

MOVING TOWARD A NEW WORLD GOVERNANCE

Text prepared for the China-Europa Forum 2010 by
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When it ceased to be a political institution, feudalism had remained the most important of our civil institutions. Reduced to this capacity, it kindled even more hatred, and we can truly say that by destroying part of the institutions of the Middle Ages, we had made those that were left a hundred times more odious.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution*, 1856¹

Alexis de Tocqueville's well-known line of thinking, reflected in this quote, in the context of the French Revolution is a powerful designation of the paradox of all revolutions, which is that they are actually triggered when things begin to improve and not, as is generally believed, when they have deteriorated beyond repair. In other words, it is when a rigid system opens up that its stiffness becomes hardest to accept, all the more so when the opening is only partial, as is usually the case. All the great revolutions that have succeeded one another since 1789 have tended to corroborate this analysis, as in Russia, where the revolutionary momentum found its source in the social opening sought by the Czar Alexander II, and in Iran, where the Islamic Revolution built its nest in the half-baked modernization measures promulgated by the Shah.

What about major geopolitical revolutions? There is far from being a host of revolutions in this area. Nonetheless, the same pattern roughly applies

¹ Non-published translation from the French for this paper

to the major geopolitical revolution that gave birth to the system of international relations that has underpinned European, then global geopolitics. The Westphalian revolution—since this is what it was—put an end to the hegemony of the imperial system and to the antagonism between the church and the state, while laying the foundations of the modern state, international law, and the balance-of-power system, a system fundamentally flawed but that worked with some success until 1914. In fact, the Westphalian system was an indirect, ulterior consequence of a particularly violent century, of the semi-resolutions of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, a peace made of compromises that in the end stirred up tensions within a Europe in crisis, a crisis that continued to brew and finally exploded in a bloodbath with the horror of the Thirty Years' War (1618 - 1648).

We are not going to compare completely different epochs here. Nevertheless, today, as at the turn of the seventeenth century, we are incontestably in a period in which we have broken away from a now vanished former order—insofar as “order” can apply to the Cold War—a period in which the world is seeking a new order, seeking, in short, a governance yet to be found, that will be capable of apprehending the moment's problems, anticipating tomorrow's crises, and writing day-after-tomorrow's history. In other words, seeking a governance system adapted to a henceforth globalized world, a “world governance” that will allow collective problems to be managed collectively and will take into account the interdependence that today defines relations among all peoples.

The Westphalian period ended with thirty years of serious crises, which in turn led to the institution of the United Nations but also to the Cold War,

which constituted, through its extreme polarization and its inherent nuclear threat, a geostrategic anomaly that paradoxically produced a certain form of peace, which lasted in its imperfection until the downfall of the Soviet Union. But the Cold War, an “impossible peace and improbable [world] war” in the words of the philosopher Raymond Aron, being indefinable, it was not able to generate a complete overhaul of the system when it died a natural death. To an uncertain war comes uncertain peace, we might say. This is why the present situation is actually closer to the Augsburg compromise than to the Westphalian revolution, with all the risks this implies for the future.

And we are in fact currently in a period of deep questioning, given that one after the other, all international cooperation efforts have failed. The Oslo Accords have not made to the thorny problem of the Middle East progress; the Doha round for economic liberalization has failed for the fifth time; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change began its long cycle with the semi-success of Kyoto, only to dash against the Copenhagen fiasco; the nuclear non-proliferation conference that has raised some hope with promises from Obama is likely to fail. Nothing, anywhere, at all serious or complete has been adopted in terms of regulating financial movements, tax havens, derivative products, nor even the untenable remunerations of bankers, which, with renewed vigor, have taken off again.

To an unprecedented situation come unprecedented remedies. At least, ideally. For we cannot really make a clean slate of the past, and proven methods of governance are those to which we are naturally attached. Today, three systems for the collective management of global problems seem to be competing against one another without, taken together, even

covering the whole range of increasingly numerous problems we are facing today and none of which, taken alone, makes it possible to consider truly overhauling global governance.

Three transnational governance systems

The first of these systems, in importance and age, the system of powers, founded on the intelligence of the correlation of forces, or even on the balance of power, favors managing collective problems through a “collaborative” competition among the major powers of the moment. This is also commonly called the “multipolar” system. The end of the Cold War and the emergence or reemergence of countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Russia have supported the idea that the planet could be guided, not to say controlled by a small collective of powerful countries who would see “good global governance” as a way promulgating their respective national interests while making humankind’s cause progress—and protecting a global geopolitical status quo. History has shown, however, that this well-known type of system is deeply flawed, as one of the major-league powers inevitably attempts at some point to reverse the status quo to its advantage. And while the vision of power as inescapably predatory refers us to a Western model sustained by Thucydides’s analysis—a model that would not necessarily be adopted, for example, by the Chinese—the facts have shown that the balance of power is often a precarious balance, and what’s more, that it favors the mighty to the detriment of the weak.

Even so, compared to the vision of the hegemony of a single country over the rest of the world—like that of the United States in the 1990s and 2000s—which sends us back to the imperial model, the “multipolar”

alternative seems to mark some progress from the recent past. Today, the system is organized around the G8 and the G20, the latter now outranking the former. Progress, but not a revolution, because this system is still based upon the nation-state, the principle of inviolability of national sovereignty, and a rigid pecking order of the powers, no matter that the circle of the privileged has been made wider. Moreover, this system constitutes a reality, in fact an important reality, and it would be dangerous to minimize its reach: in the twenty-first century, the world is still largely governed by the power struggle, for better and for worse.

The second system, the one rather simplistically called the “collective security” system, is much newer. Philosophically, it dates back to the eighteenth century, and to the twentieth for its implementation.

Historically, it signifies meaningful progress from to the charity model, which was the first sign of a common world reference (Red Cross, Geneva Conventions, etc.) and emerged in the wake of the 1870 Franco-Prussian War.

Today, as we all know, it is embodied by the United Nations. Often criticized, and often rightly so in fact, the UN has nonetheless succeeded in setting up a lasting procedure to manage problems related to war and peace, economic development, and tomorrow, environmental security. This procedure, although of limited scope, has proven all the same that it is possible to manage the moment’s problems collectively. Featuring a permanent and unchangeable Security Council, the system could hardly be said to be truly “democratic,” but it is more so than the former one.

The UN, which is expected to solve an ever-expanding range of problems without providing it a fraction of the means it would need to do so,

remains one of the cornerstones of tomorrow's world governance. Over the past decades, some of its shortfalls have been offset by the rise in power of international judiciary institutions (special courts, International Criminal Court).

Its current deficiencies, partly connected to the fact that non-binding law does not have the force that the UN would require, are a daily reminder that the UN, as is constantly repeated, needs to be reformed. Although the UN has changed over the years, it has not yet shown that it is capable of in-depth transformation. This is due above all to the inherent limits of collective-security systems, which are that they are completely based on the states that constitute the system. States, for a multitude of reasons including their complicated relations with one another, are those preventing the in-depth transformations that would give greater scope to the system, even though they are an integral part of it.

Just as the UN overrode the League of Nations in 1945 before supplanting it (in 1946), will we witness the birth of a third global collective-security organization, a sort of third-generation model for the twenty-first century? At the moment, there is nothing pointing to this possibility. The UN will therefore continue to play the role that it has had since it was instituted, but it will have to evolve, even simply to maintain its rank.

This will require improving the organization by limiting the right of veto, enlarging the Security Council, increasing its means for appraisal, setting up an economic-security council, and establishing a global environmental organization. There should also be more recourse to the General Assembly and to consensus conferences. Ideally, a Declaration of

Interdependence should have to be adopted under the principle that a *common destiny calls for the proclamation of the principle of global intersolidarity*, i.e., the recognition of diversity founded on a spirit of tolerance and pluralism, and on the organization of integration processes associating the various stakeholders representing individuals, power-wielding organizations, states, and what is more generally designated as the “international community.”

The third model, that of the European Union (EU), also has its philosophical roots in the European Enlightenment. For its implementation, however, it draws its energy from the negative experience of three decades of crisis around two world wars, somewhat like the Treaty of Westphalia had found its drive for peace in the (“first”) Thirty Years’ War. There is no other example in history of a system (that of the EU) that turned as quickly as it did, by other means than force, a zone of resentment and quasi-perpetual war into a region of solid, stable, and sustainable peace and cooperation. In many respects, the EU challenged a good number of practices and preconceptions on state politics. Most of all, it demonstrated that solidarity among states and peoples is not an empty word, the EU having proven that privileged nations can make significant efforts to integrate less favored countries into a collective institution.

Can, however, the European model, already strained by an extremely rapid enlargement of the EU, be applied on a world scale? For the moment, the passage from a European Union to a world union seems very distant. The same is true for an assembly of regional unions, especially as, what with the financial crisis, indebtedness, persistent unemployment, the aggravation of political and cultural cleavages, just the EU already

has a big job ahead to get out of its current rut. But from a philosophical point of view, the idea of a world government based on the EU model reconciles us with an idea that, since Hobbes's *Leviathan*, has been somewhat unattractive and mostly suggested an almighty and authoritarian global state.

From the principle of sovereignty to the principle of interdependence

Other than their more-or-less openly displayed determination to generate peace and stability, these three systems, both competing and complementary at the same time, have one point in common: all three are articulated from the perspective of the state and national sovereignty, each with a specific approach to sovereignty, either placing it at the heart of the problem, or trying to transcend it in some way or another while placing it as a prerequisite to the development of an international or transnational (but not supranational) management system. Article 2.7 of Chapter 1 of the UN Charter, which in a way takes up the concept of inviolability of national sovereignty from the Westphalian Treaties, is exemplary on this point.²

To move beyond the principle of sovereignty without naively advocating the end of the nation-state: this is the crux of the problem in world governance today. As underscored by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk: "Meanwhile, nations remain dangerous entities because not one in them is ready yet to sacrifice the advantages they have acquired within this container of the good life in order to acquire protections of a

² "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter. . ."

higher order.”³ It is true that even though the nation-state is at times at a loss or ineffective when it comes to facing the problems of the moment, it is still the central actor of transnational governance. Its role is vital, if only because without the state, society disintegrates dangerously, as can be observed here and there, with disastrous effects on the people and on the international community (as in the case of Somalia). Nonetheless, it is also imperative that countries adapt to globalization, while often the opposite effect occurs, which is to push countries into withdrawing into themselves for fear of losing a little of their sovereignty or identity. To illustrate this withdrawal symptom, we can observe that today borders are much more rigid than they were formerly.

And yet, although the principle of sovereignty (and its inviolability) has constituted the fundamental theme in international relations since the seventeenth century, today the principle of interdependence is the one that must play the role of main principle in a global governance worthy of its name. And this principle should have the value of universal standard. The principle of interdependence is the one that should be governing the thinking and development of new standards and new procedures, perhaps new institutional forms too.

The development of a world governance articulated around the principle of interdependence translates in its implementation as a systematic approach necessarily based on consensus work. The ethical and political bases of such a governance are to be sought in a feeling of *responsibility* and *solidarity* of a global order, all of this in a spirit of *plurality*, *dignity* and *sustainability*, i.e., what could be designated as the “*five pillars of a global governance for the twenty-first century*.”

³ French daily *Libération*, March 13, 2010.

Just as the Founding Fathers of the United States reinvented democracy by instituting an efficient system of checks and balances (which is in fact found earlier in other cultures: the Mapuches of Chile and the Iroquois, for instance), we need today to develop solutions through as broad a consensus as possible while obtaining all the actors' approval, which is necessary for their cooperation. The task is titanic because it requires legitimizing the exercise of this power, as much as conforming to the democratic ideal and exercising citizenship, and because these forms of governance also need to be developed, not as rigid institutional forms but according to a principle of effectiveness and competence, for which it is difficult in the first place to define the criteria. Above all, this new architecture needs to be able to coordinate relations and cooperation among the various types of actors and stakeholders. Finally, this global governance needs to be compatible and complementary with all other forms of governance: local, national, regional, and continental.

The development of a true global-governance system, however, logically requires putting to the floor all the thought forms underlying the construction of a new architecture of governance that would reflect the plurality of the planet. Hence, confronting thought systems constitutes the first step in the direction of building global governance. The problem is obviously not just to compare or confront thought forms but to flesh out the blueprint of truly universal and plural thought on the drawing board of tomorrow's world. In other words, not only does knowledge need to be globalized, but as very precisely stated by the French-Chinese Chen Lichuan, it is also necessary: "to conceive a symbiosis of civilizations in which the best of each civilization will have secured a place at the high table and which is specifically about reconciling two approaches to

human society, one based on rights, the other on knowing how to live together (another way of referring to a ‘harmonious society’), and finding a balance between collective spirit, community requirement, and the need for individual autonomy and independence.”