# A *New* New World Order

*By Parag Khanna*

**The emerging geopolitical and economic consensus is that the 21st century will no longer be dominated by nations such as America, Brazil and China, but, instead, by so-called global cities such as Dubai**

When I was a young boy growing up in the UAE, we used to take long family drives in our long blue Buick sedan from Abu Dhabi all the way to Khorfakkan to lay on the beach by the sea. Sometimes there wasn't another car for miles. Along the way, we would stop so I could climb up the sand dunes and tumble down under the glaring sun.

Today the same drive would reveal that, rather than cities growing in isolation, they are beginning to merge, both metaphorically and physically. Abu Dhabi and Dubai are reaching outward towards each other, with Jebel Ali rapidly expanding in between. The emirates' sandy coastline is quickly being transformed into one long urban seafront necklace, a pulsing reminder of the growing clout of the country and region as a whole. Instead of a rivalry between the capital Abu Dhabi and the commercial entrepôt of Dubai, we now talk of "Abu Dubai".

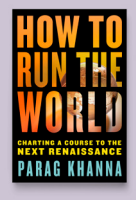
This emerging global landscape in which cities are the dynamic drivers of economic growth and innovation, and the locus of political power and authority, is what I call the "*New* New World Order". When US President George HW Bush addressed the United Nations two decades ago at the end of the Cold War, he spoke of a "New World Order". But the implicit assumptions of the time – that America would be the world's only superpower and that diplomacy would be channelled through multilateral institutions like the United Nations – have been turned on their head. Suddenly the world has multiple superpowers, including the European Union and China, and nations aren't the only players in diplomacy, but also cities, companies, NGOs, religious groups, universities, trade unions and others.

This "*New* New World Order" actually greatly resembles the Middle Ages of a millennium ago. The Middle Ages was not only the time of Arab and Islamic glory, but also an age when cities, not states, dominated the world – and the webs of commerce they spun manifested in the great Silk Roads traversed by Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo.

Fast-forward one thousand years and Dubai is the 21st-century Venice, a "free zone" that efficiently re-exports the world's goods, confidently sitting at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia. We now call the deepening trade routes between the Gulf and Far East the "New Maritime Silk Road". No matter who is up or down, Dubai wins. When traffic between New York and Dubai dried up due to the 2008 financial crisis, Emirates Airline rerouted its Airbus A380 planes to Toronto, whose banking system survived in better shape. Fortunately for a New Yorker like me, the A380 has resumed service to JFK.

But it is Dubai's Terminal 3 that may well be the world's most cosmopolitan building or the single most connected node in the physical centre of the world, constantly buzzing with the languages of all the world's civilisations. The Dubai I remember was and is ever more a melting pot of peoples from all over the world. From Emiratis to Western and Eastern expatriates, people have voted with their feet, and the time horizons for which they plan to stay in Dubai is getting longer and longer. For this reason, Dubai's multinational composition today makes it perhaps a leading experiment in moving beyond notions of citizenship to "stakeholdership": responding to the ambitions of all manner of residents who see their future in the bustling emirate. V

*Read more about Dubai's status as a global city in our Special Report on page 20*




## *About the writer*

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