The New World Order and the Islamic World

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During a triumphant speech before the Congress on September 11, 1990, President Bush announced that the pursuit of a "new world order" would be an objective of American foreign policy. The speech's tone and emphasis marked a new phase in international politics, for only a few months earlier the United States and the Soviet Union, former Cold War foes, had demonstrated an unprecedented level of cooperation to eject Iraq—a former Soviet client—from Kuwait. In that speech, Bush stated that

> The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective – a new world order—can emerge: a new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony (Freedman 1991, 195).

The idea of a new world order, as it appears, entails and conveys the collapse of the old system and the emergence of another, different one. This paper is concerned with identifying and analyzing the premises of this new world order. How different are they from the tenets of the "old" order? Or more precisely, to use the *Economist*'s words: "What is new? Which world? And whose order?" (*Economist,* February 23, 1991, 25-26). What are the agendas of this order and to what extent do they reflect the interests of the Third World? How will this new order affect the Islamic world, the Third World, or "the residents of the South?"[1]

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[1]This study will use the term "Third World" or the "South" when it refers to issues concerning all countries of the Third World including the Islamic world. In some instances, examples drawn from certain parts of the Third World are used to illustrate common phenomena or shared trends.

The Islamic world provides an appropriate analytical framework for studying the relationship between the powerful North and the less advantaged South in a changing world, for it embraces a wide spectrum of geopolitical, ethnic, and socioeconomic entities which render it more representative of the Third World than any other region. Moreover, the region's religious and cultural attachments are different from those of the North. This contrast becomes important when we realize that some parts of Third World, such as Latin America, share the same religion with the North and, to a large extent, the basic tenets of a common culture.

The Emergence of the New Order

One of the striking features of the new world order is the way in which it unfolded. Although peaceful change in the international system is possible, some students of world politics postulate the need of a world war or a hegemonic war as the main mechanism for achieving change (Gilpin 1985; Modelski 1978). For Gilpin and Modelski, the major changes to the international system during the twentieth century took place after World War I and World War II. In contrast, the third transformation of the international system came as a result of two factors: 1) systemic changes such as the emergence of a global economy, the revolution in communications, and a tendency towards democracy and market-oriented economies and 2) the transformation of the distribution of power within the international system (Huntington 1991, 5). The internal disintegration of the Soviet Union left the United States as the only major superpower. Also, a war which was not hegemonic, the second Gulf War, asserted and confirmed the ascendancy of the United States as the dominant world military power.

The international order which emerged after World War I was based on the primacy of the nation-state. Achieving and maintaining national independence became the driving force of politics. The system that developed after World War II, however, rested on a different foundation: that of ideology (Brzezinski 1991, 3). It seems that in the new world order which is now emerging, economic factors will play a larger and more dominant role.

Recent events in the Soviet Union may illustrate the salience of economic issues in international politics. Mounting economic problems in the Soviet Union rendered the country vulnerable to Western political pressures, for Western economic aid comes with strings attached. Converting military industries into civilian ones, reducing military size, and showing "moderation" on important international political issues are the trade-offs which the Soviet Union should offer in exchange for Western aid. Another example showing how economics has eclipsed ideology is the case of China. China's $10 billion

annual trade surplus with the United States makes it economically vulnerable. Thus, China may not risk its trade with the United States over issues that do not directly affect its national interests. For both the Soviet Union and China, issues concerning former clients and solidarity with Third World countries have been put on hold for the time being.

The increased importance of economic power was coupled with a relative decline in the United States' economic power after World War II (Huntington 1991, 5). One explanation of the United States' resort to the military option in the Gulf was to offset a declining economy inside and rising economic competitors abroad (Petras 1991). The emergence of Japan as a dominant economic power will soon be followed by a powerful united Europe. This may pose a threat to the United States by limiting its access to local markets and by subjecting its companies to fierce competition in other parts of the world. For this reason, Petras (ibid., 513) argues that

> The U.S. war in the Gulf was in its deepest sense a means of changing the rules of global power: Subordinating economic competitors into bankers of U.S. military conquests; converting economic resources from markets toward war subsidies. . . . It was meant to define a new military-centered global order in which markets, income and resource shares are defined not by technological market power, but by political military dominance.

The New Patrons

With the Soviet threat subsiding, who are the likely patrons of the new world order besides the United States? According to some leading American strategists (Huntington 1991; Luttwak 1990; Brzezinski 1991), Japan, due to its rising economic power, is the first candidate. This is posited on two factors: 1) Japan will be leading the world in areas of technology and research and 2) this leadership will translate into increased Japanese influence throughout the world. A second candidate is newly unified Germany. Its strength and might lies, as in the Japanese case, in its economic capabilities. Both countries have a history of ultranationalistic sentiments. After these two come a united Europe and China. For these reasons, some American strategists are concerned with the balance of power in Euroasia.

In this uni- and multipolar structure, it seems that the American government will adopt the following strategy in order to maintain its dominance: 1) Prevent any single power from dominating Europe, Asia, or both; 2) Prevent the total disintegration of the Soviet Union; 3) Limit German power by encouraging its participation in NATO and other European international

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Issues of Information and Culture

Third World countries feel culturally and socially vulnerable to the complete domination of Western culture and traditions (Holsti 1982, 9). The Islamic world faces such a security challenge when it is faced with the penetration and domination of the Western media, which introduces and presents Western social norms, ways of life, and behaviors in a way that renders the indigenous culture inferior and second-class.

Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, the former secretary general of UNESCO, once observed that "freedom is meaningless if it is a one-way flow of information" (Vidyarthi 1988, 25). By these remarks, M'Bow is referring to the current situation of the international information flow. In a UNESCO report dealing with the international flow of information, Mowlana (1986, 21) notes that

> News flows from developed (North) to developing (South) countries follow a vertical direction. Horizontal flows do exist within the North and within the South, though there is significantly less volume of flow within the latter; while there exists a good deal of news flow from South to North, its volume is unsubstantial in comparison with the flow from North to South.

The flow of information which molds world opinion and contributes to the shaping of cultural and social norms and behavior is increasingly coming under the control of a few Western media corporations. Bagdikian notes that five media giants now dominate the important channels of the world's mass media: i.e., newspapers, magazines, books, broadcast stations, movies, recordings, and video cassettes. These are: 1) Time Warner Inc. (USA), which publishes magazines with a world readership of about 120 million and owns a number of large book publishing companies. Among its holdings are the world's second largest record company (WCI) and cable TV's HB0 and Cinemax; 2) Bertelsman (Germany) specializes in satellite TV, book publishing, and records. Moreover, it publishes about forty magazines in fifteen countries spread over four continents; 3) Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation Ltd. (Australia) owns an empire of newspapers in North America, Asia, Europe, and Australia. In addition to that, Murdoch owns the largest satellite television system in Europe, Fox Broadcasting (the fourth largest TV network in the United States), Harper and Row Publishers, and TV Guide, which has a circulation of 17 million; 4) Hachette-SA (France) is the world's largest producer of magazines (seventy-four in ten countries) and is the world's largest publisher of reference books; and 5) Capitol Cities/ABC, Inc. (USA), with less global outreach, owns ABC-TV, eight local TV stations, twenty-one radio stations, a chain of nine daily newspapers, and Hollywood Studios. It also

owns Word, Inc., the country's largest publisher of religious materials (Bagdikian 1989, 807-11).

This Western domination of the international mass media leads to the marginalization of other cultures. A certain set of norms and values is fused into movies, television and radio programs, plays, and music. Media not only contributes to the promotion of social progress, economic development, and international understanding, but it can also fuel hostility, fan national strife, and incite territorial disputes (Vidyarthi 1988, 7). International understanding would be better enhanced by accepting cultural and social diversity at the global level, not by denying and ignoring it.

This Western domination is conducted under the rubric of the free flow of information. But competition between unequals certainly works to the advantage of the powerful partner. Bagdikian (1989, 812) puts the argument more eloquently:

> True freedom of information requires three conditions: the opportunity to read and watch anything available; a diversity of sources from which to choose; and media systems that provide access for those who wish to reach their fellow citizens.

The Islamic world is highly dependent on Western media. Table 1 shows television programs imported to selected regions of the world, while table 2 represents films imported to selected Islamic countries. These UNESCO statistics underscore the cultural vulnerabilities of the Islamic world.

Table 1: Television Programs Imported from the West and the United States to Some Regions of the Third World, 1983.

To	Percent from the West	Percent from the U.S.	Percent from the Arab region
Africa	80	47	
Arab Region	59	32	28
Latin America	81	77	

Source: UNESCO. *World Communication Report.* Vendome, France: Imprimerie des Presses Universitaires de France, 1989, 147.

Table 2. Films Imported by Selected Islamic Countries and Their Origins.

Year	To	From	Percent
1984	Egypt	USA, France, Italy	74.5
1985	Algeria	USA, France, UK	51.4
		India	17.9
1983	Indonesia	USA, France, Italy	47.5
		Hong Kong	30.6
1984	Turkey	USA, France, Italy	64.5

Source: UNESCO. *World Communication Report*. Vendome, France: Imprimerie des Presses Universitaires de France, 1989, 399.

The other issue area of concern to both the Islamic and the Third worlds is economic development, the backbone of which is capital. An international order eager to attain harmony and prosperity should seek a more equitable distribution of resources. The world is now divided between those who live in destitute poverty and those who enjoy affluence and prosperity.

The Islamic world suffered a great drain of its natural resources during the period of colonialism, for raw materials and cheap labor were transferred to the industrial North. Some might argue that capital transfers from the North to the South have already been taking place in shape of aid, loans, and investment by multinational corporations. Upon closer scrutiny, however, this argument turns out to be of limited utility.

Let us first examine the debt issue. In 1986, the Third World shouldered about $1 trillion worth of debt, $360 billion of which belonged to the Islamic world. By 1990, Third World debt reached $1,300 billion (O'Neill 1990, 1). One of the most noticeable consequences of Third World debt is the adverse flow of capital. From 1981 to 1985, Latin American countries suffered a net capital outflow of about $30 billion annually (Wesson 1990, 420). Some countries paid out more in interest than the original amount of debt. Brazil, for example, "which owed $53 billion in 1980, has paid $105 billion in interest and still owes $115 billion" (ibid., 421).

Turning to the investment issue, statistics show that the recycling of capital is confined to the industrial North. Money generated by the more affluent countries eventually ends up again in the North for reinvestment and expansion purposes. For example, foreign direct investment in the United States jumped from $47.7 billion in 1983 to $72 billion in 1986 and to $160.2 billion in 1989 (Salvatore 1991, 101). In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa suffered a decline:

net capital flows[2] dropped from $18.3 billion in 1981 to $15.1 billion in 1987 (Taylor 1990, 11).

The Arab world, a region of vital importance to the industrialized countries (especially the Gulf), received very limited amounts of investment. Of the $253.9 billion direct Japanese investment abroad (as of March 31, 1990), only $3.404 billion (or 1.34 percent) was invested in the Arab world, while $105 billion (or 41 percent) was invested in the United States (Kuroda and Hatanaka 1991, 92).

These examples underscore the economic disparity between the North and the South. Any world order which fails to address these fundamental issues of concern to two-thirds of the world's population will ultimately hamper its goals of achieving peace, harmony, and prosperity.

Political Impact on the Islamic World

As regards the future relations of the Islamic world with the West, some Western strategists (Luttwak 1990; Taylor 1991) have assumed a conflictual relationship. Luttwak provocatively portrayed the Islamic world as a radical, highly militarized region which, without apparent reason, can easily attack its neighbors. In an article published in *Commentary*, he argues that the North-South conflict might replace the East-West confrontation by rotating the front lines of hostility by 90 degrees. He further notes:

> And because for all Europeans—Russians very much included—the adjacent South is largely Islamic, the 90-degree solution is that much more plausible, given the exasperated rejection of Western cultural penetrations by many Muslims, and the violent extremism of some (Luttwak 1990, 17).

Luttwak continues to describe North African and Middle Eastern countries. He states:

> A denuclearized and substantially demilitarized Europe could hardly coexist safely with heavily armed powers just across the Mediterranean, some equipped with long-range missiles (ibid., 18).

In a further negative characterization of Islamic behavior, Luttwak (ibid., 17) argues that "violence on a large scale is present wherever Islam meets non-Islam."

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[2]Capital flows to Africa include donations, loans, and investments.

Taylor (1991) characterizes the Islamic-Western schism as being less militarily threatening than Luttwak's depiction. He introduces a new dimension to the conflict, that of ideology, when he states that

> In the future, both mass emigration to the West and anti-Western ideologies, probably based on Islam, could be appealing. The region represents few direct military threats to Europe at the moment (1990, 138).

A military confrontation between the West and the North Africa-Middle East region in which these countries pose a challenge to the North is not objectively present at the time being. Most nations of North Africa and the Middle East depend on the North for their military hardware and training. Moreover, the West's strategy is to prevent any Islamic country from going nuclear. The "nuclear club" is an exclusive entity for the big powers, whereas admission for others is selective. With the Soviet Union disintegrating, Western powers have expressed concern that independent Muslim Soviet republics may take a nuclear arsenal with them "at last confronting the world with the long-dreaded 'Islamic bomb,'" as *Newsweek* puts it (September 9, 1991, 22).

One of the questions that has a direct impact on the Islamic world and needs further examination is the position and role of the Islamic republics in the Soviet Union. The Central Asian republics occupy a strategic location between Russia and China. Although these republics' current political and economic situation may force them to find some ties with Moscow, the future is by no means certain. Islamic activism is increasing, especially after the legalization of the Islamic Renaissance party on September 9, 1991. In 1989, there were only 160 working mosques; now there are more than 5,000, and ten more mosques are opening every day (*Economist,* September 21, 1991, 58-60).

One result of this dominant Islamic sentiment may be to seek a way to redirect the orientations of the republics toward the South. Such a development would have a great geopolitical as well as psychological impact. As far as the geopolitical aspect is concerned, the Islamic frontier would then extend to the borders of Russia and China. Nuclear technology and capability would be transferred to the Islamic world. Whether the Afghan *Mujāhidīn* would succeed in their attempt to overthrow the communist regime in Afghanistan or not, the future of communist rule in that country would be extremely remote. Moreover, these transformations may also have a direct bearing on Kashmir and may possibly lead to its people being allowed self-determination.

Concerning the psychological factor, central Asia once represented the cultural and spiritual heart of the Islamic world. Cities such as Bukhara,

Tashkent, and Samarqand were centers of knowledge, culture, and various arts. With their reintegration into the Muslim ummah, a surge in Islamic activism would be expected throughout the region, especially in such secular states as Turkey.

Two other areas of concern to the Islamic world are the Gulf and Palestine. The Gulf contains one of the world's most desirable commodities: oil. Industrialized countries depend on the Gulf area for this oil. Japan, for example, imports almost all of its oil from the Islamic world (70 percent from the Gulf and more than 20 percent from Indonesia). The United States imports about 25 percent of its oil from the Gulf. More importantly, the largest amount of oil reserves in the world resides in the Gulf. Of the almost one trillion barrels of oil reserves, 720 billion are found in the Gulf (*Dallas Morning News*, October 14, 1991, 6).

Any interruption in the supply of oil from the Gulf is considered by the West to be a direct threat to its continued well-being. The second Gulf War proved that the United States will not allow a single power to control the flow of oil. The United States' strategy in this regard is to prevent Iran, Iraq, or Saudi Arabia from dominating the Gulf area. One of the obvious consequences of the Gulf War is the complete dependence of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the small emirates on the United States for both security and protection, which highlights the fragility of the Arab interstate system. The fragility of this system became even clearer with the collapse of the "Damascus Declaration." Another significant ramification of the Gulf War, one closely connected with the first, is the complete collapse of the concept of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism. The foundations of the idea were severely shaken by the invasion of one Arab country by another and the subsequent polarization of the Arab world into two antagonistic camps. This means that some Arab governments, especially those of Iraq and Syria, may seek another base for the legitimation of their continued rule.

The other area of concern to the Islamic world is Palestine. The Palestinian issue was used by many Arab governments to mobilize the population and generate political support. Many Arab regimes have in the past based their legitimacy around the Palestinian problem. Therefore, stability in the Middle East is connected with settling the Palestinian problem.

Conclusion

It seems that the new world order, at least as far as many actors at different levels in the Islamic world (i.e., states, organizations, or individuals) are concerned, does not mean change for the better, for the issues which it raises are not of major concern to those actors. Issues of external military

threats, nuclear deterrence, and balance of power are not urgent issues for most Islamic world actors. What many Islamic countries are concerned about are issues such as internal violence, hunger, and refugees. In addition, both the Islamic and the Third worlds are quite concerned with economic development and the flow of information. When Third World countries proposed a new world information order and a new world economic order, they were faced with fierce opposition on the part of the West. For the Western industrialized nations, preservation of the status quo means the continuation of their dominance.

For a world which wants to live in harmony and peace, an incorporation of these information and economic concerns into the overall framework of the new world order is crucial. With the present situation of disparity between the North and the South, poverty and, as a result, violence will become increasingly endemic to the South. Brzezinski puts the argument more succinctly when he notes:

> With nuclear weapons inhibiting the recourse to war among the leading powers, global politics are becoming in some ways similar to American urban centers: a mixture of interdependence and inequality with violence concentrated in the poorer segments of the society (1991, 5).

A world hoping to live in harmony, peace, and prosperity needs a more equitable distribution of resources. More tolerance and understanding of others' cultures and belief systems is not only desirable, but needed.

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