



AN ANALYSIS OF CHANGING WORLD ORDERS

Dr. Muhammad Ali
Assistant Professor
International Relations Department
DHA Suffa University
Karachi - Pakistan
muhammadaliehsan1@hotmail.com

Abstract

It is important to understand the nature of international relations and to do that it is important to understand the nature of various world orders within which international relations were conducted. Orders are designed to bring sanity in international relations that are conducted in an anarchic international environment. Great powers take the responsibility of setting up orders and when they same great powers make mistakes and their power declines, they cede space for other rising powers to create a new order. All orders seek to establish basic rules of international conduct and the power that leads the order takes it as its responsibility not to allow these rules to be violated. However, when the very power that leads the order violates the established rules that it was supposed to defend then it loses its credibility and moral standing to lead the order. Rise of other powers and the balance of power holding the order together shifts thus creating the necessary circumstances for the deterioration of this order until it finally expires. This paper attempts to analyze the various world orders that have existed and how the current US led order may expire and be replaced by an order of multipolarity.

Key Words: World Order, Great Powers, Balance of Power, Bipolar World, Unipolar World, Multipolar World, Sovereignty, Peace and Security

Introduction

Thomas P.M Barnett's theory of the core and the gap highlighted in his book 'The Pentagon's New Map- War and Peace in 21st Century' divides the world into two distinct parts- the core and the gap. This outstanding piece of literary work published in 2005 articulated the conditions and circumstances that would trigger the change in the world order (Dalby, S. 2008). Basically, core is the developed world and the gap is the world developing. Core's good life is what the gap wishes for and there are public protests, demonstrations and even coups against the governments that are not able to govern well and bridge this gap. The continent of Africa is a typical example 95% of which was colonized by Britain and France, Britain colonized 22 African States whereas France



colonized 20 States.¹ But now there are coups taking place there and the latest has been in Gabon (History Ville 2022). Another coup in Niger has turned against its old colonial master and Niger is no more willing to provide uranium as the key product that France was extracting from Niger at a very low cost and using it to run its nuclear power plants (Al Jazeera 2023). Such has generally been the western world's exploitation against which the African countries are now raising their voice, protesting and even conducting coups. Barnett talks about four flows that keep the balancing act across the globe; people, energy, investment and security. I think that there is another important flow that Barnett missed out and that is the gap in his theory. The flow is of knowledge, intellect and reason which has actually necessitated the rise of the global south against the global north. Core's best strategy should have been to embrace the gap thus shrinking it while expanding the core. Many countries in the gap are now governed by the dictates of the IMF rather by their own government and Pakistan is a country which is a typical example of such an arrangement (Kugelman, M. 2024). This actually means that the core has created global institutions that even control the economics and politics of the countries in the gap. Even the latest figures of people in need of aid today as compared to the people in need of aid ten years earlier suggests that the void between the core and the gap is widening. 300 million people need humanitarian aid today as against 81 million people that needed humanitarian aid ten years earlier (UNOCHA. 2023). 600 million people in Africa don't have access to electricity which amounts to almost 43% of the continent's population (Anadolu Agency, Getachew Tadesse, A. 2019). This actually is an acute example of one of the flows i.e., the energy flow which instead of creating balance has created huge imbalance between the core and the gap. Knowledge, intellect and reason is the great flow which has created the awareness in the gap about the imperialist and western exploitation by the part of the world that Barnett refers to as the core. United States considered as the global hegemon is being increasingly viewed by the gap as the core's and not the gap's hegemon because of the loss of its moral standing and credibility in the gap. This fifth flow of the awakening in the gap is already bringing a change in the world order and acting as an important factor in creation of a multipolar world.

History of Orders and Type of Orders

Chinggisid Order

The term changing world order cannot be explained and understood unless we look at the history of orders that prevailed in various eras in the world. Scholars of international relations generally agree to the beginning of the field of study of international relations some 500 years ago (Hansen, V. 2022). This was the time when few European countries began to establish colonies in Africa, Asia and Americas. This process of colonization transformed the world as did the Treaty of Westphalia which for the first time laid the ground rules for the establishment of sovereign nation states. The European world order laid the foundation of global politics as before that politics didn't happen at the global stage. In her book, '*Before the West*', Ayse Zarakol, a professor of international relations at the University of Cambridge challenges this thesis of the beginning of the world order as the European order (Zarakol, A. 2022). She takes international relations beyond



Westphalian order and proposes that the world order began at the time of Genghis Khan and calls it “Chinggisid order” (Genghis Khan’s name in Mongolian is Chinggis Khan) which started in the thirteenth century and under which Genghis Khan and his successors, the Mongols created the world’s largest contiguous empire, which extended across the steppe from Hungary in the east to China in the west.

The Chinggisid order according to Zarakol existed for 500 years and had three different phases. The first was from around 1200 to 1400 and comprised both the unified Mongol empire ruled initially by Genghis Khan and, after the empire broke apart in 1260, its four successor states in modern-day China, Iran, Russia and Ukraine, and Central Asia (Hansen, V. 2022). The rulers of the three western successor states eventually converted to Islam, while Kublai Khan, the ruler of the modern-day China and Mongolia, supported Buddhists, and Confucians. The second Chinggisid world order comprised the Timurid empire of Timur the Lame (also known as Tamerlane), who lived from 1336 to 1405, and the Ming dynasty in China, which reigned from 1368 to 1644. Timur and the early Ming emperors all aspired to rule empires as large and as impressive as Genghis Khan’s.

The third world order is also ascribed to the Mughals, the Ottomans, and the Safavids. Early modern India was dominated by the Mughal Empire. Between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century and the Ottoman and Persian Empires dominated what is now known as the Middle East. These rulers succeeded conquering large spans of territory in modern-day India, Turkey, and Iran before weakening of these three dynasties around 1700. The Chinggisid rulers left a long-term impact on Japanese, Turkish and Russian societies. Since the 1920s, Russian scholars, such as Nikolai Trubetzkoy, George Vernadsky, and Lev Gumilyov, have debated how two centuries of Mongol rule affected modern Russia and how it has empowered Russia to invoke traditions that have nothing to do with the Treaty of Westphalia (Maximick, K. A. 2006)

Analysis of Chinggisid Order

The early world orders were formulated by primitive communities and nomadic societies in which the image of a nomad was seen as of a ‘simple people, fierce and free’, living an ‘exotic’ life of ‘barbaric lawlessness (Sneath, D. 2007). Understanding the influence of Mongol Empire of that time is central to any analysis of understanding how the Mongol Empire contributed to the socio-economic and political development of Europe and how it contributed to a subsequent modern capitalist world that has come into being (Anievas, A., & Nisancioglu, K. 2015). The primitive world of savages who the Europeans thought needed civilizing had a tripartite mechanism of running the nomadic social life (Matin, K. 2007). First, there was a necessity of locating the grazing land for the animals in the herd through a continuous and far reaching mobility. Second, this mobility, and the social structure it entailed, endowed nomadic life with militaristic traits (Amitai, R., & Biran, M. 2004). In fact, the mobility and the militaristic trait of nomadic society brought it in direct contact with the sedentary society of Europe when nomadic society felt that there was the necessity of raiding sedentary communities for grains, manufactures and luxury goods (Anievas,



A., & Nisancioglu, K. 2015). Third, in their interactions with sedentary societies, nomads also made use of their mobility to develop extensive trade relations with widely disparate sedentary communities which in turn facilitated the communication and transfer of technologies and information over long distances. The Chinggisid and the subsequent two world orders laid 'economic openness' as the ground rule in the conquered lands for it was a crucial factor to the reproduction of their empires. The strategy of economic openness helped these primitive Empires to treat the conquered lands as the logistical bases for the supply of food, strategic resources, luxury goods, tributes and taxes (Amitai, R., & Biran, M. 2004). The use of external whip by nomadic societies against the sedentary societies woke them up towards more ordered politics and better equipped military organizations. Consequently, sedentary societies realized that they required greater accumulation of surpluses and centralization of resources. No doubt, the three primitive orders helped the sedentary societies including those in Europe to replicate the political, social, economic and military features of the nomadic societies (Anievas, A., & Nisancioglu, K. 2015).

Concert of Europe

The most important and successful effort to build and sustain world order came from Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century (Shvangiradze, T. 2023). The order sustained itself from 1815 to the outbreak of World War 1. It was established at the Congress of Vienna by the victorious allies —Austria, Prussia, Russia, and the United Kingdom, the great powers of their day who defeated Napoleon and his armies. The motive for establishing this order was to ensure that that France's military never again threatened their states and that revolutionary movements never again threatened their monarchies. The order established the inter-state relationship on the basis of sovereignty, locked Europe's borders into place and also established the basic rules of international conduct. This order was centered in Europe but given the dominating position of Europeans in the world the order became an international order (Haass, R. 2018). The peace of concert lasted for a century but its limitation was exposed by the Crimean War fought from 1853 to 1856 over the fate of Christians living within the Ottoman Empire and which pitted France, the United Kingdom, and the Ottoman Empire against Russia.

Analysis of Concert of Europe

The major achievement of Concert of Europe was that Europe avoided major wars for over 100 years. It was not the balance of power that held the order together but the shared commitment of the European powers not to alter their borders without mutual consent. These powers also agreed on establishment of spheres of influence, serving as physical buffers between these great powers, was integral to their geopolitical calculations (Skidelsky, R. 2023). Crimean war was an exception as it was triggered by Russia that demanded improved treatment of Orthodox Christians in Palestine. Britain can also be blamed for the war because its unconditional support to Ottomans encouraged the Ottoman Empire's stubbornness to fight and declare war against Russia prompting France also to join in and support the war effort. Critics term the British and French policy of propping Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russia's eastern expansion as a big mistake. Russia invaded Turkey in June 1877, ostensibly to protect the Sultan's Christian subjects. After



overcoming an unexpectedly strong Turkish resistance, Russia forced the Ottomans into a punitive peace. This set the stage for the 1878 Congress of Berlin, hosted by Otto von Bismarck, which resulted in a series of compromises, with Britain receiving Cyprus in exchange for Russian gains. Although the final peace agreement was flawed, it effectively prevented a major European war for the next 36 years (Beyer, G. 2024). One of the big lessons of the 100 years order of Concert of Europe was that providing unconditional support by great powers to a power threatened by a strong adversary leaves little room for compromise.

Cold War Order

By the end of 19th Century and the start of 20th Century a modern Japan and powerful unified Germany were rising as great powers. At the same time tsarist Russia and Ottoman Empire were declining and France and Britain were maintaining their status as strong powers. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was the architect of the united Germany but his successors were unable to discipline the power of modern German state (GradesFixer. 2024). World War I ended the peace of Concert of Europe but it was the aftermath of World War II that brought us the next world order. There were actually two world orders that existed parallel to each other, Cold War order based on the principle of balance of power and the order was the order of liberal internationalism that operated alongside the Cold War order. World War II had clearly threatened the status of existing Empires as the forces of nationalism and revolution spread through the colonized world. The challenge for the greatest emerging power United States from the World War II was to create the basis of more authentic global peace and order and to do that it had to lay the foundation of the new order on the democratic principles and on principle of national self-determination. As the order was taking root it was 'Wilsonian in nature' as President Woodrow Wilson's ideas became an inspiration and a guide to national leaders, diplomats, activists, and intellectuals around the world (Mead, W. R. 2020). During World War II, many Americans came to regret their country's prewar isolationism, including its refusal to join the League of Nations, and Wilson began to appear less like a martinet hobbled by poor political skills and more like a prophet whose wisdom, had it been heeded, could have prevented the second great global conflagration in 20 years. The Cold War order was Wilsonian in nature because international relations in this order would be guided by principles put forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and conducted according to rules established by institutions such as the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, and the World Trade Organization. But the balance of power nature of the order would force United States to commit some compromises like supporting many dictators around the world as an essential need to fight Soviet Union (Carothers, T., & Feldman, B. 2023). The Wilsonian nature of the order was embedded in the concept of liberal internationalism and as the Berlin wall fell in 1989 it seemed as if the opportunity of a Wilsonian Order to function had finally arrived. Both the George W Bush and the Clinton administration's fought hard to create the order in the Wilsonian mode but both administrations were confronted with centrifugal forces that tore the idea of Wilsonian order apart (Gill, M. B. 2017).

Inevitable compromises, such as U.S. support for ruthless dictators and military rulers in many



parts of the world, were seen as regrettable necessities imposed by the need to fight the much greater evil of Soviet communism. When the Berlin Wall fell, in 1989, it seemed that the opportunity for a Wilsonian world order had finally come and the former Soviet empire could be reconstructed along Wilsonian lines (Krauthammer, C. 1990). When Germany was defeated in World War I and the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires collapsed, President Wilson had imagined that the true hour of a liberal global order under the League of Nations had arrived. In the early 90's the United States policy makers looked at the collapse of Soviet Union from a similar prism, considering that the time had come for a truly global and liberal world order.

The 90's decade which was the post-Soviet Union decade was the start of the unipolar moment in the world (Mearsheimer, J. J. 2019). As the sole super power in the world United States started pushing globally the agenda of its order of liberal internationalism. But the key policies on which the agenda of this order was based were deeply flawed. To spread liberal democracy across the world was not an easy task as all nation states had their own identity and ideology and it was difficult for them to subscribe straight away to liberal democracy. Nationalism emerged as key political ideology and the idea of liberal internationalism clashed with national identity and sovereignty which were the key components of the ideology of nationalism. The underlying assumption of the order of liberal internationalism was that such an order will be largely free of war and will generate prosperity for all of its member states (Glaser, C. L. 2019). It was widely believed in the West at the time that eventually almost every country in the world would become a liberal democracy—a belief that led Francis Fukuyama to conclude that this might be “the end of history (Fukuyama, F. 1989). Statistics showed that spreading democracy around the world which was the major component of order of liberal internationalism was meeting success. According to Freedom House, 34 percent of the countries in the world were democracies in 1986. That figure jumped to 41 percent by 1996 and then 47 percent by 2006 (Puddington, A., & Roylance, T. 2017). However, by 2005 it was clear that United States was failing in Iraq and instead of being able to create a liberal democracy it had pushed the country into a state of civil war. Attempts to bring about a regime change in Libya and Syria pushed both these countries also into a state of civil war. United States broader misadventures in Middle East ended up creating a new threat in the form of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The Oslo Peace Process stalled and United States helped Israel coerce the Palestinian resistance to prevent Palestinians from virtually having no hope of acquiring their own state and making Israel what its two former Prime Ministers call an apartheid state (McCarthy, R. 2010). EU expansion and the expansion of NATO eastwards provoked President Putin and Russia to invade Ukraine (Suny, R. 2022). Had it not been United States desire to promote democracy in Georgia or Ukraine or even in Russia itself the world may not have witnessed the Ukraine war. Not only the unipolar moment resulted in United States undertaking democratic initiatives that destabilize Europe but it also encouraged China to think differently about the world order that was now more inclined towards containing rather than engaging it. China's accesses in East China Sea, South China Sea, against Taiwan and even at China-India border are all reflection of how China felt more threatened and insecure during the unipolar moment of the world (Kashyap, N. 2023). But finally the rise of China, along with the



revival of Russian power, has brought not only the unipolar era but the Cold War order to a close and what we are witnessing now is the beginning of new era and a new world order – the order of multipolarity (Mearsheimer, J. J. 2019).

Analysis of Cold War Order

United States started implementing the order of liberal internationalism in a post-Soviet strategic environment. It based the implementation of the order on an assumption that the two other powers in the world have their problems, Russia was weak and China was rising so it could utilize the opportunity to carry out ambitious social engineering at the global scale. This assumption failed as nationalism stood up as a great force of resistance. United States tried to create a world in its own image and tried to control the lives of the people by exporting its own way of life. Political and military interference by United States was rejected by nation states that valued their self-determination and sovereignty and resisted foreign intervention by sticking together under the banner of nationalism and protectionism. American thesis that democracy was the best form of government didn't receive universal acceptance and although it may be one of the better political systems but its rejection by many countries proved that it may not be the ideal political system. In the unipolar moment different forms of interference by United States has created conditions that led to different political problems across the globe and the loss of United States moral credibility (Araya, D. 2023). United States experiment with the introduction of an order of liberal internationalism has not found global acceptance and has eventually ceded space for another order to replace it and take its place.

Towards Multipolar Order

To become truly global in nature an order must meet all its commitments in all the continents. The current order is no more unipolar as United States faces growing geopolitical constraints and counterbalancing pressures, despite a defense budget approaching \$1 trillion, policymakers and experts routinely argue that China's growing economic and military footprint means that the United States can no longer simultaneously meet its commitments in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East (Shiffrinson, J., Keohane, & Wohlforth, W. C. 2023). United States is also engaging other countries like India, Japan, Australia and others to balance against China. Globally, United States enjoys significant success as a hegemon because the EU and the European members of NATO are on its side. Currently the US-China ties and the war in Ukraine have stressed the international system but United States still dominates it because of the support it draws from the EU member states and other partners and allies. The international system is also China dependent because China contributes a lot to the international system, China accounted for about 30 percent of global manufacturing output in 2021. This means that despite concerns against China all the powers in the international system, medium as well as ordinary are bound to maintain a working relationship with China as the structure of the international system is based on the capabilities and power of great powers in the system and all the ordinary and medium powers in the system would like to serve their national interests by benefiting from the capabilities of all the great powers in the system including China. One can use the analogy of game of cards to explain the behavior of these medium



and ordinary powers in the system. Their position in the structure of the system is what cards these powers have been dealt with but how they play their cards drives the process within the system and that process is influenced by the element of interdependence and is fast driving the world towards multipolarity. Multipolarity is not only about the symmetry of military and economic capabilities of the powers but it is also about the control of resources and influence and dominance of various domains. Singapore, for example is a tiny state but as a financial center, a port in global trade, and a critical hub for oil refining (even though it produces no oil), Singapore has a consequential international position (Doing Business International. 2023).

The dominant geopolitical reality of our time so far has been the absence of great power conflict. Many decades after the end of World War II, Germany once a fascist power and Japan the imperialist power have continued to remain civilized great powers with some of the largest economies in the world and least militarized foreign policy. The interdependence and rise of the rest are two factors that eat into the present-day United States ability to act as a global hegemon. China and Russia are the greatest geopolitical threats of 21st Century, US keeps telling the world but in a multipolar world many states want to make strategic choices regardless of their relationship with United States and this global phenomenon has gradually pushed the world in becoming a multipolar world (Ashford, E. 2023).

United States made many mistakes during its unipolar moment and one of them was to try and repair the disordered world by utilizing the order of liberal internationalism. United States could have learnt from the Gorbachev experience who launched the idea of perestroika or “restructuring,” but the bureaucrats kept thwarting his orders. To light a fire under the bureaucrats, he used a strategy of glasnost, or open discussion and democratization but once glasnost let people say what they were thinking, many people said, “we want out” and by December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist (Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. 1977). Gorbachev’s miscalculation was that he thought that communism could be repaired and in trying to do so he punched a hole in the system and when the pressure began the hole opened up and tore apart the system. In the unipolar moment United States also tried to democratize the world and carried out misadventures in places like Afghanistan and Middle East. It also punched a hole in the international system which after experiencing great turbulence is seeking to balance itself. One of the ways of doing it is to end the era of United States hegemony and unipolarity and ushering in an era of the rise of the rest and the arrival of multipolarity.

Analysis of Multipolarity

Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth challenge the idea that a multipolar world is being created. They consider that United States remains at the top of the global power hierarchy and the world “is neither bipolar nor multipolar, and it is not about to become either (Brooks, S., & Wohlforth, W. C. 2023). They base their argument on three claims; One- the military and economic capabilities show that United States and China are the only two plausible great powers today, two- United States technological advantages suggest that China is not a peer, and three- the international



system has failed to create meaningful balance against United States so therefore according to them this lack of balancing against United States means that unipolarity endures.

The focus of United States led order has been to make this world a less dangerous place to live and to achieve that it has tried its best to ensure that the order of liberal internationalism rests on the main institutions such as United Nations, NATO, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the G-20 (Mazarr, M. J. 2017). United States utilized and used these institutions to affect almost every aspect of the modern world. These institutions are accepted worldwide and they promote and drive the global ideas, norms, economy and technology with a view to create an interdependent and interconnected world. Why United States is still a global hegemon is because besides its military and economic prowess it has been able to create an international system that is institutional dependent and which to a varying degree United States can control. Add to this how United States dominates the world's alliance system and how it is home to some of the leading technological firms than it is not difficult to understand why United States is the leading global power today. It is because of such American global standing that great-power war has been completely absent in the nearly 80-year period since World War II, during which Washington has pursued a global grand strategy and an order of liberal internationalism (Shiffrinson, J., Keohane, , & Wohlforth, W. C. 2023). The current American foreign policy thinking proceeds from the strategic thought that transnational threats and interstate wars would have dominated the international system had the world been bipolar or multipolar and United States was not its leader.

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, there were 50,000 personal computers in the Soviet Union as against 30 million in the United States at that time but four years later, there were about 400,000 computers in Soviet Union (Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. 1977). Technological asymmetry was one of the big reasons for the disintegration of Soviet Union. Four asymmetries that created a world for United States advantage have gradually symmetrized thus offsetting United States advantage in the coming multipolar world. Firstly, today the technological gap is not fundamental in offsetting the balance of power between the three great powers United States, China and Russia. Secondly, being informational and knowledge-based society was a huge United States advantage but this knowledge and informational asymmetry is fast symmetrizing with the rise of the rest of the world. Thirdly, the asymmetry of attention in the unipolar moment of the world meant that the rest of the world looked up to only one great power to seek its favorable attention. With the resurgence of Russia and rise of China this asymmetry of attention has also symmetrized and the rest of the world has others great powers to look up to. The fourth asymmetry has been the asymmetry of beliefs. United States tried to universalize its idea of liberal internationalism but majority of Muslim nations and some other nations as well became more conscious about their identities and started imagining how to safeguard their own civilizations and cultures, customs and traditions reinforced by their religious beliefs. The asymmetry of United States and the rest of the world's beliefs clearly suggests that the world no more wants to symmetrize only under the United States umbrella of liberal internationalism.



Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye make a very interesting point when they write that global power politics is not defined by material resources held by various countries but by the characteristics of their relationship with each other (Johnson, J. 2017). Historically war had been seen as an opportunity for great power advancement; now it is being seen as a dangerous drag and more and more countries seek enhanced economic relationship to make the lives of their people better. Former US President Donald Trump calling NATO obsolete is an extension of Norman Angell's view who on the eve of World War I wrote his best-selling work '*The Great Illusion*' in which he prophesied that war was obsolete. United States continues to maintain a militarized foreign policy giving little room for diplomacy to succeed. This is quite apparent from its policy on Ukraine. reliance on economic sanctions, political boycotts, and the indictment of political leaders for war crimes impedes effective diplomacy (Skidelsky, R. 2023). This foreign policy approach is forcing the other powers to forge new alliances that is leading to creation of a multipolar world.

Conclusion

Professor John J. Mearsheimer believes that orders tend to expire in a prolonged deterioration rather than a sudden collapse and when one considers how World War I broke out some 60 years after the Concert of Europe had for all intents and purposes broken down in Crimea there is little reason not to agree with him. I have tried to analyze various orders that ruled the world with emphasis on what constituted their creation and what factors led to their downfall. The last order of liberal internationalism has contributed to the emergence and return of nationalist and ideology fueled geopolitics. Wilsonian ideas were good in intent but their wrong implementation by United States in the unipolar moment created hostility against them in the states like China, Russia and Iran. These and many other states see the Wilsonian ideals as a great threat to their political system and domestic politics. The conflictual environment in Eastern Europe, South China Sea and Gaza in Middle East are a reminder to the world in how these Wilsonian ideals are being still contested on ground. Information revolution has awakened the gap and countries in the gap have become more conscious about their sovereignty and are not willing to compromise and surrender it. China and Russia have emerged as the two other great powers that are leading the dissent against the current United States dominant system that they feel is unfair and unjustly supports the west. Ironically, many countries in the gap agree with these two powers and join them in their call for executing reforms that would make the current order less imperial and more pluralistic. United States grip on the order of liberal internationalism is sliding and the emergence of a new order is on the horizon. Great powers will dominate their sphere of influence and regionalization more than globalization will be the dominant aspect of this order. Like Professor Mearsheimer said, we may witness a period of prolonged deterioration of this order and hence one can say that partial unipolar and partial multipolar will be the order of this world until it finally expires and gives room to the new order to take over.



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