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Author(s): Thomas G. Weiss

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What Happened to the Idea of World Government*

THOMAS G. WEISS

The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

What happened to the idea of world government, so central in the United States to public debate of the 1930s and 1940s, and why has it been replaced by “global governance”? This article reviews the reasons behind that evolution—the need to incorporate interdependence and nonstate actors into analytical frameworks along with a lack of imagination from analysts—as well as the pluses and minuses of both concepts. When states still could solve or attenuate most problems, world government remained a possible objective and not far from the mainstream. Paradoxically, now that states visibly cannot address a growing number of transboundary threats, world government is unimaginable; and even more robust international organizations are often looked upon askance. Could the same far-sighted American political commitment that created a new generation of international organizations after World War II re-emerge under the Obama administration, if not in 2009, then at least by the end of a second term?

Le machin (the thing) is what Charles de Gaulle scornfully called the United Nations (UN), thereby dismissing multilateral cooperation as frivolous in comparison with the real red meat of world politics, national interests and *Realpolitik*. He conveniently ignored—as many amateur and professional historians have since—that the formal birth of “the thing” was not the signing of the UN Charter on June 26, 1945, but rather the adoption of the “Declaration by the United Nations” in Washington, DC, on January 1, 1942. The same 26 countries of the powerful coalition that defeated Fascism and rescued France also anticipated the formal establishment of a world organization as an essential extension of their war-time commitments. These were not pie-in-the-sky idealists. After the failure of the League of Nations, states did not view the second generation of universal international organizations in the form of the UN system as a liberal plaything to be ignored but rather a vital necessity for post-war order and prosperity.

Numerous other politicians and pundits since de Gaulle have made careers by questioning the UN’s relevance and calling for its dismantlement. Mine, in contrast, has revolved around trying to strengthen the world organization. Thus, the 50th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) in the city that hosts United Nations headquarters provides me with an opportunity to revisit the United Nations from a particular angle: the desperate requirement for a third generation of intergovernmental organizations that

* Presidential Address, 50th Convention of the International Studies Association, New York, N.Y., February 16, 2009.

moves beyond the “anarchy” and absence of overarching authority that Hedley Bull (1977) and virtually all ISA members take as a point of departure for international studies.¹

Will it take a calamity on the scale of World War II to demonstrate the abject poverty of our current thinking? Is such a disaster necessary to catalyze a transformation of the current feeble system of what many of us now call “global governance”—the patchwork of formal and informal arrangements among states, international organizations, and various public–private partnerships—into something with at least some attributes of a world federal government? A negative reply to these questions and hope for transformed multilateral organizations requires a real stretch of the imagination, especially in the United States where the term is a four-letter word and rarely uttered in polite company. Robert Jenkins (2006) summarizes:

Once a staple of informed debate on international affairs, the term is almost never uttered in mainstream political discussion, unless it is to dismiss those who advocate the idea as hopelessly naïve, or to demonize those suspected of secretly plotting the creation of a global leviathan.²

This article traces what happened to the idea of a world government and its replacement by “global governance.” My colleague, the American historian David Nasaw, reminded me that the thirteen original colonies during the American Revolution were operating under the weak and contested Articles of Confederation, but they sought in 1787 a “more perfect union” in Philadelphia. The world and the weak confederation of 192 UN member states require a “Philadelphia moment.” First, however, I examine why and how we arrived at the notion of global governance as well as its pluses and minuses.

Background to Contemporary Thinking about World Order

It is commonplace to state that many of the most intractable contemporary problems are transnational, ranging from climate change, migration, and pandemics to terrorism, financial instability, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); and that addressing them successfully requires actions that are not unilateral, bilateral, or even multilateral but rather global. At the same time, the policy authority and resources necessary for tackling such problems remain vested in individual states rather than collectively in a universal institution; the classic collective action problem is how to organize common solutions to common problems and spread costs fairly. The fundamental disconnect between the nature of a growing number of global problems and the current inadequate structures for international problem solving goes a long way toward explaining the fitful, tactical, and short-term local responses to challenges that require sustained, strategic, and longer-run global perspectives and action.

In preparation for the world organization’s 60th anniversary in 2005, then UN secretary-general Kofi Annan’s dramatic wake-up calls included references to “forks in the road” (Annan 2003) and “a new San Francisco moment” (Annan

¹ Research about the UN system is not idiosyncratic among past presidents of the International Studies Association. A quick overview of my 48 distinguished predecessors shows that over one-quarter of them have written at least a book and/or several major articles on the United Nations or part of the system, and three-quarters have at least a few articles touching upon the United Nations or multilateral cooperation. Among previous ISA presidents who have devoted a considerable portion of their scholarly attention to international organization and the United Nations are my dear friend Craig Murphy, the late Hayward Alker, Robert Keohane, David Singer, James Rosenau, Bruce Russett, the late Harold Jacobson, and Chadwick Alger. I am grateful to Anoulak Kittikhoun for his research assistance.

² I have benefited from conversations with Rob Jenkins as well as his comments and book manuscript in progress, *United States of the World: Revisiting America’s Mid-Century Movements for Global Government* (Forthcoming).

2005). The *New York Times* (2005) lead editorial after the September 2005 World Summit was closer to the truth: “A once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform and revive the United Nations has been squandered.” At first viewed as a window of opportunity to revisit the United Nations in light of changes in world politics since 1945, instead negotiations exposed the very debilitating political and bureaucratic conflicts that regularly paralyze the organization. Ironically, the deliberations among prime ministers, presidents, and princes highlighted the indecisiveness and pettiness that the summit was supposedly convened to address (see Weiss and Crossette 2006).

In spite of the ongoing mantra of reform and the obvious need for a drastic overhaul, the state-centric world organization continues to limp along much as it has since its establishment. Decolonization with its massive membership expansion as well as other fundamental geo-political and technological changes have altered the agenda to be sure, but the UN’s basic structure is fundamentally intact, a formidable bastion of state sovereignty. Unlike earlier cataclysms, today’s narrow misses have not yet led to any transformation of the structures of international cooperation or even to serious conversation about such an eventuality. Shortly after leaving his post as deputy-secretary-general and prior to becoming the UK’s minister for Africa, Asia, and the UN, Mark Malloch-Brown commented that while no topic, not even sex, was more popular than reform, neither governments nor Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon understood “the scale of change required.” Member states “would have to rise above their own current sense of entrenched rights and privileges and find a grand bargain to allow a new more realistic governance model for the UN.” But, Malloch-Brown continued, “That may take a crisis” (Malloch-Brown 2008, 7–8).

On the one hand, it is safe to say that the framers of the UN Charter would today have trouble recognizing many activities because of extensive adaptations and changes since 1945, when such contemporary topics as global warming, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality were not on the international agenda. On the other hand, and in spite of the almost quadrupling of its membership, the founders would certainly find familiar the state-centric and decentralized institutional approach to problem solving that is incapable of addressing many of today’s life-threatening global challenges or providing critical global public goods.

The generic label for the organizational chart is “UN system,” a term implying more coherence and cohesion than is characteristic of the world body’s actual behavior. Frequent use is made of the “UN family,” a preferable image because like many families the United Nations is dysfunctional and divided. “The orchestra pays minimum heed to its conductor,” wrote Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart (1994, 32). The United Nations cannot be compared to the vertical and hierarchical structures of national governments, corporations, or militaries. In 1969 Sir Robert Jackson, in his customary picturesque fashion, was charged to evaluate the UN’s development efforts and began the *Capacity Study*: “Governments created this machine which is...unmanageable in the strictest use of the word...like some prehistoric monster” (United Nations 1969, iii). His lumbering dinosaur is now forty years older and certainly not better adapted to the climate of the 21st century.

In fact, Rube Goldberg could not have come up with a better design for futile complexity than the current array of agencies each focusing on a substantive area often located in a different country or continent from other relevant UN partners and with separate budgets, governing boards, and organizational cultures as well as independent executive heads. Whatever contemporary issue is of greatest concern—be it terrorism, climate change, migration, pandemics, or WMDs—we require transnational perspectives and efforts across sectors with some central direction, none of which the UN supplies.

The usual explanation for this sorry state of affairs and institutional disarray is a lack of political will, great power politics, or classic collective action problems, but blame also should be apportioned to us scholars for our lack of imagination. In struggling with the conclusion for *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It* (Weiss 2009b), I recalled with some discomfort what the Quaker economist and former ISA president Kenneth Boulding repeated often, "We are where we are because we got there."³

We analysts of international organizations have strayed away from paradigmatic rethinking. We have lost our appetite for big and idealistic plans because so many previous ones have failed: the Concert of Europe flopped; Tsar Alexander's Hague conferences failed to end war; the Kellogg-Briand Pact was never a serious proposition; and Immanuel Kant's and Woodrow Wilson's collective security visions were incorporated in the moribund League of Nations and were still-born in the ineffective UN. Consequently, we no longer regard the challenges of thinking about drastically different world orders as part of the job description for serious scholars.

What Is Global Governance?

Over the ISA's lifetime, mainstream thinking has shifted decidedly away from strengthening the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations toward "global governance." Ramesh Thakur and I have struggled to understand the origins and itinerary of this idea for the UN Intellectual History Project (Weiss and Thakur Forthcoming), which we trace to an offspring of a marriage between academic theory and practical policy concerns in the 1990s. James Rosenau and Ernst Czempel's highly theoretical *Governance without Government* was published in 1992, just about the same time that the Swedish government launched the policy-oriented Commission on Global Governance (1995) under the chairmanship of Sonny Ramphal and Ingmar Carlsson. The 1995 publication of its report, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, coincided with the first issue of *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organization*, the journal of the Academic Council on the UN System.

While a cottage industry of "prevention" has emerged since the publication of the Carnegie Commission On The Prevention Of Deadly Conflict's (1997) report, anticipating problems before they overwhelm us is not the strength of our species. About the best that we can hope for is playing catch-up in the face of life-threatening menaces. Dramatic climate change and environmental deterioration, weapons proliferation and run-away technology, massive poverty and pandemics, ethnic cleansing and destabilizing financial flows nudge states to react, cope, and eventually agree under duress to construct the feeble intergovernmental organizations that we have.

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 as we approach the second decade of the 21st century, the collective problems threatening the planet require building far more robust intergovernmental organizations with far greater scope and resources, and very soon indeed. U.S. civil rights champion Martin Luther King, Jr., in his 1967 address at Riverside Church, reminded us: "Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'" (King 1967).

The market will not graciously provide global institutions to ensure human survival with dignity. Adam Smith's "invisible hand" does not operate among

³ Interview with Elise Boulding in Needham, Massachusetts by the author on 16 April 2001. See United Nations Intellectual History Project (2007). The conclusion from this book (Weiss 2009b) provides the point of departure for this article.

states to solve problems any more than it does within states. The supply of essential global public goods lags far behind the demand today, and tomorrow's needs will only be more pressing and more transnational. 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 bureaucracies, cannot address many actual and looming transborder problems.

We thus have embraced the idea of global governance. "Governance" represents the range of both informal *and* formal values, norms, practices, and institutions that provide better order than if we relied purely upon formal regulations and institutions. Confusion enters because the Latin root *gubernare* is the same for all the units that we study as social scientists. "Governance" is closely associated with "governing" and "government"—that is, with political authority, institutions, and effective control. While they are related, the failure to distinguish clearly among terms such as global governance, world government, and cosmopolitanism is analytically very unhelpful (see, for example, Craig 2008).

Applying "governance" to the planet is fundamentally misleading. It captures the gamut of interdependent relations in the *absence* of any overarching political authority and with international institutions that exert little effective control (Czempiel 1992; Gordenker and Weiss 1996). Quite a distinction exists, then, between the national and international species of governance. At the national level, we have governance *plus* government which, whatever its shortcomings in Mexico or the United States, together can usually and predictably exert effective authority and control. At the international level, we have governance *minus* government, which means virtually no capacity to ensure compliance with collective decisions.

"Global governance" refers to collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacities of individual states to solve; it reflects the capacity of the international system at any moment in time to provide government-like services in the absence of world government. Global governance encompasses an extremely wide variety of cooperative problem-solving arrangements that may be visible but informal (e.g., practices or guidelines) or result from temporary units (e.g., coalitions of the willing). Such arrangements may also be more formal, taking the shape of hard rules (laws and treaties) as well as constituted institutions with administrative structures and established practices to manage collective affairs by a variety of actors, including state authorities, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, private-sector entities, and other civil society actors.

As is worth repeating, at the national level we have governance plus government. And, despite well-known weaknesses, lapses, and incapacities, the expectation in Berlin, New Delhi, Brasilia, and Johannesburg is that existing institutions are routinely and predictably expected to exert authority and control. For the globe, we have only the feeblest of imitations—institutions that routinely help ensure postal delivery and airline safety, to be sure, but that routinely do far too little to address such life-threatening problems as climate change and ethnic cleansing.

Why Did Global Governance Emerge?

Three explanations exist for the appearance of the notion of global governance. The first is that, beginning in the 1970s, interdependence and rapid technological advances fostered the recognition that certain problems defy solutions by a single state or even a coalition of the willing. The development of a consciousness about the human environment and especially the 1972 and 1992 UN conferences in Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro are usually seen as key events in this evolution. Although other examples abound, sustainability is especially apt to illustrate why we are in the same listing boat. It simply is impossible—in spite

of laudable environmental legislation in California or wind farms in The Netherlands—to halt global warming or acid rain with such isolated actions.

The second explanation for the growing interest in global governance is the sheer expansion in numbers and importance of nonstate actors, both civil society and for-profit corporations. Such growth has been facilitated by the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991), including institutional networks similar enough to facilitate the transnational and transgovernmental inter-actions described by Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004, 2009). That intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations no longer occupy center stage for students of international organizations was symbolized by establishing the Global Compact at the Millennium Summit of 2000. The private sector—both the for-profit and the not-for-profit species—was recognized as a necessary partner for the world organization. State-centric structures—states themselves as well as their creations in the form of intergovernmental organizations—no longer enjoy a monopoly over collective efforts to improve international society and world order. They share the crowded governance stage with many other actors.

To borrow an image from James Rosenau (1999, 293), a “crazy quilt” of authority is constantly shifting, and the patchwork of institutional elements varies by sector and over time. Perhaps even better images can be adapted from nonscholars, including Gertrude Stein’s characterization of Oakland—“...before there’s no there, there” —or the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, a grinning head floating without a body or substance. Contemporary global governance is highly uneven, often giving the impression of coverage but usually without much effect. Moreover, appearances can be deceiving and dangerous; 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 we are merely treading water or, worse, wasting time and energy rather than moving from danger toward safety. Informal, loose global governance is insufficient even were it to be accompanied by strengthened international institutions.

This brings me to the third reason for the emergence of global governance and the motivation behind this essay, namely that many of us are embarrassed with the seemingly simplistic and overly idealistic notion of supra-nationality. While Europe proceeds apace to move, in the late Ernst Haas’s (1964) formulation “beyond the nation-state” apparently the planet is different. Although the European Union was once thought to be a model for what could happen in the international system, currently a world federal government or even elements of one is not only old-fashioned, it is commonly thought to be the preserve of lunatics.

What Happened to the Idea of World Government?

According to Craig Murphy’s masterful history of “global governance” *avant la lettre*, since their growth began in the 19th century, international organizations customarily are viewed as “what world government we actually have” (Murphy 2000, 789). McNeill and St. Clair (2009, 1) make the same point: “There is in the world today no ‘global state’ or ‘global government’; but international organizations such as the World Bank and the UNDP are the nearest thing we have.” This commonsensical notion is not incorrect, but the problem lies elsewhere. At the national level we have the authoritative structures of government *supplemented* by governance; but internationally we simply have governance with some architectural drawings that are seven decades old and not up to present building codes, along with unstable ground and shifting foundations under existing structures.

The United Nations is a makeshift expedient, what we and preceding generations have been able to concoct for addressing global problems. Not conceived as a world government, of course, the United Nations also was not the creation of unrealistic utopians. “Its wartime architects bequeathed us this system as a realist necessity vital in times of trial,” one historian notes, “not as a liberal accessory to be discarded when the going gets rough” (Plesch 2008, 137).

Unlike earlier generations of international organization scholars, however, the goal of contemporary proponents of global governance is *no longer* the creation of world government (see Latham 1999; Yunker 2005, 2007). This is a dramatic change from the past when such thinking was not beyond the pale and actually not even far from the mainstream.

Beginning with Dante’s *Monarchia* at the beginning of the 14th century, there is a long tradition of criticizing the existing state system and replacing it with a universal government (Murphy 1994; 1). The idealist tradition includes Hugo Grotius, the Dutch jurist whose *On the Laws of War and Peace* (1625) usually qualifies him as the “father” of international law; Emeric Cruce, the French monk who died in the same year as the Peace of Westphalia and who had dreamed of a world court, a place for nations to meet and work out disputes, and disarmament; and, of course, Immanuel Kant whose *Perpetual Peace* (1795) envisioned a confederation of democratic and pacific states (though he stopped short of world government). Finally, demonstrating that these ideas are not the monopoly of Western thoughts, Derek Heater (1996) has found contemplations about “world government” in Chinese and Indian philosophies.

The late Harold Jacobson noted that the march toward a world government was woven into in the tapestries decorating the walls of the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva—now the UN’s European Office but once the headquarters of the League of Nations. He observed that they “picture the process of humanity combining into ever larger and more stable units for the purpose of governance—first the family, then the tribe, then the city-state, and then the nation—a process which presumably would eventually culminate in the entire world being combined in one political unit” (Jacobson 1984, 84).

Today it is hard to imagine a United States in which a serious conversation about the topic depicted in that tapestry would be possible. Yet there once was a sizable group of prominent American supporters from every walk of life, reflected by resolutions passed by thirty of forty-eight state legislatures, supporting a U.S. response to growing interdependence and instability that would pool American sovereignty with that of other countries.

September 11th and the Bush administration turned customary wariness toward international organizations—or the ups and downs of what Edward Luck (1999) has called “mixed messages”—into visceral hostility toward the UN. One now requires unknown powers of imagination to envision a Washington, DC, where the idea of world government would be a staple of public policy analysis. Yet in 1949, House Concurrent Resolution 64 argued in favor of “a fundamental objective of the foreign policy of the United States to support and strengthen the United Nations and to seek its development into a world federation.” It was sponsored by 111 representatives, including two future presidents, John F. Kennedy and Gerald Ford, as well as such other future prominent politicians as Mike Mansfield, Henry Cabot Lodge, Abraham Ribicoff, Christian Herter, Peter Rodino, Henry Jackson, and Jacob Javits. About the same time, the Senate Foreign Relations Sub-committee was considering several similar motions to recommend to President Truman (Boyer 1985). Throughout the 1940s, it was impossible in the United States to read periodicals, listen to the radio, or watch newsreels and not encounter the idea of world government.

We now conveniently ignore how many prominent groups in the interwar years and during the Second World War pushed the idea.⁴ One of the first such organizations was the Campaign for World Government (CWG), founded in 1937 by peace and women's rights activist Rosika Schwimmer. Clarence Streit, a *New York Times* journalist in Geneva who reported on the League of Nations in the 1930s, published a 1939 best-seller, *Union Now*, that proposed a global federal union of liberal democracies (Streit 1939). Schwimmer (1940) criticized Streit because the inclusion of former enemies, in her view, would be necessary if the new experiment was to be accepted as a veritable world government and not dismissed as a continuation of a wartime alliance.

Neither persuaded the Roosevelt administration to include the idea of world government in American proposals in San Francisco, but peace movements of various stripes raised the profile of supra-nationality. The cause had an unusual hero, the defeated 1940 Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie, who was Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's goodwill ambassador and published in 1943 another unlikely hit, *One World*, that spent four months in the first position on the *New York Times* best-seller list (Willkie 1943). It sold some two million copies and at least attenuated the Republican Party's isolationism and helped secure bipartisan approval of the UN.

Shortly before the nuclear age began, the June 1945 signing of the Charter in San Francisco diminished the punch of those pushing for a world federation because at least there was a new universal institution; but it far from satisfied world-government advocates because the UN, except for an occasional Security Council decision, could not act independently from its member states and enforce decisions. And so the world organization's establishment in part whetted the appetites of a numerically small lobby seeking to avoid a nuclear World War III. The legacy of wartime activism was the United World Federalists (UWF), founded in 1947. Its 50,000 members were inspired by another best-seller, Emery Reves's 1946 *The Anatomy of Peace*, which was serialized in *Reader's Digest* and argued that the United Nations of member states had to be replaced by the rule of law for the world. Grenville Clark, a Wall Street lawyer and friend of Roosevelt's, teamed up with Harvard Law School Professor Louis Sohn to burnish these ideas in what later was expanded in their classic textbook *World Peace through World Law* (Clark and Sohn 1958). Simultaneously, financier Bernard Baruch devised a visionary plan to place the nuclear fuel cycle under the United Nations at a time when the United States still enjoyed the atomic monopoly. Led by its president Robert M. Hutchins, the University of Chicago from 1945 to 1951 sponsored a prominent group of scholars in the Committee to Frame a World Constitution.

The movement was not confined to a fringe academic group but drew support not only from a scientific luminary like Albert Einstein but also sympathy from five nuclear-destruction-fearing Nobel Prize winners in the sciences (see Masters and Way 1946) and such visible entertainers as E. B. White, Oscar Hammerstein, and—Ripley, believe it or not—Ronald Reagan. Future Senators Alan Cranston and Harris Wofford sought to spread the UWF's message among university students, and the Student Federalists became the U.S.'s largest nonpartisan political organization. Other prominent individuals associated with the world government idea included Kurt Vonnegut, Walter Cronkite, H. G. Wells, Peter Ustinov, Dorothy Thompson, Supreme Court Justices William Douglas and Owen Roberts, Senators Estes Kefauver and future Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. And the list goes on.

⁴ For an exhaustive summary and key primary documents, see Barrata (2004). Many examples here draw on his thorough research.

By the early 1950s, the world government idea was hidden by the Iron Curtain, overshadowed by the Cold War, and eclipsed by Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt. On the right wing, this jump-started the engines of the black helicopters that are still whirling and fostered labeling advocates for world government as communist fellow travelers; and more recently on the left wing, the idea has encountered fears of top-down tyranny in a dystopia (Falk 1995, 2009, 13–24; Walzer 2004, 171–91).

In Europe, the attention of most intellectuals was on reconstruction although a few prominent individuals pursued the universal federal ideal, including historian Arnold Toynbee as well as writer Aldous Huxley, philosopher Bertrand Russell, and John Boyd Orr (the first head of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and 1949 Nobel Peace Prize laureate). Most Europeans eventually followed the French banker Jean Monnet and shifted to a federal idea for the continent and away from one for the globe.

Most of the countries in what we now call the “global South” were still colonies at this time, and local independence struggles and solidarity in decolonization efforts were far more pressing than distant world orders. Nonetheless, aspirations for a world federal government were not absent from public discourse in, for example, newly independent India. In an address to the General Assembly as late as December 1956, Jawaharlal Nehru, no utopian, argued: “In spite of the difficulties and the apparent conflicts, gradually the sense of a world community conferring together through its elected representative is not only developing but seizing the minds of people all over the world.” He continued, “The only way to look ahead assuredly is for some kind of world order, One World, to emerge” (Nehru 1999 [1956], 61–4).

The short answer to the question in this article's title is: the United States became obsessed with anticommunism; Europe focused on the construction of a regional economic and political federation; the burgeoning number of post-colonial countries shifted their preoccupations toward nonalignment and Third World solidarity; and scholars got out of the business.

In any case, this “ancient history” of world government now seems quaint. ISA members thinking about it are almost extinct. From time to time a contemporary international relations theorist, like Alexander Wendt, suggests that “a world state is inevitable” (Wendt 2003, 2005; Shannon 2005), or Daniel Deudney (2006) wishes one were because war has become too dangerous. Or, an international lawyer, like Richard Falk (2006), calls for an irrevocable transfer of sovereignty upwards. When someone like Campbell Craig (2008) notes the “resurgent idea of world government,” this has more to do with the buzz about “global governance” and less with the serious mainstream discussion of supra-nationality *per se*. In short, the idea of world government has been banned in sober and sensible discussions of global affairs and certainly is absent from classrooms. In fact, I cannot recall a single undergraduate or graduate student inquiring about the theoretical possibility of a central political authority exercising elements of universal legal jurisdiction. The surest way to secure classification as a crackpot is to mention a world government as either a hypothetical or, worse yet, desirable outcome.

Occasionally a mainstream academic utters “world government” for one of two reasons. First, the author wishes to demonstrate her hard-headed realism and scholarly *bona fides* by spelling-out clearly what she is *not* doing. At the outset of her insightful book, *A New World Order*, Anne-Marie Slaughter stressed that “world government is both infeasible and undesirable” (2004, 8). No reader would have mistaken her convictions without this disclaimer. But “new world order” seems ominously close to a slippery slope between international cooperation and an embryonic world government; and so the author or publisher or both felt compelled apparently to formally distance the book from the entirely

discredited literature about world government. Second, the term may be invoked as a functional equivalent for Pax Americana—for instance, Michael Mandelbaum's 2006 book on U.S. hegemony, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World's Government in the Twenty-first Century*, or Niall Ferguson's 2004 paean to American empire, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, or even Amitai Etzioni's 2004 text, *From Empire to Community*, which espouses the virtues of an American-led antiterrorist "Global Safety Authority." All discuss the many global public goods that the United States provides (or should provide) and especially its role as the world's policeman making it the functional equivalent of a world government.

Changes from Earlier Thinking

After his archival labors to write a two-volume history of world federalism, Joseph Barrata observes that in the 1990s "the new expression, 'global governance,' emerged as an acceptable term in debate on international organization for the desired and practical goal of progressive efforts, in place of 'world government.'" He continues that scholars "wished to avoid using a term that would harken back to the thinking about world government in the 1940s, which was largely based on fear of atomic bombs and too often had no practical proposals for the transition short of a revolutionary act of the united peoples of the world" (Barrata 2004, Vol. 2, 534–5).

Most analysts 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 younger scholar would wish to cut short her career by exploring such a thought for a dissertation.

Global governance is a half-way house between the international anarchy underlying Realist analysis and a world state. The current generation of intergovernmental organizations undoubtedly helps lessen transaction costs and overcome some structural obstacles to international cooperation as would be clear to anyone examining international responses to the 2004 tsunami or ongoing humanitarian crises for which we see a constellation of helping hands—soldiers from a variety of countries, UN organizations, large and small NGOs, and even Walmart.

Global governance certainly is not the continuation of traditional power politics. It also is not the expression of an evolutionary process leading to the construction of institutional structures able to provide global public goods and respond adequately to contemporary or future global threats. Moreover, to speak of "governance" and not "government" is to discuss the product and not the producer. Agency and accountability are absent.

Most of us certainly are not complacent about what is at stake or satisfied that global governance can accomplish what global government could. Rather, our approach reflects a judgment about how to spend limited analytical energies in the immediate term. Even those considered modestly engaged, however, are no longer even imagining anything more than institutional tinkering. The disappearance of any passion for more robust intergovernmental organizations appears to be the accompanying downside to the pursuit of global governance.

Two important features distinguish global governance from earlier thinking about collective responses to international problems; and they have serious implications for how we act because they restrict our thinking and advocacy. First, many analysts formerly viewed the development of international organization and law not only as a step in the right direction and as more effective than unilateral efforts and the law of the jungle. But they also viewed the march of a growing web of international institutions as an unstoppable progression.

However, even a rabid world federalist had to admit that a powerful state could solve most problems on its own, or at least could insulate itself from their worst impacts. Efforts to eradicate malaria within a geographic area and to prevent those with the disease from entering a territory should be seen as qualitatively different from halting terrorist money-laundering, avian flu, or acid rain. Today, no state, no matter how powerful, can labor under the illusion that it can guarantee success in protecting its population from such threats. Earlier problems could be constrained by a rich state within its borders by constructing effective barriers, whereas a growing number of contemporary challenges to world order consist of what former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan (2002) calls “problems without passports.”

Paradoxically, when states still could solve or attenuate most problems, the idea of a world government remained plausible over the longer term and was part of the mainstream. Now when states visibly cannot address a growing number of threats, world government is unimaginable; and even more robust international organizations are often looked upon askance.

Second, 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 were recognized as having a crucial impact and reach. They became an increasingly integral part of solutions either promulgated or actually undertaken by the United Nations and many of its member states.

This shift in perspective has, however, led us to go overboard in our enthusiasm for informal arrangements and for nonstate actors and their potential for problem solving. Burgeoning numbers of NGOs and corporations clearly have resources and energy; but why are more robust intergovernmental organizations viewed as an afterthought, if even thought about at all? The current generation of such 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 transnational social networks. To state the obvious, NGOs and multinational corporations will not eliminate poverty, reverse global warming, or halt murder in Darfur.

In the early Postwar period, it should be recalled that such prominent U.S. Realists as Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr had already (albeit uneasily) concluded that a “world state” was logically necessary in light of the nuclear threat (see Craig 2003; 166–73; Morgenthau 1960; Ch. 27, 29; Morgenthau 1962, 174–75; Niebuhr 1959). Neo-Realists subsequently viewed the absence of central authority as an unalterable fact of life (Mearsheimer 2001) and even favored a system of sovereign states over a world government (Waltz 1979, 111–2). Hence rereading E. H. Carr (1964, 108) is valuable in that he warned readers in the interwar years that blending utopia and power in thinking was necessary in order to avoid stagnation and despair. In other words, the father of Realism understood that a vision of where ideally we should be headed is necessary to avoid getting mired and going nowhere. Another Brit, Oscar Wilde (1954 [1891]), said it more poetically: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth looking at.”

Without a long-term vision, we accept the contours of the current and unacceptable international system, including the feeble UN. By not even struggling to imagine a fundamentally different system, we make the continuation of the current lackluster one inevitable.

The Pluses and Minuses of Global Governance

Global governance is a useful analytical tool—if I were choosing an expensive word, I would say a good “heuristic” device—to understand what is happening

in today's world. At the same time, it lacks prescriptive power to point toward where we should be headed and what we should be doing. It is a process, not an entity, which assembles any stakeholder with an interest in whatever topic is at hand. To repeat, in the domestic context governance adds to government, implying shared purpose and goal orientation *in addition to* formal authority and police or enforcement powers. For the planet, governance is essentially the whole story, what Scott Barrett calls "organized volunteerism" (Barrett 2007, 19).

We are obliged to ask ourselves whether we can approach anything that resembles effective governance for the world without institutions with some supra-national characteristics at the global level. At a minimum, we require more creative thinking about more robust intergovernmental organizations. We also need more passionate (or less embarrassed) advocacy for steps leading toward elements of supra-nationality rather than hoping somehow that the decentralized system of states and a pooling of corporate and civil society efforts will ensure human survival and dignity.

Proponents of global governance—and it would be difficult to say that I am not in this category, having edited the journal with that title from 2000 to 2005—make a good-faith effort to emphasize how to best realize a stable, peaceful, and well-ordered international society in the absence of a unifying global authority. But this pragmatism also reflects an assumption that no powerful global institutions will appear any time soon, a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. But agency is essential; and better problem solving will not simply materialize without more muscular intergovernmental organizations, first and foremost those of the UN system.

Paradoxically, intergovernmental organizations seem more and more marginal to our thinking at exactly the moment when enhanced multilateralism is so sorely required. And ironically, this reality coincides with a period when globalization—and especially advances in information and communication technologies along with reduced barriers to transnational exchanges of goods, capital, and services, of people, ideas, and cultural influences—makes something resembling institutions with at least some characteristics of supra-nationality appear feasible. As Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry tell us, "the relentless imperatives of rising global interdependence create powerful and growing incentives for states to engage in international cooperation" (Deudney and Ikenberry 2009, 79). However, what gets lost as we struggle to comprehend an indistinct patchwork of authority is that current intergovernmental organizations are insufficient in scope and ambition, inadequate in resources and reach, and incoherent in policies and philosophies.

It is humbling to realize how much our aspirations have diminished, how feeble our current expectations are in comparison with earlier generations of analysts who did not shy away from elements of a world government and robust intergovernmental bodies. At Bretton Woods in 1944, 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 with one-sixth of annual world imports. As the late Hans Singer sardonically noted: "Today's Fund is only 2 per cent of annual world imports. The difference between Keynes's originally proposed 50 per cent and the actual 2 per cent is a measure of the degree to which our vision of international economic management has shrunk" (Singer 1995, 19).

While it is true that a denser network of institutions exists now than when Keynes was writing, the tasks that he sought to accomplish remain—indeed, the ongoing financial and economic crisis make the lacunae more obvious by the day. We must ask ourselves why we are satisfied that the contemporary intergovernmental organization with supposedly the sharpest economic enforcement

teeth is such a pale imitation of what the 20th-century's greatest economist thought desirable and plausible. While his big plans never panned out, what is required is not thinking bigger but making a quantum shift in thinking, not just an institutional thickening of the current international order but a different order.

Article 109 of the UN Charter foresaw a constitutional review of the world organization no later than 1955, but a two-thirds quorum has never been assembled to convene such a gathering. There were those who hoped that ten years would be sufficient to demonstrate that the United Nations was not up to the challenges facing the international system. So it may seem hazardous, and the epithet "Pollyannaish" undoubtedly will come my way, to assert that we now have reached a point that states will understand the need to federate in some fashion.

Nonetheless, it is time to reaffirm a belief that human beings are as strong as the problems that they have created, that they can pull together more powerful intergovernmental institutions. Craig Murphy encourages us, "the longer history of industry and international organizations indicates that the task of creating the necessary global institutions may be easier than many of today's liberal commentators believe" (1994, 9). His contention mirrors a poetic encouragement by the UN's second secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld: "Never measure the height of a mountain until you have reached the top. Then you will see how low it was" (1965, 7).

Are Anomalies No Longer Anomalous?

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn (1970, 4) outlined the process by which a dominant scientific paradigm—or "ways of seeing the world"—is replaced by a new one. Being on the outlook for unanticipated results creates both an awareness of possible deficiencies in a theory or existing paradigm. Puzzling anomalies have to be addressed through the generation of auxiliary hypotheses in order to explain an anomaly within that existing paradigm. If too many anomalies and too messy a web of auxiliary hypotheses arise, a new paradigm is required when "the anomalous has become the expected" (Kuhn 1970, 53). 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 anarchy still predicts much of international relations albeit amid a growing number of disconnects. Like Copernicus, however, we should stare at the same sun and planets that others have observed since 1648 but reframe the relations among them. Rarely do international systemic changes evolve in a linear fashion, but rather they usually are accompanied by discontinuities and contradictions (Jencks 1997). The malfunctioning of today's international system has not yet led to a new paradigm but rather to global governance, which helps us to understand what *is* happening but does not push us to determine what *should* happen. Many of us are willing to admit that we are living in a "post-Westphalian" moment—a label much like "post-Cold War"—which accurately indicates that we are leaving behind the era begun in 1648 but provides neither a catchy nor an accurate label for what follows.

Like the United Nations itself, global governance is a bridge between the old and the as yet unborn. It cannot solve those pesky problems without passports that are staring us in the face—global warming, genocide, nuclear proliferation, migration, money-laundering, terrorism, and worldwide pandemics like AIDS.

If someone is a Westphalian pessimist—an image I borrow from Richard Falk (2006)—she should feel free to eat, drink, and be merry as nuclear apocalypse is inevitable shortly before or after the planet’s average temperature increases by several degrees. And if someone is a post-Westphalian pessimist, he might as well do the same because globalization’s inequities and proliferation of lethal technologies will lead to a different kind of chaos and undermine or even doom civilization as we know it.

Nonetheless, I still firmly believe that human beings can organize themselves to solve global problems. There are numerous ways to think about an eventual supra-national global entity, and human agency is an essential element for every one. Westphalian optimists consist of those who believe that the state system can be adapted and eventually modified; they possess a basic Kantian faith in the warming of international relations. For them, the combined spread of trade and economic progress along with the consensual strengthening of existing international organizations ultimately will result in a world state. David Held (2004) is the best example of a Westphalian optimist, whose vision is more humanistic and less militaristic than those of other observers (see also Rodrik 2000; Went 2002).

Post-Westphalian optimists like Peter Singer (2004) see globalization as creating a context for global unity in which sovereign states no longer will represent the outer limits of political community and ethical obligations—and his version, like Willkie’s and Nehru’s, is called “one world” (see also Crabera 2006; Pojman 2006). Over time, there will be voluntary actions by governments and peoples—akin to what is happening in the European Union—and this gradual process could eventually result in important elements of a world federal government. Singer recognizes the dangers of a lumbering institutional behemoth and potential tyranny—indeed, even the existing United Nations is anathema to extremist libertarians, some of whom still imagine it as a plot to take over the world and destroy individual freedoms. Singer nonetheless sees the growing influence of transnational social forces as making possible a different kind of post-Westphalian global unity.

As either a Westphalian or a post-Westphalian optimist—I vacillate between the two—global government rather than global governance is the missing component of future analytical perspectives. If, as Kenneth Boulding told us, we are where we are because we got there, then we will remain there without an alternative vision. A clear link exists between our aspirations, on the one hand, and our policies, institutions, and accomplishments, on the other. My late friend Sergio Vieira de Mello, who died in the attack on UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003, put it differently: “Unless we aim for the seemingly unattainable, we risk settling for mediocrity” (De Mello 2007, 9).

Perhaps as much as any recent event, the global financial and economic meltdown that began last year, which the late John Kenneth Galbraith (1954) might well have dubbed “the great crash, 2008,” made even clearer what many less serious previous crises had not—namely the risks, problems, and enormous costs of a global economy without adequate international institutions, democratic decision making, and powers to bring order, spread risks, and enforce compliance. “The global financial and political crises are, in fact, closely related,” no less an observer than Henry Kissinger (2009) wrote on Inauguration Day, but the financial collapse “made evident the absence of global institutions to cushion the shock.”

Most countries, and especially the major powers, are not ready to accept the need for elements of global government and the inroads that this would entail for their own autonomy. Nonetheless, the logic of interdependence and a growing number of systemwide and life-threatening crises place this possibility more squarely on the international agenda and make parts of a world federal government an idea that is both necessary and possible.

Conclusion

We need a big international vision from the Obama administration (see Weiss 2009b). In nominating his confidante Susan Rice as ambassador to the United Nations and by restoring the post's cabinet status, Obama not only announced that the United States has rejoined the world and is ready to reengage with all member states, but also he acknowledged what is evident to most people on the planet who were not in the ideological bubble of the Bush administration, namely "that the global challenges we face demand global institutions that work" (Obama 2008). Or as Strobe Talbott, the president of the Brookings Institution and former U.S. deputy secretary of state, has written, "mega-threats can be held at bay in the crucial years immediately ahead only through multilateralism on a scale far beyond anything the world has achieved to date" (2008, 395).

The new president excels in political imagination and the articulation of his vision for meaningful change, and he should draw on his skills for two communications challenges in the United States. First, he understands one of the major tenets of democracy, which is essential to building the next world order as well, namely that disagreements over priorities and policy choices have to be resolved through consensus on process. Some criticize his willingness to negotiate with domestic adversaries. This is not a sign of weakness; and internationally, it is a prerequisite to moving beyond evaporating American hegemony. With power shifting, the United Nations is no longer a detour that delays but rather a destination that enriches U.S. options and influence.

Second, he also must help overcome what can only be described as the appalling public ignorance, especially among members of Congress, about why the UN agglomeration works the way that it does. Why, despite its weaknesses, does it have a presence in every trouble spot and in every emerging issue that anyone can spot? In the contemporary world, U.S. diplomats as well as the public need to understand the usefulness of setting goals, seeking cooperative programs (even those that never are executed as is hardly unknown in governments, militaries, and businesses), and thinking of global policies as a better way of keeping alive than trotting out the tanks.

It is not enough that the United Nations be made to work; it must be seen to work for all. And Obama may be the leader who makes Americans and other citizens of the world agree on the need for a new grand bargain, a third generation of international organizations. The choreography of a grand bargain is delicate. It happens in stages, with each side giving up something to get something. The era of unending U.S. gains through the application of unilateral power is over, but there can be addition by subtraction. Compromises that preserve a substantial degree of U.S. persuasiveness in the long term are worth giving up some power in the short term.

There are of course still many members of the contemporary flat-earth society, the John Bolton's and John Yoo's for whom the mere mention of even "the benignly labeled 'global governance'" is anathema (Bolton and Yoo 2009). However, those whose ears do not pick up any humming noise of black helicopters but rather a loud collective sigh of relief with the prospect for enhanced international cooperation under an Obama administration are obliged to ask whether anything that resembles effective global governance can occur without something that looks much more like government at the global level. We certainly should be pragmatic in two ways: by respecting subsidiarity, the commonsensical principle that higher levels of society should not take on tasks and functions that can be accomplished better at lower levels; and by customizing solutions rather than hoping for one-size-fits-all solutions. At a bare minimum, however, we require more creative thinking about more robust global organizations. It is certainly not far-fetched to imagine that over the coming decades we will see a gradual

advance of intergovernmental economic agreements including a global currency along the lines that Europe has nurtured since the Second World War. Who would not have been denounced as a crank seven decades ago for thinking that political and economic union were possible among France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other European states?

And the scent of reinvention is beginning to be in the air. For example, in January 2008 U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2008) argued before business leaders in New Delhi: "To succeed now and in the future, the post-war rules of the game, the post-war international institution, fit for the Cold War and for a world of just 50 states, must be radically reformed to fit our world of globalisation where there are 200 states, an emerging single marketplace, unprecedented individual autonomy and the increasing power of informal networks across the world." In the midst of the ongoing financial crisis, President George W. Bush pulled together a "G-20" because the G-7/8 did not include the countries that now account for most of world economic growth or credit. The Council on Foreign Relations has a new, multiyear program on International Institutions and Global Governance World Order in the 21st Century; and its journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article at the outset of 2009 on "Reshaping the World Order," which argues that "the United States has the means and the motive to spearhead the foundation of a new institutional order" (Brooks and Wohlforth 2009, 50). In December 2008, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted "Present at the Creation 2.0: How Reinventing the International System Could Become One of the Central Legacies of the Obama Administration." Robert Hormats and David Rothkopf, two mainstays at Beltway seminars, argued that "the United States cannot effectively or affordably achieve its goals without restoring, renovating, or in some cases reinventing the multilateral mechanisms available to it in each major policy area" (Hormats and Rothkopf 2008, 1).

The reference to Dean Acheson's autobiography is especially apt because Washington was not only present at the creation (Acheson 1969; Chase 1998) of but actually led the post-World War II efforts to construct a second generation of international organizations to promote peace and prosperity after the collapse of the League of Nations and the Great Depression. Now, we urgently require the next generation of international institutions or at least to revise the largely outmoded architectural drawings for existing ones and introduce 21st-century building-codes.

Looking back on a "remarkable generation of leaders and public servants," Sir Brian Urquhart recalls earlier U.S. leaders who "were pragmatic idealists more concerned about the future of humanity than the outcome of the next election; and they understood that finding solutions to postwar problems was much more important than being popular with one or another part of the American electorate" (Urquhart 2005, 42). Could that same far-sighted political commitment of 1945 dawn again under the Obama administration, if not in 2009, then at least by the end of a second term?

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