

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Bradman Weerakoon

One of Sri Lanka's most distinguished civil servants, Mr. Weerakoon has served as Secretary to six Prime Ministers. Currently Presidential Advisor on International Affairs, he is also the secretary of the All Parties Conference and a member of the newly formed Human Rights Task Force.

Foreign policy serves the national interest of a country. That is a fundamental postulate. Therefore Sri Lanka should try to ensure that its domestic needs are best served by its foreign policy - specially in the context of the emerging New World Order.

Since the whole Non aligned stance had some relation to the fact that there were two antagonistic super powers, the emerging rapprochement between super powers will have immediate relevance to the positions and postures we adopt in our foreign policy. Now that there's no Super Power rivalry the whole concept of Non alignment between the blocs will also have to be reassessed. I believe that in all the countries which were following a policy of non alignment (and we were very much in that group) there has to be a reappraisal of this. That reappraisal will take place in a formal sense at the Non Aligned Summit meeting in Accra this year. We will have to grapple with problems such as what Non alignment means now in this new context, is there any validity on non alignment and do we have to redefine this concept.

North-South Divide

On the other hand if this rapprochement stabilises (as it seems likely to) that will mean that the East-West divide will close. But this will have no effect on the North-South divide. In fact this North - South divide might even get heightened. This is a challenge to the South. Our foreign policy would have to and will have to pay more attention to bringing about collaboration and cooperation between the Southern countries - specially to find solution to our common economic problems like debt, trade, aid and striving to influence multilateral institutions like the IMF and the

World Bank which are now being directed mainly by the North. In the past the Soviet bloc countries looked at Southern problems with some sympathy and were very accomodating to the needs and the aspirations of South - particularly in multilateral forums. But the changes in Eastern Europe and the Super Power rapprochement might result in a mutiny of this support. Therefore as a result of the recent changes the South countries might lose some of the strength and force they had in international forums. Thus our foreign policy initiatives with those countries must stress the point that they should not forget the concern for the problem of countries like Sri Lanka.

1992

Another important international scene would be Europe in 1992. As a result there will be a very strong, very affluent consumer market of 320 million people which will not have any internal boundaries. We must try to ensure, through the conducting of our foreign policy, that our

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access to Europe (to this market) is on better terms than in the past. We should try to ensure that the preferential treatment that the ACP countries (Africa, Pacific, Caribbean) get under the Norway convention doesn't leave us out and that we are treated on equal terms as any other developing country.

Human Rights

The concern for human rights is another factor we will have to take into account in our foreign policy. In the past it was not a condition of aid. But increasingly it is being used as a conditionality for aid.

This could affect both official and private investment. Why the Developed Countries use human rights as a condition is open to a lot of questions. Some say this is an excuse for the slackening of aid as a result of the eventual diversion of aid from the Third World to Eastern Europe. Also today we live in an increasingly interdependent world - specially with the development of communication. Therefore the acts which can be considered to be human rights violation according to the ethics and values of the donor countries will affect the people of those countries - who now have an increasing say on policy and how this money is used. That concern has brought about an increased awareness of human rights. Therefore we too should concern ourselves with this problem on two levels - the manner in which we project ourselves in those countries and the actions that we take in dealing with extreme situations - we should try to ensure that these actions pass muster. This is important in order to achieve our ultimate purpose of being able to get aid.

Co-operation

We should also analyse the failure of the Uruguay Round. The purpose of the Gatt Negotiation was to achieve a further liberalisation in trade to help the developing countries. The way the world trade is structured now, the manufacturing products of the developed world enjoys very good terms, while the primary products of the Third World countries have very poor

terms. It was hoped that this unequal and unfair structures can be changed with the cooperation of the developed countries at the Gatt Negotiations. But this did not happen. In fact you had the developed countries ganging up against the South. What does this tell us? It tells us that one cannot look for concessions for scraps from the table, but has to work very hard to set ones own house in order and work in collaboration with others of ones own kind and win those positions. They won't be conceded so we will have to find some strength through collective action. That's why the regional group (SAARC, OAU

etc) will have to work together - region wise and as the South on these multilateral negotiations. We will have to spend a lot more time examining and analysing the situations and the problems and find coincidental points with other countries.

other developing countries which broadly have the same interests as we have.

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The changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the rapprochement between

them. The world is getting very complex and things are happening all the time, some of which were never anticipated because we did not have the benefit of indepth analysis. What Sri Lanka needs very much is that kind of depth or the creation of professional competency and research ability and capacity on which we can draw at very short notice. This is an essential tool we will need in order to respond to the adhoc situations which are bound to arise. The world is full of adhoc happenings but our response should not be adhoc; it should not be off the top of the head; it should be the result of deep and serious thought - circumstances may not give us time for this but at least we should be prepared for it. Therefore we need preparation. That's the approach we need today.

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We must also try to de-emphasise the rivalries we might have as developing countries and fight for common good and a common future. For example in the case of garments while free trade would be to our long term advantage, in the short term we benefit somewhat from the quota system because it provides us with a steady market and save us from having to compete with big countries like India and China.

This is a point where the overall interests of the South and the particular interests of a country like Sri Lanka do not coincide. Therefore we must be able to make the correct judgement - that though the quota systems benefit us in the short term it's free trade that's beneficial to us in the long term. This is specially important, because the developed countries would be trying to work on these rather insidious differences and to make out that there own stand would be in our best interest too. Thus we will get drawn into supporting a stand which in the long term would not be to our best interest because of a short term advantage. So we will have to be very careful and very watchful of this kind of situation. We should try to understand what's going on, try to make the necessary internal adjustments and come to an understanding with these

the two Super Powers and even the Gulf Crisis has lead to the emergence of a new world order-something dramatically new. I hope we are going into it with our eyes a little more open and with a little more maturity than before.

When we gained independence in 1948 we had a stary eyed vision - that now we are independent the whole world is open for us, we can do so much - and I think over the 40 years or so we've learnt a lot - about the very structures of our nation state (that it's not axiomatic and that it has problems, which have to be sorted out) our political order, our economic system, etc. And we are learning a lot about the nature of the region around us and about India, about the world; about the multilat-

We need think tanks or experts on which/ who we can draw at very short notice. But I don't think we have this at present. Therefore we rely on whatever available information; or just take a chance. Fortunately we are not relying on outsiders. One thing that I can say about Sri Lanka's foreign policy is that we are not lead by

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eral institutions like the IMF - the World Bank, the Political Multilateral system of the United system. We have to deal with contingencies. There cannot be any ready-made plan of action for the future - what our foreign policy needs in this new situation is some very broad perspective thoughts and the ability to draw upon very intensive research of the existing circumstances which will help us to analyse this situation and to decide how to respond to

anybody else. This is a good thing - not being anybody's puppet as some countries are. They do not have to think. But we don't have that "Luxury". We have to do our own thinking ourselves. So let's be proud of the fact that we can do our own thinking. But let's also sustain that ability to think correctly, by developing a strong professional competence which can justify the actions we take - sometimes on the basis of mere hunches. ■

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