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New World Order and the geopolitical landscape

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at last week's opening of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit, called for, among other things, the creation of "a New World Order where power is shared by all nations".

He hit out at the West for what he called its "revival of the old European trait of wanting to dominate the world".

Early last month, soon after the tense UN Security Council meeting over chief arms inspector Hans Blix's report, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who was on tour of Europe to explain why the US was going to war, described France and Germany as being the "Old Europe".

Political leaders, political scientists, students of political science and intellectuals would fully understand what these two leaders are talking about.

Behind those words are concepts so powerful and radical that when they become realities, the geopolitical landscape of the world as we now know it will be changed.

And right at the centre of it all is US President George W. Bush.

Of late, many political commentators and newspaper columnists in the West have likened him to Julius Caesar, the Roman emperor who expanded his empire so far and wide that Western historians today are calling him "the most powerful human being in the Western world".

An article in an American magazine early this year declared in no uncertain terms: "Bush aspires to be a Caesar, make no mistake about it."

But it also argued that though the scale of power and authority Bush has attained is "impressive", and, despite his "bellicosity and imperial pretensions", the comparisons with Julius Caesar "utterly fails".

"Bush is a Caesar-wannabe with nukes," it added.

Many political analysts said Dr Mahathir and Rumsfeld were referring to the same thing - the changing global geopolitical landscape and American hegemony in the New World Order that is taking shape today.

These days, "hegemony" is said to be a dirty word in the US, especially among American policymakers. "Hegemony" is a formal word that means "the domination of control by one country or a group of others".

So too is "geopolitics", which has of late has become a catchword in the corridors of Washington. "Geopolitics" refers to the activities of politics on a worldwide scale, especially as they affect relations between countries. The pace of geopolitics and hegemony ala Americana picked up when the Cold War ended.

During the era of the Cold War, the world was divided into two spheres - East and West, with the East representing communism and the West democracy.

It was a world balanced at the centre, with the US and Russia as the two superpowers. All other nation states were spread around these two political systems. That was how it was until the Cold War ended, and a New World Order began to emerge.

And it is in this "New World Order" that the US is today exerting its authority.

Writing in the New York Times last month, Thomas Friedman, the columnist who won the prestigious Pulitzer award three times, argued that the "New World Order" is still bipolar, not between East and West but between the "World of Order" and the "World of Disorder".

He wrote: "The "World of Order" is built on four pillars - US, European

Union-Russia, China and India, with all the smaller powers around them."

(Incidentally, in combining the European Union and Russia, the US has coined the word "Eurasia", and in some cases has also used the word "Eurasians" to refer to the people of the European Union and Russia. This is confusing to many Asians, as "Eurasians", the result of European and Asian parentage, do exist.

(In the New World Order that the US is building, Asian nation states do not feature in the formula).

The "World of Disorder" comprises failed states (such as Liberia in Africa), rogue states (Iraq and North Korea), states too big to fail but too messy to work (Indonesia, Pakistan and Colombia), terrorists and mafias.

Friedman, who is the author of the well-known book on globalisation, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree", is of the view that "very small groups of people can amass huge amounts of power to disrupt the 'World of Order'", and from this "individuals can become super-empowered".

He described the Sept 11 terrorist attacks as: "The first full-scale battle between a superpower and a small band of super-empowered angry men from the 'World of Disorder'."

Today, the US is preparing for a full-scale war against Iraq. It has already amassed some 250,000 troops near Iraq.

Many are questioning the rationale for the determination of the US to start the war with such haste. More are not convinced of the reasons the US administration has forwarded. According to a commentator, "We are perhaps witnessing a new phase of Pax Americana.

"But this 'New World Order' is destined to last less than the 400 years that Caesar's empire lasted. And as was the case with Caesar, victory may come at a high price, though in this instance, it is a price we all will pay."

Another political analyst said the war against Iraq "is part of a US grand strategy to reposition the entire Cold War global geopolitical landscape to reflect the "New World Order" with a single superpower".

In building this "New World Order", the European Union is becoming the casualty as it is now split into two factions over the Iraq war.

Rumsfeld grouped the two into "Old" and "New" Europe.

But in essence, what Rumsfeld was referring to, and what he did not say, was that the split was part of the US objective of creating a new US political satellite system in Eastern Europe to replace the one that was built by the Russians but was disintegrated when Russia broke up.

In doing that, the US is also trying to globalise the North Treaty Atlantic Organisation so that instead of it being a defensive grouping against the Soviet bloc as in the old days, it would now become an offensive war machine for US imperialism.

Many have also wondered why in the debate over war against Iraq, France and Germany (along with Russia) were so vehemently against the US, as seen in the recent verbal fight in the Security Council.

Analysts say these countries came together not because they are allies, but to counter the growing threat of the US in turning the UN Security Council into a puppet of US foreign policy, similar to what the US did with the International Monetary Fund.

Despite the argument that the war against Iraq would not be about control over oil, many remain sceptical.

Especially so since Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, and that that oil features prominently in the US plan for a "New World Order", given that US oil supplies are now met by imports.

Another factor supporting the fight for oil was that when US Vice-President Dick Cheney took office under Bush, he commissioned Baker

Institute for Public Policy (a think-tank set up by former US Secretary of State James Baker) to do a report on the security of energy.

It is this report, known as "Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century", that gave Bush and his team one of the reasons for wanting to go to war.

Cheney also had the benefit of advice from a number of prominent senior oil executives, including Kenneth Lay, the disgraced former chief executive of the collapsed Enron.

Among other things, the report said: "The US remains a prisoner of its energy dilemma. Iraq remains a destabilising influence to the flow of oil to international markets. Saddam Hussein has also demonstrated a willingness to use oil as a weapon.

"Therefore, the US should conduct an immediate policy review towards Iraq including military, energy, economic and political/diplomatic assessment."

But oil could not have been a sufficiently strong reason to push for war.

It was another report, entitled "Re-building America's Defences" undertaken by Project for the New American Century, that provided the push.

This project was undertaken in 2000, soon after the Asian Century of growth and prosperity was devastated by the 1997-98 financial crisis.

The report was very radical in outlook, as it called for "American military dominance of Earth and space, pre-emptive strikes on any potential rival, unquestioning support for Israel, and ignoring international opinion in the pursuit of US strategic objectives."

Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and the rest of the war Cabinet are of the same opinion as the recommendations of the report, which, in a way, makes the team a very dangerous grouping.

Indeed, Wolfowitz is one of the two men named in an article in The Observer in London last month as the "brains" behind the push for war against Iraq.

The other is Karl Rove whom Bush was reported to have called a "boy genius".

"Rove is one of the new political breed - a master craftsman. His Christian faith is a weapon of devastating cogency, but he never discusses it," said the paper.

"No one knows if his politics are religious or politics are his religion."

Wolfowitz, considered a "firebrand hawk", is a brilliant mathematician and a diplomat.

The newspaper said that in 1992, just before Bill Clinton defeated Bush's father, Wolfowitz wrote a blueprint to "set the nation's direction for the next century", which now forms the basis of Bush foreign policy.

The report, entitled "Defence Planning Guidance", was equally radical in its recommendations.

It said the US must be sure of "detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role".

It contemplated "the use of nuclear, biological and chemical weaponry pre-emptively, even in conflicts that do not directly engage US interests".

Two years ago, Project for the New American Century stated in a report: "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides immediate justification for intervention, the need for a substantial American military presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein."

In this respect, as a commentor said, "An attack on Iraq serves an emblematic purpose; sending a message to the rest of the world saying:

Defy us at your peril."