



GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

A “Philadelphia Moment”?

a One Earth Future Discussion Paper by

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An obvious puzzle for friends and foes of international cooperation is how to explain why order, stability, and predictability exist despite the lack of a central authority to address the planet's problems. In short, how is the world governed in the absence of a world government?

On any given day in virtually every corner of the world, exchanges take place smoothly, with neither notice nor comment. Mail is delivered from 200 countries. Travelers arrive at airports, harbors, and train stations and by road—many of them crossing borders with barely a notice. Goods and services move by land, air, sea, and cyberspace. A range of transboundary activities occurs with the expectation of safety and security. In fact, disruptions and failures are often less frequent and spectacular in the international arena than within such countries as Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Syria and others that supposedly have functioning governments.

That largely unseen economic, political, technological, and other structures enable the provision of these global public goods is uncontroversial. Moreover, there are even more remarkable non-events that go unremarked, including the fact that no children are dying from smallpox, and that no nuclear weapon has been detonated in war since the two horrific explosions in Japan in 1945.

The proverbial Martian, landing in most parts of the planet, would observe many smooth international transactions and thus would undoubtedly have no trouble in answering affirmatively the question, “Can the world be governed?” Asked by observers for centuries,¹ a range of replies has been forthcoming. However, they often have been interpreted as unacceptable (e.g., empire or religious domination), hopelessly premature and idealistic (e.g., proposals for supranational control), or ambiguous and tentative (e.g., the failed or moribund collective-security experiments, the League of Nations and the United Nations).

Less equivocation usually accompanies the response to “Can it be better governed?” Many people are aware that we simply have to do better in confronting the range of problems that threaten human survival with dignity. Our predecessors on planet Earth waffled on this question; we cannot.

How can this be accomplished without a government for the world?

My answer, and that of a growing number of observers, is “global governance.”² How do we define it? A good start is the sum of the informal and formal ideas, values, rules, norms, procedures, practices, policies, and institutions that help all actors—be they states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational corporations (TNCs), and individuals—identify, understand, and address transboundary problems.

The fundamental challenge of our times, what the French would call *le problème*, consists of the disconnect between the nature of global problems—that same Martian would encounter climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, financial volatility,

pandemics, and the list goes on—and the inadequate political structures for international problem-solving and decision-making. Seemingly everything is globalized—that is, everything *except* politics. Commerce, culture, ideas, and technologies move freely while simultaneously our politics remain largely imprisoned within national borders, and decision-making about transboundary problems has, with few exceptions, not progressed beyond sovereign states in most fields of endeavor. That is, the world is still being governed by the same guiding principles as developed in the mid-seventeenth century after the Peace of Westphalia.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan often points to many contemporary global challenges as “problems without passports.”³ Our main task, in turn, is to find solutions without passports—or solutions that do not require visas at the very least—so that the most crucial actors can overcome the barriers to effective collective action.

At present then, we have too many fitful, tactical, short-term, local responses to a growing number of actual or looming threats that require the opposite: sustained, strategic, longer-run, global perspectives and action. Global governance can help us to better understand the reasons for this fundamental disconnect as well as possible ways to attenuate the worst aspects. My appreciation of global governance, as will become obvious, is not unbounded enthusiasm but is akin to Dag Hammarskjöld’s reported characterization of the United Nations, which was “not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” That said, emerging from the ashes of World War II’s death and destruction, Hammarskjöld’s appreciation of the world organization was not false modesty but ambition. Enthusiasm and optimism for global governance in 2013 also is ambitious.

Let me proceed, as the subtitle of my forthcoming book’s sub-title does, by answering three questions: Why has the concept of global governance emerged? What is it? And finally after explaining the framework of gaps, where is global governance going?



Why Did Global Governance Emerge?

Global governance sprouted and took root among academics and policy wonks in the 1990s for three reasons, two of which are well known, and one considerably less so: interdependence and rapid technological advances; the sheer expansion in numbers and importance of non-state actors, both civil society and for-profit corporations; and embarrassment with the supposedly simplistic and idealistic notion of supranationality. The first two are now commonplace observations, but the third is not. For me, it constitutes a confession, and explains why I am passionate about determining a more persuasive response to, “Can the world be governed?” *Caveat lector*. The slope may be slippery toward becoming a proponent for a central authority for the planet.

Interdependence and Globalization

In the nineteenth century, the hazards or collateral damage of industrialization (for example, communicable diseases, child labor, and alcohol abuse) led to the establishment of humanitarian organizations and movements, on the one hand.⁴ And technological advances (for example, in transportation and manufacturing) led to the establishment of international public unions to address such problems as river navigation and infectious disease, on the other hand.⁵ While they might well be seen as responses to “interdependence,” it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that this term came into widespread use, which reflected a growing realization that a host of problems went beyond the problem-solving capacities of any single state, no matter how powerful. In an interdependent world what happens in one corner or at any level (local, national, or regional) can have repercussions in all other corners and at all levels.

Consciousness about the limits to the carrying capacity of the human environment, and especially the conclusions from the 1972 Stockholm Conference, are usually seen as a landmark.⁶ Although other examples abound, ecological threats are especially apt illustrations of why we are all in the same listing boat. Kishore Mahbubani builds on that metaphor, comparing the Westphalian world in which states resembled separate boats in a flotilla to today's world in which there are 193 (the current number of UN member states) separate cabins on the same boat. He then explains, "this boat has a problem. It has 193 captains and crews, each claiming exclusive responsibility for one cabin. However, it has no captain or crew to take care of the boat as a whole."⁷

It is impossible for any one state—in spite of laudable legislation in California and Colorado or investments in wind farms in Brazil and Belgium—to halt global warming or acid rain. Isolated actions, however praiseworthy, simply will not suffice. While solving global problems begins with local and national actions, it cannot stop there. "Think globally, act locally" is a slogan that captures only part of the story; it has to be complemented by "Think globally, act globally."

Widening and deepening interdependence led to softening some of sovereignty's formerly unchallenged characteristics, largely sacrosanct since the 1648 treaties of Westphalia. It has become uncontroversial to note that political, social, economic, environmental, and technological influences continually cross borders. Stephen Krasner correctly reminds us of the "organized hypocrisy" of sovereignty's routine violations over the centuries when states were supposedly supreme and a key characteristic was their ability to ward off outside influences.⁸

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However, something fundamentally new is afoot, namely the widespread and recognized inability of national authorities to exert control over not only the flow of pollution but of goods, information, labor, capital, communications, and technology. Today's globalizing world neither respects borders nor requires entry visas for many influences from both powerful and powerless countries. While some national borders are more porous than others, no country any longer is, or can even claim to be, an island unto itself.

The phenomenon of globalization is hotly debated—is it new or old, was it just as influential and widespread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Wherever one stands on the globalization divides,⁹ the intensity, speed, and volume of human interactions are new and reflect the nature of interdependence that definitely was recognized as such in the 1970s and nudged us toward using the concept of global governance.

The Proliferation of Non-state Actors

The second explanation for the growing pertinence of global governance is the sheer expansion

in numbers and importance of non-state actors, from both civil society (not-for-profit) and the market (for-profit), as well as transnational and transgovernmental networks of various types.¹⁰ That intergovernmental organizations like the UN or the European Union (EU) or World Trade Organization (WTO) no longer appear alone in the limelight on center stage was symbolized by the establishment of the Global Compact at the UN's Millennium Summit of 2000.¹¹ Members of the private sector—both the for-profit and the not-for-profit species—were recognized as necessary partners for the world organization as the last and most formidable bastion of sovereign equality for its members. There is an ever more crowded governance stage. “Multi-level governance,” “multiple-multilateralisms,” and “multiple stakeholders” capture reality and are not merely academic jargon.¹²

A knowledgeable reader may protest that international NGOs (INGOs) and TNCs have been with us for some time. The creation of anti-slavery groups in Britain and the United States at the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century jumps to mind, or even the founding of the Sovereign Constantinian Order in 312 and the Order of St. Basil the Great in 358. The British and the Dutch East India Company were chartered in the first years of the seventeenth century. And of course, the numbers of IGOs have grown steadily since the public unions of the nineteenth century.

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Again however, the growth in the numbers and scope of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations makes the current situation distinct. Over the twentieth century, more than 38,000 international organizations were founded—a rate of more than one per day. More than 33,000 were founded after 1950, and almost half of all organizations created between 1900 and 1999 were established in the last two decades of the twentieth century.¹³

The result, to borrow an image from James Rosenau, is a “crazy quilt” of authority that is constantly shifting, and the current patchwork of institutional elements varies by sector, region, and time period.¹⁴ Perhaps even better metaphors are available from such non-academic sources as Gertrude Stein—her characterization of Oakland: “there’s no there, there”—or Lewis Carroll’s Cheshire Cat, whose grinning head floats without body or substance.

Let me open a parenthesis here to which I return later. Contemporary global governance is highly uneven, often giving the impression of coverage but often with too little effect. Appearances thus cannot only be deceiving but also deadly; a well-populated institutional terrain can mask a lack of coherence, substance, and accomplishment. We may feel virtuous and persuade ourselves that we are making progress when, in fact, we are merely treading water or, worse, wasting time and energy rather than moving more swiftly and energetically toward safety; we may even be drowning what we are trying to rescue.

Idealism Takes a Back Seat

The third reason for the emergence of global governance, and part of my personal motivation for writing about it, is a sheepish confession: professors and pundits of international relations and organization are discomfited by supranationality, which supposedly is simplistic, idealistic, and even dangerous. In spite of ups and downs, Europe proceeds apace to move, in Ernst Haas's formulation, "beyond the nation-state."¹⁵ Yet apparently the planet is different. Although the European Union was once thought to be a model for what could happen, first in other regions and then globally, currently the idea of a world federal government, or even elements of one, represents not only old-fashioned thinking, it is commonly thought to be the preserve of lunatics.¹⁶

Specialists in international relations and organizations have strayed away from paradigmatic rethinking. We have lost our appetite for big and idealistic plans because so many previous ones have failed so dismally: The Concert of Europe flopped. Tsar Nicholas II's Hague conferences failed to end war. The Kellogg-Briand Pact was never a serious proposition. Immanuel Kant's and Woodrow Wilson's collective security visions were moribund in the League of Nations and still-born in the United Nations.

In short, the challenge of thinking about drastically different world orders has disappeared from the job descriptions of serious scholars. Analysts and advocates of global governance see world government as atavistic idealism that is beyond the pale. To investigate or support such a policy is seen as naïveté at best, and lunacy at worst. And certainly no young scholars would wish to cut short their careers by exploring such a thought in a dissertation.

What Is Governance? What is Global Governance?

"Governance" first appeared in *Webster's Second New International Dictionary* but the 1840 definition confuses more than it clarifies. It defines governance as "an act, manner, office, or power of governing; government; state of being governed; or method of government or regulation." Students of Latin will appreciate the origins of such a tautological definition by recalling that the root *gubernare* is the same for all the units studied by social scientists. "Governance" is closely associated with "governing" and "government"—that is, with political authority, institutions, and effective control. However, it is a more complicated discussion than that.

"Governance" is a combination of formal and informal ideas, values, rules, norms, procedures, practices, policies, and organizations that provide better order than if we relied purely upon formal regulations and structures. Community attitudes or clubs are important elements in explaining or solving problems. The connotations in both Latin and its Greek etymological predecessor, *kubernân* are helpful here: "piloting" and "steering."¹⁷ Hence, government is one crucial facet of governance in the authoritative allocation of values and social order. At whatever level, governance refers to the composite system through which an entity pilots or steers—or in

a more contemporary translation, manages—its common affairs. This may or may not involve authoritative governmental structures that can be observed and touched.

Global governance is best understood by peering through the five “lenses” of gaps in knowledge, norms, policies, institutions, and compliance. Such a framework allows us to conceptualize the essential tasks for the pursuit of more order, stability, predictability, and prosperity with a fairer distribution of benefits for the planet.

Hence, applying the term “governance” to the planet can be misleading—even wrong—in one very essential way. Governance at the global level is characterized by interdependent relations but the absence of any overarching political authority, as any card-carrying realist would be quick to point out. It comprises international organizations that have little power and exert little effective control. They may have quite “formal” (or routine and

highly elaborate) procedures, but they are not supranational (i.e., above national governments). Quite a distinction exists, then, between the national and international species of governance. At the national level, governance consists of the informal networks of coordination *plus* the authoritative and coercive capacity of government which, whatever its shortcomings, together usually and predictably exert effective authority and control in Swaziland or Switzerland, in Uganda or the United States. At the international level, however, governance is the entire story—governance *minus* government—which means too little capacity to ensure compliance with collective decisions although with more order, stability, and predictability than one might expect.

A brief definition of global governance is collective efforts to identify, understand, and address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacities of individual states to solve. As such, it may be helpful to think of global governance as the attempt within the international system to provide government-like services and public goods in the absence of a world government. To repeat a longer definition, global governance at present is the combination of informal and formal ideas, values, rules, norms, procedures, practices, policies, and organizations that often furnish a surprising and desirable degree of global order, stability, and predictability if not always—in fact, far too rarely—fairness.

Global governance encompasses an extremely wide variety of cooperative problem-solving arrangements that may be visible but informal (e.g., practices or guidelines governing private military companies or NGO participation in intergovernmental conferences) or result from temporary units (e.g., coalitions of the willing in Iraq). Such arrangements may also be more formal, taking the shape of hard rules (international law and treaties governing the laws of war or trade practices) as well as constituted organizations with administrative structures and well-established practices to manage collective affairs by a variety of actors at all levels including state authorities, IGOs, INGOs, private sector companies, and other civil society actors. Through a variety of such mechanisms and arrangements, we can observe that sometimes collective interests are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated.

We usually equate global governance with activities that are hard to dislike, for instance, cooperation and problem-solving; but that is not necessarily the case. For example, Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich collaborated with Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union in 1939 to invade Poland and belligerents in the Democratic Republic of the Congo sometimes cooperate to rape and plunder resources. It is essential to distinguish ends and means.

Five Global Governance Gaps

Having explored the “why” and the “what” and before examining “whither,” it is important to explore the framework of five gaps that Ramesh Thakur and I developed as a means to understand where global governance is headed. I use illustrations from the same three main substantive arenas that orient my teaching and research: international peace and security, human rights and humanitarian action, and sustainable human development.¹⁸

Global governance is best understood by peering through the five “lenses” of gaps in knowledge, norms, policies, institutions, and compliance. Such a framework allows us to conceptualize the essential tasks for the pursuit of more order, stability, predictability, and prosperity with a fairer distribution of benefits for the planet.



While helping to determine *what remains to be done*, we cannot overlook *what has been done*. Moreover, we are obliged to understand the nature of the comparative advantages, resources, and energy of various actors on the world stage. Not overlooking past progress, however fledgling, and modifying future goals and incentive structures should help to determine how optimistic we can be. Too many individuals are paralyzed by thinking about the daunting tasks ahead without realizing that some previous daunting peaks have already been scaled.

At the same time, a possible downside is that the framework of gaps can privilege the status quo and favor institutional tinkering over more radical change. Determining that the global governance glass is half-full or half-empty is a subjective judgment about which reasonable persons can disagree. Building on past successes should not, however, imply that merely modest additional efforts will suffice. The discussion should make perfectly clear the unacceptable disparities between actual and looming global problems, on the one hand, and feeble global solutions, on the other.

Compensating for drastic variations in weather, or containing new pandemics, or halting mass atrocities will require far better solutions than we have at present. Not to put too fine a point on it: Tinkering is inadequate. Inertia is not an answer.

Also to be kept in mind is that some gaps may be more elementary in a sequence than others—that is, usually it is necessary to have a modicum of shared knowledge and norms in order to formulate policies, establish institutions, and take steps toward ensuring compliance. Moreover, the framework of gaps remains dynamic because gap-filling is part of a never-ending process. While plugging gaps is an immediate and verifiable objective, success justifies only momentary applause but not self-satisfaction. Resting on laurels is unjustified because new gaps continually arise even for old problems when unexpected developments (technological, political, and economic) intrude. In this regard, the ultimate objective is securing compliance—the most elusive of the five governance gaps.

Knowledge

There often is little or no consensus about the nature, causes, gravity, and magnitude of a particular problem, neither about its metrics nor theory. And until these items are properly defined, contestation is bound to inhibit or even impede the formulation of normative, policy, and institutional remedies.

Filling the knowledge gap is an important first step along the path of addressing other gaps in global governance. If we can recognize a problem and agree on its approximate dimensions, we can begin taking steps to solve it. The generation of new facts and figures is essential, as is finding an arena where existing information can be collated and collected, alternative interpretations vetted, and competing interpretations debated. Theory is what links variables in a coherent framework, whereas facts refer to the accumulation of data and their persuasive presentation. Both are necessary but hardly sufficient, especially with other gaps looming on the horizon.

Filling knowledge gaps for contemporary global governance, however, confronts two central challenges. First, ideology can determine what information is made available and is acceptable; or it can even trump hard data. When there are well-defined ideological stances and lobbies mobilized, data may or may not be powerful enough to call into question those positions that have been formed and set in concrete long before research began and data gathered. Even when evidence is compelling, the ability of states—and TNCs, NGOs, and individuals—to frame an argument in their favor by the selective use of data can be a significant factor affecting the persuasiveness of knowledge. How useful are additional data and theoretical explanations in the face of dominant world views or entrenched ideologies, especially when backed by money and power?

Second, there are also issues like population in the 1970s or global warming in the 1990s that appear on the agenda because of previously unknown or undervalued threats, and they often

encounter insufficient or conflicting information. Presumably in such cases, new and better data can more easily have an impact. However, the clash between the best scientific minds on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the constellation of industrial and ideological forces in the United States, for instance, to lobby against the evidence on global warming at the outset of the twenty-first century remains an impressive counter-balance to Enlightenment optimism. The irony of Hurricane Sandy's disrupting the presidential election was not lost on those who recalled that neither Barack Obama nor Mitt Romney had uttered a word about climate change during three televised debates.

Norms

A norm can be defined quantitatively to mean behavior that is commonplace—what the proverbial woman in the street would identify as “normal” behavior or a statistician would graph on a “normal curve.” Alternatively, a norm can be defined as behavior that is expected because it conforms with values. An ethicist, for instance, would identify a moral code for a society or a code of proper behavior for an individual. The two meanings may converge in practice or complement each other but, in at least some cases, they diverge.

Indeed, values are a dominant explanation for human progress and they undoubtedly are an essential ingredient, for good and for ill, in explaining global problems and their possible solutions.¹⁹ As the philosopher William James indicated, normative ideas have a “cash-value” when they prove to be true and useful.²⁰

Norms matter because people care about their reputations and image—in brief, about what others think of them. For ordinary citizens as well as politicians, approval and disapproval (or public shaming) often affect social behavior. Louis Henkin persistently and persuasively argued that “Nations generally desire a reputation for principled behavior, for propriety and respectability.”²¹ Why do powerful and less powerful states care? Ian Johnstone answers the question and reminds us that “states care about collective judgment of their conduct because they have an interest in reciprocal compliance by, and future cooperation with, others as well as a more long-term interest in predictability and stability.”²²

States are not fond of being called on the globe's carpet and being singled out for egregiously flaunting international norms. We need think only about official government gymnastics to justify policies such as Israel's settlements in the Occupied Territories and North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear capacity, or even a lesser issue like Saudi Arabia's refusal to allow women to drive. Naming and shaming occur at all levels, of course, but for a world without central authority, they are the primary tools readily available to alter or attenuate objectionable behavior. The advance of civil rights in the United States or the end of apartheid in Southern Africa are testimony to the efficacy of such measures.

UN secretaries-general have often mounted the world's most visible bully pulpit—for example, U Thant during the Cuban Missile Crisis or Kofi Annan during the Iraq War. Stalin's snide dismissal of the naming-and-shaming capacity of the papacy—"How many divisions does the Pope have?"—dramatically underestimated the power of a hearty moral voice and of clarion calls for action. Similarly, many have underestimated the influence of the UN's "secular pope"²³ and of the publicity by international organizations of miscreants. Public approval or disapproval is important. The United States and the United Kingdom paid a price for going to war against Iraq in 2003, just as the former gained stature and trustworthiness by supporting anti-colonialism after 1945, whereas the latter lost both in initially working to maintain European empires. Similarly, Russia and China will pay a price for constantly using or threatening to use their veto in the Security Council to halt atrocities as Syria goes up in flames.

Social scientists for some time have been developing conceptual tools and mobilizing data to theorize better about international norms: how they emerge; how they diffuse globally; how they are internalized by states; and finally how they become embedded in international regimes. While critics have questioned the mechanistic and linear nature of the most cited model—Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's three-stage life cycle²⁴—the pattern of norm creation in the United Nations demonstrates their theory by providing an organizational platform for advocacy in the first stage as well as the forum of choice for norm cascade in the second, and finally for seeking affirmation, reaffirmation, and compliance in the third stage. Ultimately, of course, the strongest case for arguing that an international norm has become internalized involves enacting domestic legislation in a country and obliging citizens to respect it; but public international diplomacy contributes to the likelihood of such laws and actions.

In addition, normative advance is not static. Norms that make sense at one point in time also may fade as conditions change and competing ideas emerge. A good example is the softening of two traditional norms that were virtually unchallenged during the Cold War: the sanctity of borders and the illegitimacy of secession. For almost a half-century, however arbitrary and dysfunctional, existing borders were sacred, and it was unthinkable that an area of a state would secede, even with the consent of citizens. The Charter of the Organization of African Unity was clear: colonial borders, generally agreed to have been arbitrarily drawn, had to be respected lest chaos ensue. However, the Herculean efforts to keep Nigeria together in 1967 contrast starkly with the 2011 separation of the South Sudan from Sudan and earlier Eritrea from Ethiopia. And of course the Soviet Union became Russia + 14, the "velvet divorce" took place between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the more violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia eventually resulted in eight states.

The universal United Nations plays an exceptional role in seeking consensus about norms whose potential application is worldwide and whose aspirations are universal. From reducing acid rain to impeding money laundering, from halting pandemics to condemning terrorism, there are numerous instances of universal norms having emerged and subsequently being consolidated.

At the same time, the UN is a maddening place to do business because dissent by powerful states or resistance by large coalitions of less powerful ones means pursuing the lowest-common-normative-denominator.²⁵

The pressure and impact resulting from civil society’s being ahead of governmental and intergovernmental curves is a recurrent explanation for normative advances.

Civil society and individuals are vital to our story because their work is essential to identifying normative gaps and proposing alternatives. Examples of individuals and institutions jump to mind: Henri Dunant and the Red Cross movement in the field of international humanitarian law; Raphael Lemkin’s coining the term “genocide” and his role in the formulation and adoption of the UN Genocide Convention; Peter Benenson and Amnesty International’s pursuit of human rights; and efforts by Jody Williams and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

The pressure and impact resulting from civil society’s being ahead of governmental and intergovernmental curves is a recurrent explanation for normative advances. Nonetheless, governments and the intergovernmental organizations that they have created are obliged to act in order to close, even partially, normative gaps.

Policies

“Policy” is best thought of as an interlinked set of governing principles, goals, and agreed programs of action to implement those principles and achieve those goals. For example, the Kyoto Protocol or the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, respectively, are best seen as policies for combating the threats of global warming and nuclear weapons.

Policy may also be broken down sequentially into three phases: formulation, adoption, and implementation. And its object may be regulative (of such services as transport, telecommunications, and public utilities), distributive (of such public resources as housing, employment, and scholarships), or redistributive (to redress social inequality through welfare programs). Moreover, at the national level, policy can also be used to refer holistically to the entire package of actions and attitudes (e.g., China or US policy) as well as to specific policies towards foreign affairs (e.g., Chinese or US policy toward Palestine or climate change), or domestic affairs (e.g., Chinese or US policy toward dissent or intellectual property). It is also useful to keep in mind the distinction between adaptations in policy in order to cope with new and unexpected challenges and requirements within an existing broad framework, on the one hand, and innovations in policy that are required because challenges cannot be accommodated within existing frameworks but require totally fresh policy approaches, on the other hand.

Not all global governance policies are alike. Some are resolutions and declarations (what international lawyers call “soft law”) whereas others are conventions and treaties (“hard” or at least “less soft” law). International is different from national public policy because ambiguities and

reservations make the application and traction anything except uniform. For instance, the West uniformly favors individual civil and political rights but has a variety of views about economic and social rights (the United States, in particular, is not keen on them). The Islamic parts of the global South do not share uniformly regressive approaches to women's rights (e.g., Saudi Arabia is more conservative than Malaysia).

In short, with inputs from experts and networks, fledgling steps to formulate viable global governance policies take place that enhance predictability, stability, order, and (too rarely) fairness within the international system. Nonetheless, and to return to an earlier theme, while the source and scale of most of today's pressing challenges are worldwide, meaning that effective solutions must be global, the policy authority for tackling them remains vested and nested in states.

Institutions

Policy must find a home within an effective institutional structure if it is to avoid being ad hoc, episodic, and idiosyncratic. Those policies backed with adequate resources and people have "clout" whereas those without do not. There exists, of course, a distinction between "institution" and "organization" in the academic literature, but our more commonsensical use is the focus on formally structured arrangements that also contain rules and norms. So while the "institutional gap" can be said to include holes in the law (codified rules) and norms, the gap that concerns us is the weaknesses in the current formal structures for coordinating state decision-making and action.

Indeed, international organizations often are flimsy, having human and financial resources incommensurate with the size of the transborder problems that they are supposed to address. Even the most "powerful" institutions such as the Security Council, the World Bank, and the WTO often lack adequate resources, or authority, or both. Many organizations are only partially constructed or remain largely on the drawing boards with a small prototype to address gargantuan threats. Throwing money at a problem does not, of course, guarantee success at the international level any more than the national level; but totally inadequate finances and weak or nonexistent structures often explain too little progress, especially in the international arena.

Another major disconnect in global governance is that the capacity to mobilize the resources—let alone muster the authority—to tackle global problems also remains controlled by states, which provides one powerful structural explanation for feeble international organizations. While a host of proposals have arisen over the years to provide more meaningful and independent resources—for example, by allocating a small transfer tax from international flights or financial transactions—member states prefer to keep such IGOs as the UN and the EU on a short budgetary leash to constrain their autonomy.

Institutions have been a substantial focus of my analytical energy, and some of my current research probes the origins of United Nations during World War II, which reflected a commitment to a

serious war-fighting alliance to defeat fascism *and* to multilateral cooperation over the longer haul. That is, the UN was not conceived as a liberal toy to be tossed aside when the going got rough but a serious strategic commitment to the actual organizational structures and values underpinning them to foster peace and prosperity after the war.²⁶

What is often forgotten—or actually is not even known—is that current expectations about the feasible dimensions and activities of the institutionalized parts of the current system of global governance are feeble in comparison with some previous visions from respected commentators about possible contributions by IGOs. At Bretton Woods in 1944, for instance, John Maynard Keynes and the British delegation proposed a monetary fund equal to half of annual world imports while Harry Dexter White and the American side proposed a smaller fund of one-sixth the total. As Hans Singer sardonically noted: “Today’s Fund [International Monetary Fund (IMF)] is only 2 per cent of annual world imports. Perhaps the differences between Keynes’s originally proposed 50 percent and the actual 2 percent are a measure of the degree to which our vision of international economic management has shrunk.”²⁷ His generalization applies today even after the infusion of capital in the midst of the 2008-9 financial crisis and a change in procedures at the IMF agreed by the G20—that is, one-twenty-fifth of what was considered desirable by arguably the twentieth-century’s most able economist.

Although the IMF is regularly lambasted for its power resulting from making structural adjustment part of the conditionality of its loans, what adjectives should describe the disconnect between demonstrated and supposedly agreed needs, norms, and policies and the resources available to such institutions as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or the UN Environment Programme? If we had Keynes’s or even White’s expectations and applied them to human rights or the environment, would institutional gaps not appear even more cavernous than they are?

Reasonable analysts may disagree about how to characterize which international organizations fall between those that work well on certain issues versus those that are so weak as to constitute a virtual lacuna even if a well-appointed physical building and a well-paid staff exist. If international judicial proceedings are the way to go, how should we categorize the establishment of various experiments? The Security Council created ad hoc international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia in 1993 and Rwanda in 1994 in order to seek legal justice against those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Subsequently, in 2002 the council convened both a special court and a fact-finding commission in Sierra Leone, in 2003

“They are blamed for not doing what they are not given the means to do; faults that are often imaginary are ascribed to them, while their real faults go unnoticed; mythical explanations are invented to explain their ineffectiveness; and finally, there is very little recognition of the few significant results that they do achieve.” Maurice Bertrand

created a special court in East Timor, and established another hybrid court (part national and part international) in 2005 in Cambodia to try members of the former Khmer Rouge regime who were responsible for the “killing fields.” What about the International Criminal Court (ICC), based on the Rome Statute signed in 1998 that went into force in 2002? How substantial is the gap when three permanent members of the Security Council—the United States, Russia, and China—have not yet ratified the treaty? Does their absence (and hence their evident lack of political will) mean that the ICC is so weak as to be useless, or is a useful step in the right direction that might eventually sway the dissenting major powers (e.g., as happened in 2011 when the UN Security Council passed resolution 1970, which referred Libya to the court)?

To repeat, a *sine qua non* for solving virtually all global problems is global intergovernmental organizations that work and that are perceived as legitimate. The impression of vast bureaucracies chugging along without much impact in Brussels or New York is widespread. Yet Maurice Bertrand, who evaluated UN management practices and performance over two decades and had done the same in France earlier in his career, reminds us to keep in perspective the relative size and impact of all intergovernmental structures: “They are blamed for not doing what they are not given the means to do; faults that are often imaginary are ascribed to them, while their real faults go unnoticed; mythical explanations are invented to explain their ineffectiveness; and finally, there is very little recognition of the few significant results that they do achieve.”²⁸

Compliance

International miscreants are everywhere, and the fifth global governance gap concerns compliance because pariahs routinely flaunt international standards almost always with impunity. Defectors from agreed norms and commitments should be identified and incentives and disincentives (including the use of force to bring the noncompliant back into line) should be available to punish them. That, of course, is easier said than done.

What can be done to twist arms or break kneecaps when necessary? US President Andrew Jackson is widely reported to have said in response to the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold Cherokee property claims in *Worcester v. Georgia*, “Mr. Justice Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it.” Enforcement is the most visible subset of compliance; sometimes problematic even within countries, as Jackson reminds us, it should be understandable why it is largely missing from the international system without a central authority.

Indeed, this last gap often appears as a virtual void because precious few ways exist to enforce international decisions, certainly not routinely to compel compliance with them. Depending on a country’s relative power, this generalization may be more limited because influential trade and finance organizations—especially the WTO, IMF, and World Bank—make demands that weaker developing countries dare not refuse. And in humanitarian emergencies, the leverage of such major players as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office of the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees should not be overlooked. And we should not, as indicated earlier, overlook the power of ideas and norms—for good and for ill—to help shape compliant behavior. But these capabilities are distinct from having the wherewithal to force a party to do what it does not want to do.

The more typically cited examples are in the area of international peace and security. Even though the UN Charter calls for them, there are no standing UN military forces and never have been. The world organization has to beg and borrow (it cannot steal) troops; they are always on loan. There is no functioning Military Staff Committee (even though it was established by Charter Article 47). Perhaps even more tellingly in terms of crisis response, the UN has no rapid reaction capability. Despite these shortcomings, enforcement still occasionally occurs, as we saw in Libya where the North Atlantic Treaty Organization led the response after the Security Council's green light.

The compliance gap is evident even when knowledge appears sufficient and relevant norms, policies, and organizations are in place. For virtually every serious global challenge we can find hesitant but insufficient progress toward ensuring compliance with agreed objectives. Many observers would shrug their shoulders and explain this reality by the "black box" of insufficient political will. The argument here is different. There is sufficient will to take modest steps toward filling many of the gaps in global governance, and especially to filling knowledge, normative, and policy gaps. But states rarely approve independent and fulsome institutions; yet the planet will remain hard pressed to respond to current and future challenges without more robust intergovernmental organizations to foster greater compliance. Try as we might to rationalize not-good-enough global governance, the sum of institutions that are inadequately resourced and insufficiently empowered to enforce collective policies cannot replace the compliance functions of a global government.

Whither Global Governance?



What are the chances of filling the gaps, of accelerating the provision of global public goods in the next few decades? In particular, what are the possibilities for attenuating the political inertia that stands in the way of improving the way that the planet collectively pursues solutions to transboundary problems? In short, where is global governance going?

On the one hand, I have argued that: One, new challenges to international peace and security and human survival have arisen. Two, new non-state actors have appeared on the world stage, and older ones have occasionally been transformed. Three, new norms and policies have proliferated. And four, new regional and global intergovernmental initiatives and institutions have resulted. The use of the passive voice in the preceding sentences is not evasive but points to the reality

that a host of agents—whose exact influence is hard to gauge but includes states and non-states, public and private actors, institutions and individuals—have caused these changes, but that exact agency varies too much to generalize.

On the other hand, such momentous changes have not altered fundamentally the dominant reality of world politics. In a stark evaluation made two decades ago that still rings true today, Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury succinctly summarized, “international society has been modified, but not totally transformed.”²⁹

The notion of global governance does not exist in isolation from the world that it is attempting to understand and to improve. Certainly the fundamental units of the system—sovereign states—are here for the foreseeable future. And they are still organized essentially to pursue their perceived vital interests in a world without meaningful, overall central authority. State sovereignty remains the core of international relations. However, the meaning of that sovereignty is continually changing and the leverage and significance of a host of non-state actors is growing in observable ways. Indeed, over the last few decades, we have witnessed sovereignty’s erosion from challenges to its legitimacy (e.g., human rights in general and the responsibility to protect in particular), an erosion from factors beyond its control (e.g., economic liberalization to communications technologies), an erosion from the demonstrated inability to address crucial global challenges (e.g., climate change, financial chaos, and diseases), and an erosion of its monopoly position on center stage from institutional and ideational developments (from a variety of non-state actors to notions of global governance).

Thus, the value-added of peering through the lens of global governance is opening our eyes to the fledgling steps that have occasionally, and more often in some arenas, been taken to enhance international order, predictability, stability, and fairness. We see the slow but steady consolidation of what Hedley Bull and other members of the English School called “international society” perhaps more than he might have anticipated or we might otherwise expect.³⁰ Moreover, to the mix we have added the energy, resources, and problem-solving skills of a host of other actors not only from IGOs but from NGOs and the for-profit sector as well.

Driven largely by the forces of globalization, the contemporary system of global governance has been transformed in many ways, not by replacing states but rather by extending their boundaries to encompass new issues and new actors, a kind of post-modern and non-territorial overlay of global governance. The result has been the extensive transnationalization of issues, transactions, and actors that blurs boundaries and intermingles public and private, civic and market.

Yet intergovernmental organizations with teeth are too often shortchanged in analyses of global governance. Perhaps they have always been too few in number; and perhaps they have always arrived too late on the scene and with too little punch. But in the second decade of the twenty-first century, addressing our collective problems requires, at a minimum, building more robust

IGOs, especially of the UN system but at the regional level as well, with greater scope and resources.

The market simply will not graciously provide solutions to ensure human survival with dignity. Adam Smith's "invisible hand" operates even less well among states to solve transboundary problems than it does within states to solve national ones. The supply of global public goods already lags substantially behind today's demands, and tomorrow's requirements will be even more pressing. Sovereignty essentially implies that global public goods must be supplied voluntarily. We have encountered examples of successful voluntary global governance but we need to accelerate the pace, to move beyond doing too little too late. There are limits to volunteers beyond borders.

The state remains essential for national, regional, and global problem-solving but states and their creations, in the form of the current generation of intergovernmental organizations, cannot address many actual and looming transborder problems. No matter how strong the contributions of informal and formal networks, no matter how copious the resources from private organizations and corporations, no matter how much good will from governments, we cannot continue to ignore and rationalize the visible absence of a central global authority. While modest improvements are plausible and highly desirable in contemporary global governance, we are obliged to honestly ask ourselves a sobering question: Can we ever get adequate let alone good global governance without something that looks much more like effective world government?

There, I have again uttered the expression that usually qualifies one to be certified for an asylum. But the straightjacket does not need to be applied to someone who asks that question. Rather it should be removed from our pedestrian thinking.

Whatever the judgment about the level of liquid in the global governance glass, the reader should keep in mind that global governance is not a supplement but rather a second, or even third best surrogate for authority and enforcement in the contemporary world. However useful a device to explain complex multilateral and transboundary interactions and phenomena, it lacks prescriptive power. We are obliged to ask ourselves whether global governance without a global government actually can address the range of problems faced by humanity.

Before answering that query, it is worth reflecting upon two features that distinguish global governance from earlier thinking about collective responses to international problems. The first is the dramatic change in perspective by many international relations specialists, who formerly viewed the development of international organization and law not simply as a step in the right direction but as more effective than unilateral efforts and the law of the jungle. They also observed the march of history, documenting a growing web of international institutions as an unstoppable progression toward a central authority, or government, for the world.

Ironically and paradoxically when states could address or attenuate most problems for their own

populations, the idea of world government remained at least present on the acceptable fringe of mainstream thinking. Now when states visibly cannot address a growing number of threats, world government is unimaginable. Not only is it beyond the pale, even more robust IGOs are looked upon askance and frequently derided. This analytical reality simply has to change.

The second distinguishing feature is that earlier conceptual efforts emphasized the state and grudgingly admitted the presence and capacities of other actors. But starting in the 1980s, and earlier in some cases, both civil society and market-oriented groups became an increasingly integral part of solutions either promulgated or actually undertaken by such multilateral organizations as the European Union and the United Nations.

While I have sought to emphasize that the human species is not starting from scratch, the shift in perspective about actors on the world stage should entail more modesty and less celebration. In particular, we should not go overboard in our enthusiasm for non-state actors in global governance. We can point to numerous examples of helpful steps in issue-specific global governance, for instance, of the International Committee of the Red Cross for the laws of war and humanitarian principles, or the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (or FIFA, its familiar abbreviation) for the world's most popular sport, or the International Association for Assigned Names and Numbers (also better known by its acronym, ICANN) for the Internet.³¹ Moreover, Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's Ratings Group render judgments that are authoritative enough to cause substantial market responses. Private regulatory initiatives govern supply chains across the globe to set environmental, food safety, and social standards to such an extent that private not public standards are the prime determinants of access to most western markets.³² And even for a high-security issue like maritime piracy, hybrid private-public initiatives seems at least as likely to mitigate this particular crime as governments by themselves or shipping and insurance companies on their own.³³

Of course, burgeoning numbers of INGOs and TNCs have resources and energy but why are more robust IGOs viewed as an afterthought, if even a thought at all? The current generation of intergovernmental organizations is so obviously inadequate that we have to do more than throw up our hands and hope for the best from norm entrepreneurs, activists crossing borders, profit-seeking corporations, and trans-national social networks. To state the obvious, these actors can make important contributions but they cannot eliminate poverty, fix global warming, or halt mass atrocities.

The downside of global governance to date has been the growing enthusiasm for what amounts to a "Global Tea Party." While the private sector can complement the public sector, it simply cannot do everything better than the public sector. Mini- and multi-multilateralisms are positive developments, as we saw at Rio+20, but their limitations should be obvious as well. Side agreements among firms and countries do not an effective global climate governance regime make. Without

more robust IGOs and elements of supranational regulatory power, states and their citizens simply will not reap the benefits of trade and globalization, discover non-violent ways to settle disputes, or address environmental deterioration.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn outlined the process by which a dominant paradigm, or "way of seeing the world," is replaced by a new one. Possible deficiencies in a theory or existing paradigm often surface when puzzling anomalies (or things that make no sense) have to be addressed through auxiliary hypotheses that can explain an anomaly within an existing paradigm. If too many anomalies and too messy a web of auxiliary hypotheses result, a new paradigm is required because "the anomalous has become the expected."³⁴ Kuhn's classic example was the shift from Ptolemy's model of planets rotating around a fixed Earth to the one introduced by Copernicus. It occurred when the old model simply could not explain what was going on, let alone predict what was going to happen and provide prescriptive guidance.

We are not yet at a Copernican moment for state sovereignty because the anarchy of which Realist theorists and many government officials are so fond still predicts much if not all of international relations. If anarchy is equated with the absence of world government, the definition is still correct but has much less explanatory value than even a few decades ago. Like a young Copernicus, we therefore should stare at the sun and planets at which others have been gazing for centuries but reframe the relations among them. We should continue to point to the obvious (to me at least) fact that sovereign states too rarely provide global public goods.

I still believe that human beings can organize themselves to address and attenuate the global problems that we and our ancestors have created. I guess that makes me an inveterate optimist.

We should recall that that such prominent American Realists as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr already had concluded by 1960 that a "world state" was logically necessary in light of the nuclear threat.³⁵ It is usually forgotten that E. H. Carr as the father of twentieth-century Realism had warned readers in the inter-war years that tempering utopia with power, and vice-versa, was necessary to avoid stagnation and despair in our thinking.³⁶ In other words, the founders of Realism did not exclude a global government and understood that vision, however quixotic, is necessary to avoid getting mired in the extant world order and going nowhere. Oscar Wilde described this insight more poetically: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth looking at."³⁷

However, wishing does not constitute a viable strategy. We must incorporate in our thinking new notions of both power and incentives. The 2005 publication of a set of essays edited by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall marked a turning point for scholarship because of the in-depth parsing of how different types of power operate in contemporary global governance, including the ideational and agenda-setting power of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.³⁸ In the international as in the domestic arena, another crucial element of strategy concerns who

will pay for global public goods, which are under-provided when they are provided at all. Incentives are not tangential but central to global governance. Another essential analytical contribution was the 2007 publication of Scott Barrett's *Why Cooperate?* Its detailed treatment goes beyond the mere net gains from international cooperation and probes the different reactions to be expected from states as the costs and gains of such cooperation are differently distributed.³⁹

Without having a vision and then imagining how we can achieve it, we risk going nowhere and perhaps even moving backwards. It is ironic, to say the least, that even the most committed internationalists no longer dare to imagine what is required beyond tinkering.

Nonetheless, without a long-term vision, are we not obliged to accept the contours of the current and unacceptable international system, including the relatively feeble set of organizations that constitute the contemporary United Nations system? Political scientists resemble politicians and do not concern themselves with such thinking most of the time. Our focus is on today and maybe next month, and long-term thinking consists of the next election cycle. However, by not struggling to imagine a fundamentally fairer and more sustainable international system for the future, we make the

continuation of the current lackluster one inevitable. Without having a vision and then imagining how we can achieve it, we risk going nowhere and perhaps even moving backwards. It is ironic, to say the least, that even the most committed internationalists no longer dare to imagine what is required beyond tinkering.

Conclusion

Most countries, and especially the major powers, appear very distant indeed from accepting the need for elements of a global government and the necessary accompanying inroads on national autonomy. However, and as far-fetched as it may seem at the moment, global federalism may not seem unlikely a half-century or a century from now. In light of experience since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, it is illogical—unless the European Union is *sui generis*—to argue that supranational organizations are unthinkable.

My Oxford friend, Hugo Slim, refers to an apt cooking metaphor in reminding us why mixtures of the ideal with the real are required for thinking through future global orders: “Like oil and vinegar, ideals and reality never fully dissolve into one another and tend naturally to separate if left alone. To combine, they need to be regularly stirred up together if they are to make a good vinaigrette.”⁴⁰ That is a good piece of culinary-cum-political advice as well for tough-minded proponents with Realist (capital “R”) persuasions or merely realistic ones.

Our immediate task is to fuse idealism and realism in a global vision “vinaigrette”. Seeking a more ethical future without taking into account power and interests is foolish, but power and interests are blind without an ethical foundation and a vision of a more desirable world.

Should you be depressed or encouraged about the status of global governance? My colleague, the distinguished historian David Nasaw, reminded me in one of my more despondent moments that during the American Revolution the 13 original colonies were operating under the weak and contested Articles of Confederation and sought in 1787 a "more perfect union" in Philadelphia. The weak confederation of 193 UN member states requires a "Philadelphia moment."

NOTES

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² The author has learned much from his collaboration with two friends and colleagues on other books that inform this discussion and are good places to continue reading: Thomas G. Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); and Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, eds., *International Organization and Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2013 forthcoming). Interested readers are also referred to *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, the quarterly journal published since 1994.

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¹⁰ David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

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¹² Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders, eds., *Multi-level Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [doi:10.1093/0199259259.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259259.001.0001)

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