Global Governance, the United Nations and Democracy

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Summary

The author claims that there is a growing need for governance, but not for world government. Global governance is one of those terms which are increasingly familiar but for which it is hard to find a consensual definition. Nevertheless it is clear that it is not one thing but a hybrid, and that it is a process rather than an institution. This process is the attempt to identify issues, to form an agenda, to arrive at an outcome and to establish arrangements to implement it and gather feedback from that implementation.

After 500 years of the present global system we are moving towards a clearer, more conscious system of global governance to match the global economy. The present institutional frameworks for global governance are patently inadequate in these terms and their inadequacy is reflected in the growing alienation of individuals from democratic processes even in mature democracies, and from the institutions of the UN system. Global governance is multipolar in the sense that there are many different actors some of whom may be multi-national corporations, other non-governmental organisations or other international institutions as well as traditional state actors.

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The context

We live in an anarchical global society. Our society is anarchical because there is no central authority. Nevertheless, there is enough governance for it to constitute a society even if it is an extremely weak one whether at the inter-governmental level or in the context of global civil society. Moreover the situation is not uniform in that there is

much anarchy in political, cultural and social matters whereas a single world economy has grown out of the spread of capitalism, now almost to the furthest reaches of the globe. But even here there is still anarchy since that capitalism is governed largely by the market with its ebbs and flows, ups and downs and periodic crises. Nevertheless, there is a single global market and one which has some clear structural features such as a centre-periphery framework. Moreover, the growth of a single world economy has been a long process lasting for half a millennium.

It is important to realise that globalisation is not only an economic phenomenon; it also has implications for the viability of states. To be sure there are those who see the strength of the global economy, or at least the global market, as being such that states are like corks bobbing in the ocean formed by the global market. Others see the growth of regionalism as an attempt to create closed seas where the water is calmer and where governments and regional institutions can bring order to the ebbs and flows and the ups and downs. Indeed, it seems wise to view the phenomenon not as a matter of states versus markets, but of states and markets. Moreover, it is not only states that wish to bring order, so, too, do many of the other crucial actors in the process of globalisation. Indeed, at the human level there is always a propensity for order and stability even where the benefits of change are widely seized upon.

Over the last half century, and more particularly from about 1960, there has been a marked growth not only of globalisation but also of a wide range of global problems as opposed to world problems. Global problems are those from which no one can escape. We are therefore all necessarily involved. To give an example of this, consider the Second World War which touched all continents but the effects of which would not necessarily be known to or experienced, knowingly or unknowingly, by an indigenous person living deep in the Amazonian rainforest. However the same could not be said of someone living in the Amazonian rainforest in the case of a nuclear war, since whether this person realises it or not he or she would be influenced by nuclear fall out and by the prospect of nuclear winter. It was around 1960 that nuclear plenitude in the form of inter-continental ballistic missiles with multiple warheads became plentiful to the two principal nuclear Powers of the day, the United States and the Soviet Union, likewise, the other early nuclear Powers were about to or had achieved that status, namely the UK, France, and a little later China.

It was also in 1960 that the OEEC became the OECD which signified the recovery of Europe and Japan from the vicissitudes of the Second World War. The Treaty of Rome had just been signed and the expansion of the world economy was gathering pace again. Moreover, despite the significant enclaves of the Soviet bloc and China, it was increasingly a global world economy which has extended dramatically over the last decade to incorporate those enclaves. The effects of this were clear to everyone when, for example, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan experienced a major financial crisis, whereupon there was an immediate impact upon my University since we were obliged to draw significant funds from our reserves in order to enable students from that part of the world to complete their degree courses, because they were unable to pay their fees or their living expenses.

It is, however, not only a question of the global economy. The effects of environmental problems at the global level likewise are striking. We are all concerned about the

hole in the ozone layer or about the warming of the planet and the subsequent effects therefrom even though there may be considerable disagreement about the approach that should be taken to these problems. In short, it is clearly evident that there is a range of global problems which are different in kind from world problems. As these examples suggest, the fundamental difference is that there is no escape from their consequences and that in the last resort the only way that these problems can be broached is by hanging together otherwise we shall surely hang separately.

There is thus a growing need for governance, but not for world government. Since there is a global society, even if it is anarchical, this also implies that there are shared values on which rules, procedures and institutions may be based which will enable the members to give substance to those shared values and, in particular, to enable them better to live together not only in dealing with global problems, such as those mentioned above, but also in order to take advantage of the opportunities that developments in global structures and processes present.

What is global governance?

Global governance is one of those terms which are increasingly familiar but for which it is hard to find a consensual definition. Nevertheless it is clear that it is not one thing but a hybrid, and that it is a process rather than an institution. This process is the attempt to identify issues, to form an agenda, to arrive at an outcome and to establish arrangements to implement it and gather feedback from that implementation. Global governance is multipolar in the sense that there are many different actors some of whom may be multi-national corporations, other non-governmental organisations or other international institutions as well as traditional state actors. What is more these actors may operate at different levels, both formally and informally, and concern themselves with a wide range of questions be they political, economic, social or cultural as well, of course, as security issues. What global governance seems best fitted to broach are those global problems which necessarily concern everyone. In doing so this decentralised public process is related to global civil society in an inter-active manner. Thus, if it achieves its goal it is likely to produce norms, rules and decisions to manage global issues and the processes of globalisation from the local to the global in a form of multi-level governance.

If the notion of governance is hard to grasp we may nevertheless be able to exemplify it in the current state of integration in the European Union, which has a system of governance, but not yet a government. In the EU there is a four way process: this involves building upwards to the joint management of pooled sovereignty, rather than federalism in a traditional sense; building down to effective regions in that all of the major countries in the EU now have either a federal or devolved political, economic, cultural and social systems; building across in the furthering of transnational ties, such as in the field of education; and increasingly, looking beyond the EU, for example in programmes for the Mediterranean and regular meetings, which are increasingly substantive, with organisations and Powers from different regions of the world. In this process a wide ranges of actors are involved, most aspects of human life are touched upon. Informal and formal processes have blended together on the basis of shared values, but without a constitution, within the framework of a number of treaties, starting

with the Treaty of Rome in 1958, the most recent one of which is the Treaty of Nice. Even though the current Convention may lead to a more formal institutionalisation and move in some ways towards a more conventional form of federalism, nevertheless the four way building process is likely to be the major thrust of the construction of this hybrid, which still has a strong element of governance as well as more formal government.

Governance is perhaps a belated response to the problems brought about by globalisation. Moreover, it is not only necessary to deal with the problems of globalisation but also to find an equitable manner in which to distribute the benefits of globalisation. It is perhaps a feeble attempt to broach the problems and potential opportunities of the 21st century with tools other than those of the 19th century or earlier. It is striking that many of our current political ideas are very old in their conception, be it liberalism, socialism, communism, capitalism and the like, or the two major 20th century additions to the list, fascism and globalism. Our dilemma is that our world is changing faster than our ability to conjure up new 'isms'. Thus there is a gap between our toolbox and the problems with which we are confronted, not to speak of the advantages from which we may be able to take benefit. These notions of global governance are one attempt at answering these problems and of devising ways of taking advantages of these opportunities.

How have we dealt with global governance in the past?

Michael Mann in his excellent volumes on *The Bases of Social Power* suggests that throughout human history societies have been formed on the bases of four sources of social power – ideology, economic power, military power and political power. While these sources of power overlap and interact, they do not form a fully integrated whole. Each is a means to attain human goals and each is a form of social control. From time to time one or the other will dominate and dictate the form of society at large, in other words, the form of global governance. But they are not organic parts of a single social totality. Since 1500, first in modern Europe and now all over the world, economic power, that is capitalism, has been the dominant basis of social power. We have had a world economy, albeit anarchically constituted, but without a world government, a world religion or world security. It may well be that this economic basis of power is beginning to change to one which is more ideologically or identity based. But whether we stay with an economic basis of power or move to a more ideologically based source of social power, the framework is likely to be decentralised.

There is also a requirement for leadership and the long cycle theorists, such as George Modelski, have suggested that there have been five long cycles of political leadership, each lasting about a century, which have been linked in with shorter economic cycles such as the Kondratieff cycles. Over the last five hundred years, century long cycles have been led by Portugal, Holland, Britain (twice), and now the United States. The United States is in a peculiar position because, while it is the sole super Power since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there are countervailing Powers in almost all of the dimensions which a super Power is likely to exercise its influence and political leadership in the process of global governance. To be sure, the United States is a colossal traditional military Power and far ahead of any other actual or potential rival. On the other hand, the threat to the United States is one that it finds very difficult to comprehend, namely the threat from terrorism. While it can bombard a regime causing its collapse, as

in Afghanistan and perhaps in the future in Baghdad, it cannot deal effectively with terrorism since the nature of the threat is very different. Terrorism is effective because rich complex societies are open and vulnerable and if they begin to reduce their vulnerability by limiting their openness, they also thereby reduce their effectiveness and their prosperity is prejudiced. Moreover, the United States appears to be attacking the symptoms rather than the causes of terrorism.

These causes are many and complex but are influenced by a growing awareness of structural violence by peoples all over the world coupled with an obvious reluctance of those who benefit from this structural violence to promote change. For example, the demand for a New International Economic Order was summarily rejected by the firm refusal of President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher to take it seriously at the crucial conference in Cancun in the early 1980s. There is, in addition, a growing gap between the rich and the poor both at the global level as well as within some of the major centres such as the United States itself and the UK. There is also a denial of identity for 'the other' by those who rejoice in and embrace the triumphalism of a combination of liberal democracy and capitalism. But if individuals and groups feel that their identity is denied then at the same time their very humanity is besmirched. In short, there is a strong sense of alienation and little has been done to reconnect those for whom the system has no apparent benefit, but many obvious costs. But such people cannot be ignored because they have the means at their disposal to make themselves heard – and dramatically so.

On September 11, 1973, the United States government aided and abetted the Chilean military to overthrow the government of President Allende which was followed by a 'caravan of death' in which 3,000 people were killed. On September 11, 2001, there was the dramatic attack on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington in which approximately 3,000 people were also killed. The first example shows the ability of a super Power to intervene elsewhere in the world whereas the second shows the vulnerability of a super Power to what were heretofore unconventional means of attack. In fact, there has been a democratisation of access to effective forms of violence. Any determined group, which is willing to sacrifice a small number of its adherents, can wreak havoc in a highly complex interdependent, but vulnerable society if it is determined to do so. If the means of crushing such attackers are either too costly or inefficient, then there is a need to move from majoritarian decision-making to consensual decision-making. This does not imply always giving way to the demands of those outside of the system but rather reforming it so that they have a stake within it, according to their own lights, which is also acceptable to those who are already well established and comfortable with the norms prevailing within the system. That such major changes are possible can be seen from the successful demolition of the *Apartheid* state in South Africa and the creation of a 'rainbow' country, notwithstanding its blemishes.

Unfortunately it does not appear that the present United States administration is willing to move in this direction. The United States has always, from its earliest days, cultivated a cultural norm of exceptionalism. General Washington warned his fellow citizens about getting involved in the political machinations of Europe and the Monroe doctrine was an attempt to preserve the pristine independence of the Americas from European interference. Because the United States feels itself to be exceptional it has great difficulty in co-operating with other countries. Like the Chinese before them, the Americans

consider that they have nothing to gain from such co-operation, although they may have a duty to lead. While leadership can be based upon coercion, it is much more effective if it is the outcome of a consensus. Nevertheless, that consensus is difficult to achieve if one Power considers itself to be exceptional and the others do not necessarily share this appreciation. Even when the United States puts isolationism aside, its notion of international co-operation is not of a truly multilateral nature and increasingly it is difficult for the United States to lead because it is unable, or indeed unwilling, perhaps even finding it unnecessary, to convince others that they should follow. Moreover, while the United States espouses wholeheartedly notions of liberty and equality in the context of a meritocratic society, it has an extraordinarily weak conception of solidarity both within the country and with its allies. While it espouses notions of liberty and equality it does not aspire in the same way to the notion of fraternity, if we are to take the three pillars of the French revolution. It considers the basis of equality of opportunity, freedom for the individual and then a meritocratic society to be sufficient. But that is not enough for others: they would add the key notion of solidarity or fraternity. Thus the United States has overwhelming military power in one sense, but its security is vulnerable in another sense and increasingly its leadership is being challenged.

In the economic sphere American leadership necessarily has to be conceived in the context of two other economic super Powers, namely, the EU and Japan. Moreover, there are other commanding cultures such as that of EU, China and India, not to mention that of Islam, which in no way signify that we have arrived at the 'end of history'. Moreover, it is not always evident that the American people are ready to pay the price of leadership when the threat cannot be obliterated from 15,000 feet and can manifest itself on their own doorsteps. This all suggests that leadership in the context of global governance is better conceived, not in the notion of a single super Power, but in the notion of a collective leadership involving not only states but other actors as well. One element in this wider framework is the United Nations system and it is to that which I now turn.

The United Nations system

There are number of compelling reasons why a change in global leadership in the process of global governance will not be brought about through a major conflagration as has been the previously the case as Portugal gave way to Holland, Holland to Britain and, in a slightly different way, Britain to the United States. We are now dealing with global problems which affect everyone and therefore can only be met, or at least most efficiently be met, in a global manner. As we suggested above, we must hang together or we will hang separately. It should also be noted that we live in a world of complex interdependence and that everyone is sensitive to others in that a change in one major actor is likely to have repercussions for another. This is a lesson that the United States seems not to have learned, although it will be forced to acknowledge this the hard way when it becomes the recipient of the 'knock on' consequences. This may engender a realisation that the promotion of community interest is an organic part of self-interest and here again there is a steep learning curve necessary for the Americans. If that learning curve proves to be too arduous then it is salutary to remember that every society has the capacity for suicide. However, the most likely outcome is a rough and ready consortium

of the United States, the European Union, Japan, China, Russia and India. In what way can the United Nations' system help to provide a partial framework for this?

While the United Nations' system is not the answer, it can be a part of an answer. Although the system is weak and inadequate in one way or another, all the major Powers are involved and thus the UN system does provide a partial framework. In security questions, the Security Council, and in particular the P5, is the kernel of a global security system. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that India is missing, as is Japan, and the EU is only partially represented by Britain and France with Germany and Italy having but a tenuous, although an increasingly important role to play. In the longer term these difficulties may be taken care of by an EU seat as one of the permanent members. However, it should be noted that, having spent the last half century essentially concerned with its domestic affairs, the EU is now beginning to look beyond its boundaries and we can anticipate a more vigorous EU presence in global affairs, beyond the economic sphere where it already plays such a role.

Insofar as the economic sphere is concerned, the central organisations are partially within the UN framework, such as the IMF and the World Bank, and partially outside that framework such as the World Trade Organisation, G8 and OECD. The growing role of China in the WTO is helpful in this regard and to a certain degree the multinational corporations and banks have been drawn in through informal means such as the Davos meetings and more formally through the UN Secretary General's Global Compact.

If, however, we turn to cultural and social questions, we find that there is a different framework. Sadly missing is a strong organisation for human rights. Human rights are given a prominent position in the UN Charter, notably in the preamble, and there has been over the years a growth of UN bodies concerned with human rights or related matters, such as the Human Rights Commission, the High Commission for Refugees and the World Food Programme. There has been at the same time a growing awareness of human rights in general, but equally of some of the inadequacies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other Conventions and institutional frameworks. Article 2.7 of the UN Charter no longer rides supreme in the way that it did in the past in that there is an acknowledgement of the tension between the universality of human rights and the notion of unbridled sovereignty in which the balance shifts between the two poles on particular issues. There is, however, no central framework, but while there is progress in the sense of the establishment of an International Criminal Court, on the other hand the United States is refusing to ratify its membership of that body and, indeed, is seeking actively to hinder its establishment.

Elsewhere a tripartite structure has emerged which has possibilities for governance despite the failure of ECOSOC to play any major role in this domain. On the one hand there are the UN Specialised Agencies which are concerned with functional questions and in which NGOs and others now play an increasing role, informally if not formally. The Specialised Agencies are concerned with individual segments such as health, labour, scientific and cultural questions, agriculture and the like. To counter balance this segmentisation, the UNDP integrates the policies of the various Specialised Agencies in the context of a particular country or region thus bringing a much-needed holistic element into the system. But perhaps the most important development is one that has been largely ignored as a systemic change, namely the advent of global conferences.

The opening phrases of the UN Charter, 'We the peoples…' are, to put it mildly, economical with the truth. Nevertheless, civil society has entered the front door of the UN system through global conferences. These conferences have been an important development over the last forty years in that they have added a new structural wing to the UN system and civil society has become central to such conferences. Themes such as the environment, human rights, population growth, resource depletion and the like are examined every five years or so through review conferences with major conferences perhaps every decade or two. This persistent pattern constitutes a structural element in the UN system as a totality. In such meetings the NGOs and MNCs play a major role. Although this is a significant change to the UN system, nevertheless it is important to bear in mind that only non-state actors in the Western model of civil society from OECD-type countries really participate in a full manner and thus the structural inequities between the centre and the periphery are perpetuated once again in the non-governmental sector. Despite this the necessity for such conferences is not just an administrative need but also a means to broach global problems of the type we have evoked above. Some issues demand a form of global riot control, while others suggest more responsive, participatory, representative and transparent forms of governance. All, however, require a response and point to the need for new consensual non-majoritarian forms of global decision-making. Such forms need to be consensual and non-majoritarian because those excluded will, as we have seen above, have little incentive not to react destructively if they are excluded since then they have nothing to lose. Moreover, they have effective means of doing so, so that if we do not listen with one ear, our other ear will be tweaked – and uncomfortably so.

Thus we can say that the UN is moving in the right direction and forming a part of global governance, although there is far to go. In particular governance must be seen as a whole – at and across the global, regional and the local levels. Regions may be seen as a brake on globalisation and a facilitator of localisation, especially if there is a strong transactional base strengthened by a psychosocial community in a particular area. Indeed, the UN Charter makes significant reference to regional organisations in many dimensions but most of these developments, including all that we have discussed above, are essentially 'top down' organisations rather than leading from the 'bottom up'. Moreover, where do the people play a role in this framework of global governance?

The peoples' agenda has been elucidated in part by the Gallup International survey of 57,000 adults in 60 countries in celebration of the millennium. The results show that people value health and family life above all else. They stress employment, living without conflict and condemn endemic corruption. Human rights, the environment and democracy are high on the agenda. But a chilling finding is that even in mature democracies, where elections are thought by the people to be fair, two thirds say that their country is not governed by the will of the people.

This agenda, arising from the Gallup survey, constitutes a set of navigation points for good governance at all levels. We ignore it at our peril. Yet authority and the legitimacy of governance is being challenged by alienation from the system even where there is ample opportunity for full formal participation. Such exclusion and alienation is a recipe for an unpeaceful world. The UN does little to ameliorate this. It is, as we have seen, a 'top down' system. Nevertheless, it has opened doors to wider participation of

elements of civil society and the satisfaction of basic needs globally is possible. More-over the UN can help, the more so if it is able to enfranchise more actors, have more responsive processes and a great transparency.

Democratising the UN framework

There are many major problems that the UN system faces in seeking to play a role in the quest for global governance, but three stand out. The first concerns the enfranchisement of all the relevant actors. We have seen how this has made some progress through the growth, in a systemic manner, of global conferences and the participation therein of a significant range of actors from global civil society. But this is not enough since many important actors do not fit the mould of participants in the UN system of global conferences. In addition, there are many relevant actors who are, from the point of view of the system, deviant. But if problems are not only interstate or inter-governmental but also intra-state and transnational, then the relevant actors need to play a role in the system.

The second major problem is to find ways to release the tension between institutional values and human needs. Human needs give rise to institutions but those institutions quickly develop their own bureaucratic practices and institutional values, which may come, in the fullness of time, to frustrate human needs. The UN system is very bureaucratic and institutionalised and so, too, are many governments and indeed, some NGOs. There is a crying need to get back to a situation in which human needs infuse the organisation and that it reflects changes in global civil society. At the moment only fitful progress has been made in the UN system and all too often institutional needs prevail over human needs. The criticisms of the IMF, in particular, arise from this tension between institutional and human needs.

Democracy has many forms, but within this framework there is usually a requirement for representivity of the constituency, a responsiveness to the perceived needs of the constituency, a sense of participation by all the actors from the local to the global level and a strong commitment to transparency. The present institutional frameworks for global governance are patently inadequate in these terms and their inadequacy is reflected in the growing alienation of individuals from democratic processes even in mature democracies ,as we saw in the Gallop survey, and from the institutions of the UN system. This alienation provides a modicum of tacit support, or at least indifference, to enable those who want to bring the system down to survive. There have been many proposals for more direct democracy in the UN system, such as a second chamber which would reflect more directly the peoples' wishes, but the system still seems alien to those in whose name it was founded, namely 'We the peoples...'.

Our challenge is to give an appropriate expression to the opening words of the Charter in an institutionalised political process of global governance for the 21st century. After 500 years of the present global system we are moving towards a clearer, more conscious system of global governance to match the global economy. However, we have not got much further than a recognition of the nature of the problem. No one can gainsay that we live in interesting times which, for the Chinese is a curse, but for us it is a challenge.