Why a World State is Unnecessary: The Continuing Debate on World Government

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Abstract: The discussion of the possibility of world government has been revived since the end of the Cold War and particularly after the turn of the millennium. It has engaged many authors. In this article, I provide a survey of the continuing debate on world government. I explore the leading question of the debate, whether the conditions of insecurity in which states are placed and other global problems that face contemporary humanity require the creation of a global authority, and consequently, the establishment of a world state. After a careful analysis I suggest that a world state is neither necessary nor inevitable nor desirable. I argue that the plurality of nation-states that form an international society has a great advantage over a world state. It supports the diversity of character and culture, and sustains the continuous progress of humankind… This reflection about the conflicting character of our international environment can lead us to the conclusion that the solution of many world problems and, first of all, of insecurity, can be provided only by bringing international anarchy to an end. We start to believe that "the predicament of vulnerability of nation-states calls for a global authority with sufficient power to redress or prevent attacks on themselves."[1] We come to think that "like the United Nations itself, global governance is a bridge between the old and the as yet unborn . . . a world federal government, an idea that is both necessary and possible."[2] We become convinced that a world state is "inevitable"[3] and "democratically necessary."[4] Thus, we come to the conclusion that "whether by a social contract among the nations or by conquest, whether gradually or at once, whether by a frontal assault on national sovereignty or a silent undermining of its foundations,"[5] the anarchic system of sovereign states is to be finally replaced by a universal world state…

Is World Government Necessary?

One can argue that we are entering now into a new era, one in which nation-states cannot offer the protection from aggression that they once seemed to provide. Under new technological conditions, even large states, facing state-sponsored or individual terrorist activities, are no longer able to guarantee security to their citizens and have become as vulnerable to violence as individuals in the state of nature. Hence, one can argue that just as in the logic of Hobbesian social contract, the fear of violent death made it necessary for individuals to submit to a common power, so also the changes in the forces of destruction make it necessary for states to enter into such a contract. The fact that nuclear weapons are possessed by relatively few states limits the force of this argument today, but it would become more powerful if nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction were to spread. Do we need a global authority in today's postmodern world, in which irrationality has largely replaced reason and weapons of mass destruction have become cheaper and more readily available?

Because of the changes in military technology, it seems indeed useful for security to be organized on a global scale. However, this does not mean that it has to take the form of a world government. The collective security of nations is a security system in which security becomes a concern of all member states, and therefore each state commits to a collective response to a threat posed by any state, including a member state, to peace and security. It has often been regarded as a principle of the United Nations and before that of the League of Nations. In the UN the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security is conferred on the Security Council (Art. 24, UN Charter). The Security Council is entitled to undertake certain measures that vary from economic sanctions to military interventions, in the event that it has established a threat to peace, a breach of peace, or an act of aggression (Art. 39, UN Charter). In accordance with special agreements, it can ask member states of the UN to provide armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage (Art. 43, UN Charter). The logic of collective security is flawless, provided that all nations subordinate whatever conflicting interests they may have to the common good defined in terms of the maintenance of international peace and security, and the collective defense of all member states.[6] In practice, however, the security system of the UN can function only when it is supported by the major world powers and where there is a consensus among these major powers in the Security Council. As a matter of fact, for most of the history of the UN, the principal member states of the Security Council did not share a consensus. Nevertheless, what this proves is not a failure of the United Nations Organization but rather the existence of ideological and cultural differences between nations. There is thus much room for improvement, which can come from prudent diplomacy based on common interests, of which the most basic is global peace as opposed to total destruction. The evidence for the possibility of such improvement is the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the ideological division between East and West that in the end led to a closer cooperation among the permanent members of the Security Council.[7] But this trend is unfortunately now over, and the primary reason for this is, as I will show, the adoption by the United States, as well by other countries, of unilateral actions that are contrary to the spirit of the UN.

Article 2 of the UN Chapter says: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other

state," but "this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII." Thus, the members of the UN system of collective security must refrain from taking any unilateral action without the authorization of the UN Security Council, unless the action is related to the basic right of self-defense, and as Article 24 clearly says, should "confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." In spite of this, the challenge to the UN collective security system came from powerful states, particularly from the United States after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The school of Republican intellectuals—including former deputy secretary of state Paul Wolfowitz and former chairman of the Defense Policy Board Richard Perle—believed that the events of 9/11 proved the need for the United States to assume the duties of an international Leviathan without much respect for the United Nations.[8] They called for the US government to take on an imperial role and act decisively to counter terrorism and reinforce Western values all over the world.[9] Prepared in September 2002, the National Security Strategy, known as the "Bush Doctrine," called for pre-emptive action against hostile states and terror groups, and it declared that the United States would not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise its right of self-defense. The consequence of this line of thinking was American interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the legality of both of which has been questioned.[10] They were justified by the United States as acts of self-defense, but there were no immediate and explicit threats posed against it by these countries and the military actions were not authorized by the UN Security Council. Moreover, they resulted in the devastation of both countries and in a large number of civilian deaths.

As Lorenzo the Magnificent once said, "What the lord does, the many do after him." The US example has led other countries to join operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in 2011 some NATO members intervened in Libya, with the aim of regime change, which is illegal and contrary to the spirit of the UN charter.[11] The military action in the form of bombing Libyan cities by France, the United States, and the UK was not authorized by any Security Council resolution. While Russia has referred to several legal arguments to justify its 2014 military intervention in and annexation of Crimea, its action was not authorized by the Security Council and it violated norms of international law.[12] Similarly unauthorized are the military actions (bombing, arming opposition groups) undertaken currently by the United States, Turkey, France, and Israel in civil-war-torn Syria. However, the fact that, because of the 2002 National Security Strategy and subsequent doctrines,[13] all nations have now become subject to military incursion by the United States, proves neither any abridgment of the concept of national sovereignty nor a need for a world government. On the contrary, by developing strategies that violate the accepted norms of international society based on the UN, the United States has affirmed its sovereignty over and against other states. It has brought international relations back to what is described by Kant as "savage lawlessness" rather than promoting lawful constraint of civilized people based on commonly accepted rules and norms.

Hence, rather than dream about a world state as an instrument to build international peace and security, one should reverse the current trend to unilateralism, which is in a sense a trend toward unlawful human relations based on might alone, and reaffirm the spirit of lawfulness that was introduced by the UN. The precondition for this is to understand that the United Nations Organization is potentially the best international institution for maintaining peace and security

and for solving global problems, but its work depends on its members' acceptance of its principles and of legal constraints that it imposes on their behavior. Perhaps the greatest problem with the idea of a world state and the corresponding idea of a global democracy is that the UN represents something imperfect and yet real, something that can be improved by prudent diplomacy, while the former represent wishful thinking that tends to diminish real solutions to today's world problems. Supporters of global governance, an important component of which is the UN, argue that the problems of globalization do not necessitate the creation of world government but can be solved by strengthening existing international institutions and organizations.[14] They can be effectively dealt by the UN and the WTO, whose work can be supported by nongovernmental organizations, such as Greenpeace or Doctors Without Borders. Therefore, nations should not, as Wendt urges, force history along toward a world state, so as to "'get the best deal' they can in the emerging global constitution," nor should they "spearhead the foundation of the new international order" that would lead us to world government.[15] Such government will not solve the current problems of humankind. That a world state is really needed to solve global problems—political, economic, environmental, and demographic—and to contribute to human welfare and the protection of individual rights is highly questionable. One can argue that this work can be done within the framework of the existing organizations, particularly by means of the global institution, which is the UN. It should be supported by prudent and far-sighted diplomacy, as well as by vigorous, prudent, and courageous states that to the best of their ability oppose illegal and unjust acts, and may even be willing to employ force in defense of the rights and the well-being of their citizens, as well as of international order. To provide the United Nations with sympathetic and robust support, to understand its idea as a federation of free states, whose basic goal is to maintain the security of each individual state and of other states in league with it, to appreciate its civilizational role in promoting lawful constraint against savage lawlessness, and hence to strengthen it as an organization rather than undermine its authority, and thus to make its work more effective, could help to maintain international peace and to solve many of our current global problems.

The Importance of Nations

Since the UN is a league of nations, an organization of distinct sovereign states, and not their amalgamation in a world state, it is worth stressing, in conclusion, the importance of nations. While there are now many advocates of globalization and of postnational governance, it is important to understand that the nation-state is in fact the oldest political organization of humankind, since its tradition goes back to the Sumerian and Greek city-states, and even earlier to independent tribes. As John Stuart Mill convincingly argued in his essay *On Liberty*, as diverse cultural communities, European nation-states have been the greatest source of progress for humanity. "What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which, when it exists, exists as the effect, not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and culture."[16] Mill rightly noted that in addition to the lust for power and wealth, which is so evident in European history, we can also find in the West the transforming intellectual and moral dynamics that have contributed to a progressive social and technological change in the world. The foundation of the

progressive development of humankind is the *remarkable diversity of character and culture*, the condition for which is freedom.

Continuous human progress, that is, our further moral and intellectual evolution, and particularly the power of intellect that, as our wonderful scientific and technological achievements show, has increased in humanity as a whole, and which Dante thought requires peace, is worth defending. Yet its two basic conditions, freedom and diversity, are likely to be missing under a world state. Indeed, we need political and cultural diversity of nation-states for human creativity and progress. They cannot be turned to cosmopolitan entities, such as today's European Union, in which there is confusion about values and consequently a loss of European heritage, or be replaced by a world state. Hence, the point is not to lose national diversity and freedom, but to peacefully build on it. One can build on fairness and lawful civility. These can lead us to a sense of oneness as an international community, and in the end produce common cultural and particularly moral values, on which any good political order must be founded. Therefore, the UN, particularly the UN Security Council, must represent universal interests of all peoples, namely, prosperity and freedom, not merely narrow interests of selected great powers, and should not be challenged by unilateral actions of its members. And there is a chance that such a vision of the UN will succeed because it is based on the correct recognition of what human beings really desire: peace and security, insofar as these, along with prosperity and freedom, are basic conditions of their development and happiness.

Conclusion

A world state is neither necessary nor inevitable nor even desirable. As we have shown by considering the immense cultural differences and various interests that divide humankind, it will not solve the problem of violence and conflict. Because of its centralization and its size, and the resultant potential ineffectiveness, it is questionable whether it could solve global problems.

A real alternative to it is provided by an international society based on the UN and other intergovernmental organizations. A sophisticated international society, with its diverse institutions adjusted to the emerging needs of humanity, creates a world order, but it is not a legal order alone. It embraces vigorous, wise, prudent, and courageous states that use far-sighted and prudent diplomacy, and sometimes even force, to oppose illegal and unjust acts, and support the existing world order rather than destroy it. It receives support from a network of nongovernmental organizations. It builds a strong international community and contributes to a sense of oneness of the whole of humanity. With adequate support, it can thus meet current global challenges, save us from war, and contribute to the moral and intellectual evolution of humankind.

A world state is another one of humanity's false dreams. The dream is that one can dispense entirely with the past and establish a society based on reason alone in which all human conflict and suffering will disappear once and for all. However, if it is artificially imposed on humankind, and not a result of its long development—particularly of moral improvement—egoism and the struggle for power would continue within it, perhaps with even greater intensity, since a world

state, like today's EU, would try to impose a despotic, bureaucratic uniformity on humanity, and against this uniformity people would certainly revolt. It would be likely to become a despotism that brings human beings to a standstill. Even if a world state were not centralized but built on principles of subsidiarity, as a collective identity, it would tend to make everyone alike and subject to the same regulations. Even if it were endowed with democratic institutions, a world state, by dint of its sheer size, would replace freedom to participate in political life with passive obedience. It would lead humanity to uniformity rather than diversity, and thus it would prove to be an obstacle to the development of the human race.

[1] Thomas Magnell, "Vulnerability, Global Authority, and Moving Away from a Local Maximum of Value," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2002): 5.

[2] Thomas G. Weiss, "What Happened to the Idea of World Government," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 265–66.

[3] Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State Is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 491–542.

[4] Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State Is Democratically Necessary." In: The World State Debate, February 28, 2014, available at http://wgresearch.org/why-a-world-state-is-democratically-necessary/.

[5] Hedley Bull, "Society and Anarchy in International Relations," in *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, ed. James Der Derian (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 76.

[6] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 2nd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956, 398.

[7] Eugenia López-Jacoiste, "The UN Collective Security System and Its Relationship with Economic Sanctions and Human Rights," *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, no. 14 (2010): 281.

[8] Richard Perle, "Thank God for the Death of the UN," *Guardian*, March 20, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/mar/21/foreignpolicy.iraq1/. For a response to this criticism of the UN, see W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, "Thank God for the UN!," *Concerned Philosophers for Peace Newsletter* 24, no. 1 (2004), http://peacephilosophy.org/16/thank-god-for-the-un-by-julian-korab-karpowicz.

[9] As Rasmussen convincingly argues, following the end of the Cold War, the West has come to define itself in terms of globalization, the civilizing process, by which the values of democracy, market economy, and civil society are promoted. "The perception of the threat of terrorism fed on the West's construction of its own future in terms of a powerful process of globalization. As the dark side of globalization, terrorism had a power equal to the bright side of globalization" (Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "A Parallel Globalization of Terror: 9-11, Security and

Globalization," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic Studies Association* 37, no. 3 (2002): 333).

[10] Michael Mandel, *How America Gets Away with Murder: Illegal Wars, Collateral Damage and Other Crimes against Humanity* (London: Pluto, 2004); Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006); Rodney P. Carlisle, *Afghanistan War* (New York: Chelsea House, 2010).

[11] Fiseha Haftetsion Gebresilassie, "Collective Security at Stake? Challenges of the Current Collective Security System" (working paper, Feb. 2012), 9, http:/aigaforum.com/articles/collective-security-at-stake.pdf.

[12] See Christian Marxsen, "The Crimea Crisis—An International Law Perspective," *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht*, no 74 (2014): 367–91. Online : http://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/Marxsen_2014_-_the_crimea_crisis_-_an_ international_law_perspective.pdf>

[13] See "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," Department of Defense, January 2012, http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf; and "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America," Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf.

[14] David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., *Governing Globalization* (London: Polity, 2002); Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[15] Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations*, 9.4 (2003), 530.

[16] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79–80.