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# New World Order: The Origin and Historical Evolution

The historical genealogy of the concept and the hope for a new world could be traced back to the dawn of human history. The idea of a new world had cropped up again and again in periods of historical transition and in times of intense political crisis. However, the concept of a 'new world order' that is perceived in the broader systemic framework emerged in political discourse only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the crises and calamities of world politics. As a result of the historical processes associated with the development of a capitalist economic order in Europe and the resultant establishment and expansion of its colonial domination in the rest of the world in stages since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the entire world had moved towards a single global system by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, the internal contradictions of the imperial world order paved the way for political and economic crises and world wars in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is in this historical context that the concept of a new world order in the structural sense of the word has evolved.

## The Liberal and Socialist Readings of New World Order after the World War I

Among the first to use the term 'new world order' as a prescription to reorganise the world were Woodrow Wilson and V.I. Lenin. Wilson wanted to see a new world order after the First World War based on Liberal Democratic norms. In contrast, Lenin believed that the Russian Revolution heralded a new era in human history and a new world order was in the making with the impending socialist revolutions in Europe and the national democratic revolutions in the colonial world. Woodrow Wilson in his speech to the United States Congress in January 1918 presented his famous Fourteen

Points as the basis for peace after the First World War. In the context of the crisis of the European political order that ensued in the wake of World War I, Woodrow Wilson further believed that the Fourteen Points, where he advocated no economic barriers between countries and no secret agreements, would usher in a new world order. In order to address the pressing problem of nationality in Europe, Wilson wanted to adhere to the principle of National Self-Determination in redrafting the political map of Europe. He believed that self-determination would lead to a better world, and his reading of it was conditioned by the liberal element of the concept. Alfred Cobban observed that "self-determination was to Wilson almost another word for popular sovereignty. In this he followed the French and the American, rather than the British, political tradition. The idealization of democracy was an essential part of Wilsonian ideology"<sup>1</sup>. Germany and her allies agreed to an armistice in November 1918 on the back of the Fourteen Points and attempts were made at the Versailles Peace treaty to put these points into practice. In line with the final one of the Fourteen Points, the League of Nations was established as a vanguard in the march towards a 'new world order', to make the world safe for democracy. However, America could not become a member of the League of Nations due to the US Senate's rejection of its membership. As a result, the League of Nations which was the key to a new world order according to Wilson suffered a serious setback at the very outset.

After the October Revolution in Russia, Lenin and Trotsky believed that it was the beginning of a new world order based on Marxist *weltanschauung*. Leon Trotsky believed that the October Revolution was the precursor of world socialist revolutions. Lenin

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believed that the October Revolution was an international one and victory could be ensured by world revolutions that encompass both the 'wealthiest' countries and the colonial world<sup>2</sup>. As a Communist visionary, Lenin talked of the emerging new world order as against the decadent old capitalist world order. For Trotsky socialism was not possible in one country and the 'permanent revolution' will ultimately usher a new socialist world order<sup>3</sup>. After Lenin's death in 1924 and the establishment of the political authority of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, the concept of a socialist world order gradually faded away.

## The Nazis and New World Order

While Liberal (Wilson) and Socialist (Lenin and Trotsky) versions of a new world order that emerged after the World War I faded away in the course of the inter-war years, the idea of a new world order emerged from a different framework with the rise of Fascism in Europe. In his concept of the 'Thousand-Year Reich', Adolf Hitler talked of a new world order based on pure *Arya* German supremacy. After coming to power Hitler mobilised material and manpower resources in pursuit of his vision of a 'new order' which covered Europe first, and then the entire world. The military defeat of Nazi Germany at the end of the Second World War, along with ideological defeat of Fascism, marked the end of Hitler's version of the new world order.

## The World War II and Aftermath

In the throes of the Second World War, H.G. Wells expressed the idea

of a new world order to unite the nations of the world, to bring peace and to end the war. In the book published in 1940 titled *The New World Order*, H.G. Wells remarked that "there will be no day of days then when a new world order comes into being. Step by step and here and there it will arrive, and even as it comes into being it will develop fresh perspectives, discover unsuspected problems and go on to new adventures .... World order will be, like science, like most inventions, a social product, an innumerable number of personalities will have lived fine lives, pouring their best into the collective achievement".<sup>4</sup> However, it is interesting to observe that in the wake of the economic and political reconstruction process after World War II, the phrase the new world order did not receive much currency, compared to the situation after World War I. The delegation of 44 victorious allied nations gathered at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in July 1944 and signed the Bretton Woods Agreements to lay down guide-lines relating to the management of financial and commercial relations for the post-war world. It was believed that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the main organs of the Bretton Woods System, along with the newly established United Nations Organization (UN), the principal organ in the maintenance of international peace and security, would usher in a new economic and political world order. The open rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union that cropped up after 1947, which was termed as the Cold War, belied any hope for a new world order of peace and stability.

### **New International Economic Order and the Third World**

The concept of a new world order surfaced once again in the 1960s with an economic emphasis in the UN framework. The decolonisation process after 1945 gave birth to 'new States' in Asia and Africa. These 'Third World' States that had now

come forward to assert in global politics in the 1950s and '60s wanted to change the international political environment dominated by the Super Powers and other Industrial powers of the West. The majority of the States in the 'Third World' organised themselves as Non-Aligned Countries and used the UN organs to present their interests utilising their numerical strength at the UN. There was a general perception among the Third World countries that there was something fundamentally wrong with the existing system of international economic relations which needed correction. According to Nurid Islam, three other factors, in addition to the dissatisfaction with the existing economic order, shaped the attitudes of the Third World in this regard. Firstly, "the vast majority of them share in common a history of colonial domination by the developed European countries with its attendant humiliation, indignity and inequalities". Secondly, "irrespective of the levels of income and endowment of natural resources they are technologically inferior to the developed world in terms of command over the access to science and technology". Thirdly, "Third World nations lack participation in the decision making process of the affairs of the world". The discourse on the need for a change of the existing international economic order found a forum with the establishment of the UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) in 1964. The demand for a change in the existing international economic system was found in the report prepared by Raul Prebisch for the Geneva Conference on World Trade and Development in 1964. A more systematic articulation of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) could be found in the period 1964-1974. In 1974, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order*. It is true that NIEO covered only trade and development-related issues but it was considered the first move towards a new world order by changing the existing global power relations. Anon J.

Nsekela of Tanzania observed in 1977 that "the New International Economic Order is about distribution: the distribution of world production, the distribution of the surpluses derived in any country and the distribution of economic power"<sup>5</sup>. He further stated "at present, there are almost no significant formal or informal decision-taking forums in which the Third World has an effective enough voice for its interests to be taken into serious account when decisions are formulated and agreed". The vigour of the cry for a new international economic order could not be sustained for long. Apart from periodic declarations in the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) forums as to the NIEO, it could not move forward as expected by its ideological founders due to internal contradictions among themselves, the absence of a clear programme of action and certain conceptual ambiguities. Ultimately, it has become nothing more than a political slogan.

### **The Post-Cold War Scenarios and New World Order**

The concept of a new world order received fresh impetus in the changed historical conditions that evolved after the Cold War. Even before the formal end of the Cold War, President Michael Gorbachev articulated his vision for a new world order. In this regard Michael Gorbachev presented a main policy statement at the UN General Assembly in December 1988. In his Statement he identified the wide-ranging measures necessary for creating a new world order. In order to achieve a new level of cooperation in the light of the changed international context, he emphasised de-ideologising of relations among States. Further, he wanted to see a more prominent role for the United Nations which is now free from Cold War constraints. In promoting a new world order, Gorbachev expressed the willingness of the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces from Eastern Europe and Asia and enter into several important international organizations such as the CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and the International Court of Justice. In

addition, he emphasised global cooperation in dealing with other pressing issues such as environmental protection and the debt issue of developing countries.

The far-reaching changes brought about in the international political environment by the ending of the Cold War kindled the hope, more than, ever for a new international order. The end of the Cold War was viewed as a decisive historical event and it was cited as the 'end of history' and, consequently, the dawn of a new historical era. It was in this context that new hope and vision was raised and new scripts were written about a new world order. Barely three weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 which symbolised the end of the East-West divide, Presidents Michael Gorbachev and George Bush met on December 2-3, 1989 on board the Soviet cruise ship *SS Maxim Gorkiy* anchored off the coast of Marsaxlokk Harbour in Malta to discuss the post-Cold War order. At the Malta Conference both leaders widely used the term 'new world order' to denote the post-Cold War world that was unfolding at a rapid phase. The political reforms in Eastern Europe and the unification of Germany were considered the key elements of the new world order in Europe. The cooperation between the superpowers was considered the foundation for peace and security of the new world. Among the other issues discussed relevant to the new world order included North-South cooperation and the debt issue. Following the same line of thinking, President George Bush further stated in his address before a Joint Session of the Congress on 11 September 1990 that "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"<sup>9</sup>. However, the early euphoria generated by the end of the Cold War as to the emergence of a new world was proved to be short-lived. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The UN Security Council passed a number of resolutions condemning the Iraq

invasion of Kuwait and Resolution 678 passed on 29 November authorised all necessary means to uphold and implement Resolution 660. The United States launched 'Operation Desert Storm' in January 1991. The process of disintegration of the Soviet Union was complete by the 24 of December 1992 leaving the United States the only superpower in the world.

The manner in which the Cold War ended set the historico-political framework for the discourse to evolve further. The Cold War ended not as a result of a violent military conflagration, but as an outcome of voluntary dissolution of the 'Communist' contestant of the Cold War. Therefore, it was interpreted as an ideological victory for Liberal Democracy. On the face of it, it was true that liberal capitalism had won the war of systems. As Ken Booth pointed out, capitalism had not succeeded at a more fundamental level because it could not satisfy all basic needs, but it could meet the wants of the powerful<sup>7</sup>. The only alternative to 'totalitarian Communism' is not liberal democracy. According to Dipankar Banerjee "the end of the first does not necessarily produce the second. Instead, as it is becoming increasingly evident, there are many forms of authoritarianism, nationalism, corporatism and market Communism that are emerging. There are also many religious alternatives that are taking place of ideologies and which do not follow a secular path"<sup>8</sup>. The language and idioms that the political leadership of the United States used to describe the new world order underscore US intentions for hegemony in global politics. However, it is clear that the realities in post-Cold War global politics do not allow the US to enact its own script for a new world order. The United States would remain as the most powerful country in the world, as far as its military capability is concerned, for sometime to come with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. But, emerging multi-polarity increasingly curtails its ability to execute unilateral action. Joseph Nye Jr. writes the power structure in the world resembles a three dimensional chess game. "The top

military board is unipolar with the United States far outstripping all other States, but the middle economic board is multi-polar, with the United States, Europe and Japan accounting for two-thirds of world product and the bottom board of transnational relations that cross borders outside the control of government"<sup>9</sup>.

It is noted that the nature and structure of war has changed in the post-Cold War global context. As the Human Security Report 2006 pointed out the number of armed conflicts around the world has declined by more than 40% since the early 1990s<sup>10</sup>. The intensity and violence of declared inter-State wars are replaced by intra-State wars, especially identity-based conflicts. At the same time, new doctrines of intervention have also emerged. The London based *Economist* in September 1992 identified two sets of conditions that are used to justify such interventions<sup>11</sup>. These two conditions include, first, 'Wars of Interests' and, second, 'Wars of Conscience'. In wars of interests, the focus was on the control of vital resources that the developed world needed urgently. The interventions of coalition forces of the developed nations in the post-Cold War period showed that they have no hesitation to take swift action to 'protect' their interests in strategic areas and resources. The second category includes direct military intervention that is necessitated in the face of degrading living conditions and humanitarian crises due to man-made or natural calamities. However, as far as the second category of intervention is concerned there was no consensus yet because of their complexities and competing strategic interests.

### **New World Order in the Context of Globalization**

The concept of new world order has been viewed both as a prescription as well as a description. To Woodrow Wilson, Lenin, Gorbachev and Bush it was more or less a prescription to guide an emerging/ desired political/world order. The concept of a new world order acquired more validity recently as a description of the globalised world unfolding as a result of the multi-

dimensional process of globalization. The intense global flow of goods, services, finance, people, images and ideas has compressed the world by linking dispersed localities and people. The unprecedented level of contraction of time and space in human activities due to technological advances has pushed the entire world into a structurally different phase of interaction and web of relations creating a high degree of interdependence and multiple properties of collective decision-making systems in global politics. As a result, one nation rests on the decisions of many others. As Christopher Coker writes, Globalization "refers in the first place to the many different complex patterns of interconnectedness and interdependence that have arisen in the late twentieth century. It has complications for all spheres of social existence: the economic, the political, and even the military. In all three it ties local life to global structures, processes and events"<sup>12</sup> The role of Internet, E-mail, Facebook and Twitter in day-to-day life reflects the way in which the world today has transformed. The role played by Facebook and Twitter in the political mobilization of masses for uprisings against the dictatorial regimes in Morocco and Egypt highlighted the political overtones of information revolution. It is in this context that the concept of a new world received renewed credentials as a description of the emerging world.

### **From the Old World Order to a New World Order**

In order to understand the new world order as a description of the emerging world with a historical perspective, it is necessary to differentiate it from the 'old world order'. The modern world system emerged with the development of the capitalist economic order in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe along with the modern 'nation State' system. Western colonialism emerged as an economic project of commercial and later, industrial and financial capitalism, as well as a political project of the new political entities identified as the national States. Rosa Luxemburg argued that modern capitalism cannot survive

without constantly revitalising its production forces and expanding its production relations. Capitalism by nature is an expansive system driven by the dynamic of accumulation. Therefore, capitalism invariably expands seeking markets as well as raw materials and investment opportunities outside the capitalist economic sphere. According to Luxemburg, "capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organizations, nor, on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organizations makes accumulation of capital possible"<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, imperialism is an inherent feature of capitalism and it is also the catalyst for the crisis of modern capitalism. Immanuel Wallerstein argued that modern capitalism emerged as a world system with long-distance trade on a global scale. It was an unequal exchange in which surplus from the periphery of the capitalist world system continuously transferred to the centre. It leads to a process of capital accumulation on a global scale, and necessarily involves the appropriation and transformation of peripheral surplus. This division of labour leads to the existence of two interdependent regions: core and periphery in a single world system.<sup>14</sup> The emergence of a world system was not a smooth and non-violent process at all. Wallerstein further remarked that these unequal power relations between the core and periphery would be contested with the passage of time. These challenges and internal political and economic contradictions of the capitalist core creates systemic crisis of the 'world system'.

Finally It is important to emphasise that the 'modern' world order evolved as an interlinked historical package where modern capitalism, the nation State system, modern science and enlightenment culture comprised its integral elements. A number of historical processes ranging from de-colonisation, the emergence of growth centres in the 'periphery', political and economic crises in the industrialised 'core', the ethno-political mobilisations

and political assertion of sub-nationals to the process of globalization contributed to change the structure and dynamics of the 'modern' (old) world order and challenged its constituent components. It is in this context that the concept of a new world order acquired more validity as a description, not as a prescription, of the 'post-modern' world order/disorder in the context of globalisation.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-determination*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970. p.63.

<sup>2</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House. 1961. p.371.

<sup>3</sup> *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, edited and translated by Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido. (Brill, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> H.G. Wells, *The New World Order* (reprinted by Hesperides Press in 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Amon J. Nsekela, "The World Bank and the New International Economic Order," *development dialogue*, 1977:1, p.78

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Toward\\_a\\_New\\_World\\_Order](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Toward_a_New_World_Order)

<sup>7</sup> Ken Booth, *New Thinking About Strategy and International Security*, London: Harper Collings Academic, 1991, P.4.

<sup>8</sup> D. Banerjee, "A New World Order: Trends for the Future" in *Security in the New World Order - An Indo-French Dialogue*, Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee, ed., New Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, 1994, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "The American national interests and global goods" *International Affairs*, & 8:2, April 2002

<sup>10</sup> Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005- Part II: The Human Security Audit*, p63.

<sup>11</sup> *The Economist* (London), 5 September, 1992

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Coker, *Globalization and Insecurity in the Twenty-first Century: NATO and the Management of Risk, Adelphi Paper 345*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 18-19

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951, p.416.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press. 1974. ■