, there should be a joint effort among nations to come up with policies which will help preserve a sound environment. Ecological problems will have to be addressed in earnest through close cooperation. Such issues as wildlife preservation, the green-house effect, and pollution generated by industrial waste should be given top priority.

Fourth, cultural exchange and enrichment through acculturation should be encouraged. An attitude of cultural relativism should be inculcated among the young. International visitors' programs should be encouraged to foster a better understanding among the peoples of the various countries. Youth exchange programs should be expanded. This is to lay down the foundation for cooperation and peace among the younger generations.

Fifth, as the US has emerged as the leading nation among the allies in the Gulf crisis, the talk about a new world order has thus centered around it. Indeed, the apprehension has been that the new world order would be an order under the US. Some even have the inordinate fear that the enforced peace pattern could be the harbinger of a pax-Americana. Thus, the new world order should be an order which is upheld by the collective effort of many nations. No single nation should play a dominant role. It should correspond to a multipolar system of international politics but at the same time should not be devoid of concerted effort for peace and stability.

Conclusion

The new world order or new international order should be one marked by peace, stability, equity, understanding, and cooperation. It should be an order in which humankind can live up to its noble attributes. It should be an order of long lasting peace which will allow for the pursuit of prosperity and happiness among fellow human beings.

But such an order can only come about by earnest efforts made by members of the family of nations. It has to be based also on a sound principle which will give rise to common interests for all the members. Moreover, it has to have an atmosphere of mutual trust, amity, and goodwill. Most importantly, the building of such an ideal new world order has to be done by zealous supporters and the undertaking must start now.