

By Harlan Cleveland



# RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

*Coalition Politics in an  
Unruly World*

The United Nations — whose General Assembly is shown meeting here — has provided fruitful lessons for reshaping future international governance.

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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



# RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

## *Coalition Politics in an Unruly World*

A DISTINGUISHED

INTERNATIONAL-AFFAIRS

EXPERT LOOKS AT THE

STATE OF WORLD AFFAIRS

AND DISCUSSES THE

POTENTIAL FOR DRAMATIC

CHANGE IN THE FUTURE.

Knowledge has always been power.

The wide spread of knowledge produced much progress for the growing educated fraction of the human race. But its thoughtless exercise also produced dirty air and water, more and more powerful weapons, and a rising backlash of second thoughts about the waste, danger, and unfairness that seemed to be the handmaidens of this progress.

The current cacophony of change — the “democracy movement” in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the “greening” of politics and business, the debating of settled assumptions, and the pushiness of people wanting a voice in their own destiny — is the natural consequence of getting hundreds of millions of people educated to think for themselves and to learn to use modern information technologies.

The opportunities are enormous for what the United Nations Charter calls “peace and security” and “better standards of life in larger freedom.” There are also plenty of age-old miseries to tackle afresh: shocking contrasts of poverty and affluence, human hunger in the face of technological plenty, and injustice and bigotry.

### Forces for Change

Knowledge brings with it a number of forces for change in world affairs:

• **Explosive power.** A generation of mutual deterrence taught the two major nuclear powers that their “ultimate weapons” were ultimately unusable. Nuclear strategy became an information game, with deployment, arms negotiations, and crisis management among the counters in the game. The spread of nuclear weapons now creates a need for multilateral deterrence. And the speed and complexity of crisis information systems, shortening reaction time and greatly expanding the number of options available, heightens the danger of suicidal acts by political leaders.

• **Biotechnology.** A world economy built more around bioresources could be a fairer world. Much of the world’s supply of biomass and life-giving radiation from the sun are located in the tropical and subtropical lands where most of the world’s poorer people live. Their poverty is not of physical resources but of knowing how to use them. Developing countries could shift comparative advantage in their favor by educating their citizens to help them understand their biotechnological potentials.



• **Communication.** The miracles of information technology could be used to reinforce control by the few and technological unemployment for the many. But they can also be used to provide new chances and choices. A society with better communications among citizens and between citizens and government will put a higher premium on early education and lifelong learning; its style of governance will be consultation and consensus, and its society will live by an ethic of dynamism and fairness rather than equilibrium and "fitting in."

"The line between 'domestic' and 'international' is irretrievably blurred."

• **Ecology.** The lesson of the mutual relations between organisms and their environment is basic and brutal: We interdepend or perish. Widening awareness of the dangers to global systems is creating a consensus that we had better protect and enhance the human environment we hold in common. The ecological ethic is not "limits to growth" but rather limits to thoughtlessness, waste, and neglect — which imply limits to poverty and affluence, limits to depletion and degradation of resources, and limits to the scale of armed conflicts about resources, religion, cultural identity, or anything else.

• **Fairness.** As information becomes the world's dominant resource, fairness increasingly depends on encouraging learning, permitting people to think for themselves, and rewarding brainwork above all. Fairness is a function of human rights and development. "International human rights" has become the first truly global political philosophy. But development — economic growth with fairness — is not universal. The basic fairness gap is between those who have access to modern knowledge and those who don't.

• **Cultural identity.** The desire to identify with a congenial "we" against a presumably hostile "they"

is a primordial urge. The clashes of ancient religions and modern ambitions, of self-conscious ethnicity and professional solidarity, bear witness to the "inward pull of community." Far from melding the world's rich variety of cultures into a homogeneous lump, the global technologies that make us one world also help intensify a whirlwind of conflict among groups, peoples, and nations. The more congested the world, the more cultural diversity and identity must be provided for.

• **Participation.** The dominant metaphor of our time is "the right to choose." All around the world, people are breaking away from authoritarian rule because they observe that where political choice works, however messily, citizens seem to live better, with more chances to choose their personal futures. To accommodate the growing numbers of people who insist on participating in the decisions that affect them, leadership will have to be more consensual and future institutions of governance at every level will have to be loose and pluralistic.

#### World Problems Are Interconnected

The line between "domestic" and "international" is irretrievably blurred, and various forms of cross-border intervention — some uninvited and some by invitation — are required for reasons of security or humanity or both.

On human rights, agreed-upon worldwide norms are spelled out in much international law. But the main instrument of cross-border intervention has been information, mostly purveyed by courageous and persistent nongovernmental organizations.

Where there is a breakdown of governance (Lebanon and Cambodia are recent examples), outsiders especially concerned may need to intervene to restrain partisan violence, help build new frameworks for governance, and provide resources and technical help.

The main dangers to world security are likely to start with turbulence and terror in the poorer countries, driven by resentments about economic fairness and cultural conflict. In these conflicts, 85%–90% of the casualties are civilians, most of them

children. World security requires that we organize to anticipate, deter, and mediate regional conflict, manage crises, mediate ancient quarrels where possible, isolate those that cannot yet be settled, stop wars when they break out, and restore peace after it is broken.

International terrorism — threatening or detaining or mistreating or murdering innocent bystanders for purposes of extortion — is of growing concern in international affairs. No government can even pretend to protect all its citizens wherever they are — especially if they insist on staying in a dangerous locale after warnings are given. But if governments refuse to be swayed by the plight of their kidnapped citizens, the hostages become less valuable, and travelers and workers outside their own countries are correspondingly safer.

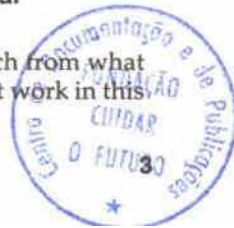
The drug epidemic requires a major international effort on all three parts of the problem — demand, production, and trading. Bankers, educators, social agencies, and police forces — all key to attacking the drug epidemic — could organize internationally and thereby persuade their governments that this scourge needs to be taken more seriously.

There are almost as many international refugees (15 million) as there were just after World War II and an equal number of displaced persons chased from their homes inside their own countries. A permanent U.N. agency, along the lines of the U.N. High Commission on Refugees, should be set up to ensure the temporary care of people unable to return to their homes but not yet able to be resettled.

Coping with catastrophe is another cross-border function that needs more professional attention and international cooperation. Disasters will occur due to both natural causes (earthquakes, floods) and human inadvertence (Bhopal, Chernobyl). Disaster relief requires ready funding, forces and facilities in place, and the executive energy to deploy them in a hurry, in large operations in unknown places at unpredictable times.

#### Rethinking International Systems

We have learned much from what worked and what didn't work in this





century's first two tries at "world order" — the League of Nations after 1919 and the United Nations after 1945. We have a chance now to revise the flawed assumptions on which the United Nations was built: that the world is truly a "community," that the major powers who won World War II would squash aggression by always working together, that the Western parliamentary model would apply (with nations substituted for individuals), and that the United Nations would be a way station to some kind of world government — which could too easily have become another form of oppressive authority.

The fruitful lessons of the United Nations' 46 years are found in bits and pieces, in its parcels of functional operations. Some of these are in highly political arenas, such as the codification of human rights or the unremitting pressure on South Africa to end apartheid. But most of the bright spots in international cooperation show up where new technologies make win-win situations possible — and restrain the temptation of political leaders to score debating points instead of deciding to do together what can only be done together.

Most of the daily news about international cooperation is its absence: distrust, suspicion, controversy, conflict, terrorism, and war. But many international systems — ranging from weather forecasting and international civil aviation to transnational investment and international health-care efforts — are working more or less the way they are supposed to work.

International cooperation works when there is a consensus on desired outcomes, when it's clear that no one loses, and when sovereignty is pooled rather than argued about. It takes special effort by national citizens willing to take the lead as international people.

In all the success stories, modern information technologies have been of the essence. Also, nongovernmental organizations have played key roles. Flexible, "uncentralized" management seems to work best, and the education of "local talent" is essential.

From a mix of world experience and universal aspirations, we can derive some guidelines for this "new try" at organizing international systems, the third in the twentieth cen-



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tury. For example, experience shows us that, under a workable system, no one country or individual is going to be "in charge." Experience has also shown us that nations, like people, can agree on next steps to be taken together if they can avoid arguments about why they are agreeing.

Some norms are already widely accepted, and violations are dramatic because they are rare. These include territorial integrity, the immunity of diplomatic missions and civilian aircraft and ships, and the obligation to

Information technology such as this satellite communications dish could provide better communications between nations.

help refugees. Slavery and colonial rule are effectively banned. Also on its way out, much more slowly, is overt official discrimination against people for being different. There is also a striking unanimity of agreement on avoiding a third world war, on protecting the air and the earth from further degradation, and on the





F-4C fighter planes on patrol. In the post-Cold War era, reductions in both nuclear weapons and conventional forces will be possible.

NATIONAL GUARD

## National and World Security

National security is a function of world security, and world security is "well-managed conflict." We must now rethink in fundamental ways the elements of a workable world security system.

It has long been evident that the sudden increase in explosive power has clamped a lid on the scale of human warfare. The eerie confrontation of two superpowers, playing an information game with their huge stockpiles of unusable weapons, is giving way to a world of plural powers made more volatile and crisis prone by the spread of knowledge. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the world coalition it brought into being, and the role of the U.N. Security Council in that coalition building illustrate both the perils and the possibilities of a world that has mutated beyond a Cold War.

Radical nuclear disarmament is

now in the realm of the possible. The short-range tactical nuclear weaponry in Europe has been an "emperor without clothes" since the 1960s and is already scheduled to be removed. Only enough long-range strategic nuclear weapons need be kept by the United States and the Soviet Union to deter their use by one another — a few hundred at most. The pollution of outer space with nuclear weapons should be effectively banned.

Steep reductions in conventional forces are also possible. First steps in this direction are still plagued by conventional technical disputes. But the traditional lethargy of arms-control negotiations should not be allowed to stand in the way of bringing U.S. military deployments in Europe into line with Europe's fast-changing politics.

To create a system of multilat-

eral deterrence, the world community, acting through the U.N. Security Council, should declare that first use of a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon is an act against civilization and authorize retaliation on behalf of civilization by other nations under the self-defense and collective-defense provision (Article 51) of the U.N. Charter. The certainty of judgment, combined with uncertainty about when its enforcement might come, is a proven means of deterrence.

Even the threat to use exotic weaponry might trigger the removal by international action of a nation's capacity to wage war with any exotic weaponry. If the ancient and often honorable principle of nonintervention is not set aside in such cases, the victim might be civilization itself.

—Harlan Cleveland

ambition that no child should go to bed hungry.

### Building New Institutions

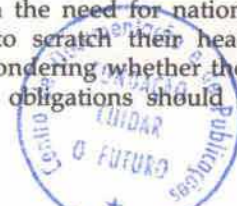
In every part of the international system, what works best is a wide consensus on norms and standards, leaving to uncentralized systems the task of carrying ideas into action. "Consensus" doesn't mean unanimous consent. It means the acquiescence of those who care, supported by the apathy of those who don't. The lack of centralization means

there is much more room for "coalitions of the willing" and for non-governmental organizations of many kinds.

In building global institutions, we will have to get beyond the traditional U.N. formula — committees of sovereigns with a staff. Where an international capacity to act is of the essence, an extranational institution is more likely to be effective. It features a strong but collective executive that is able, from an international platform, to do policy analysis,

negotiate consensus on norms and standards, keep a watchful eye on how markets and managers are carrying out agreed policies, and blow the whistle in public when such policies aren't carried out.

The finances of ongoing international functions — such as peacekeeping, development aid, and environmental protection — must be set free from the need for national legislatures to scratch their heads each year, pondering whether their international obligations should be





funded. A stream of funds for such purposes should be created by international taxes on functions that crucially depend on the maintenance of a peaceful world: travel, transportation, communications, international transactions, and the use of the global commons (Earth's oceans, its atmosphere, Antarctica, and outer space).

The purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter are still a good guide for the third try at organizing international systems. But many of the Charter's procedures are outdated obstacles to cooperation and will have to be bypassed in the future of international governance. For example, U.N. peacekeeping is already done in ways not spelled out in the Charter yet consonant with its purposes. Nongovernmental organizations, largely ignored in the Charter, will play major roles in the policy analysis and consensus building that will guide most of the world's work: preventing armed conflict, regulating the world economy, and enhancing the human environment.

#### **A Worldwide Crisis-Information Network**

Managing crises now requires a worldwide crisis-information network. Space satellites, for observation and communication, can keep the world apprised of most military-related movements. Computer teleconferencing and satellite broadcasting can also play a role. But the key role will still be played by individuals who have to organize the data into information, integrate it into their knowledge base, use their intuition, and derive from all this the wisdom to foresee conflict and work to mediate and moderate it.

Conflict resolution usually needs a "third party" instantly available to talk frankly with and listen hard to both (or many) disputants. Heads of governments and U.N. secretaries general have done this, themselves or through personal representatives. There are also international courts and arbitrators. But what is needed is an international panel of conciliators, experienced people known for their independence of spirit and skill in human relations, designated ahead of time by the United Nations, who agree to drop immediately what-

**"Conflict resolution usually needs a 'third party' instantly available to talk frankly with and listen hard to both...disputants."**

ever else they may be doing and act for the community of nations in defusing or resolving an international conflict.

U.N. peacekeeping forces have already chalked up some notable successes. But training and funding have been left to ad hoc arrangements, different for each case as it comes up. It's high time that peacekeeping become an established part of the U.N. system, funded by the world community as a whole and recruiting and training military personnel from as many countries as possible.

#### **A Nobody-in-Charge World**

The movers and shakers in our unruly world will still be the political democracies and their market economies and the smaller countries that choose to associate with them. But their troubles at home bedevil the leaders' capabilities both to cooperate and to lead.

The United States is still first among equals: The Iraq crisis bears witness. But U.S. financial and industrial mismanagement have made it impossible for Americans to "lead with the purse." The most important thing Americans can do to create a world system that works is to get their own economic house in order.

The European Community is soon to become the world's largest single market — and potentially its greatest economic power. But Europe is a long way from having a "European" foreign and security policy; the continent is still a determined diversity of cultures and connections in search of a unified world view. But Europe is likely, in time, to act as one of several great powers in world affairs.

Japan is caught between its reluctance to lead and the world's assumption that Japan's wealth obliges it to step forward in dozens of contexts as a major partner in the United Nations, in peacekeeping coalitions, in international banks and funds, and in refugee relief and resettlement. Hard work and astute business strategies, the hallmarks of Japan's success, will sharpen these dilemmas, not cause them to go away.

The internal reforms anticipated to take place during the 1990s in the

#### **Developing-Nation Debt**

Developing-nation debt — more than \$1 trillion — can be seen as an unconscious conspiracy of careless lending by governments and international banks to political leaders careless of the future needs for repayment. By now the outcome is more than obvious: The debt burden will have to be lifted from developing countries by a major act of international statesmanship, so that in partnership with the creditors these nations can generate a real "war on poverty."

The existing developing-country debt is already discounted on world markets to something less than one-third of its face value. By one stratagem or another, much of this debt will be written off. But a goodly share can be repaid by developing countries in *their own currencies*, to be spent by agreement on development projects within each debtor country that are recognized to be internationally valuable.

The debt is thus "swapped" for local performance, funded by the local-currency accounts, with projects ranging from the protection of recognized global treasures such as rain forests to the start-up of new research and development efforts. Such a focus on national resources of global value will attract contributions and investments from abroad, with the scent not of "aid" but of "jointness."

—Harlan Cleveland



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Soviet Union and Eastern Europe depend heavily on those nations' cooperation with industrial democracies and their knowledge-driven economies and on aid, loans, invest-

ment, and technical help from their more-dynamic world neighbors. Uncertainties about Western and Japanese relations with the Soviet Union will be further complicated by the wholesale revision of relations between the Kremlin and the newly feisty Soviet republics. That internal crisis makes unpredictable the pace of both conventional and nuclear disarmament and thus the Soviet role in the world security system.

China's aging leaders still don't believe the advice that Gorbachev gave them in 1989 (but didn't take seriously enough himself): You can't loosen up the economy without loosening up the political system, too. Until that lesson sinks in, with all it implies for change and reform,

China will be marginal in the world economy and (except for its veto vote in the U.N. Security Council) in world politics as well.

Among the developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, no leading champion yet stands out. These countries will contain the great bulk of the world's population. Continued rapid growth of population in developing countries risks increasing their dependence on the industrial democracies — and also risks generating resentful behavior that threatens the delicate networks of the global knowledge economy.

The hope for healthy growth-with-fairness and for regional security arrangements lies not in the developing nations clubbing together to confront the world's richer minority, but in natural groupings of more-developed and less-developed countries. For example, the United States and Canada will be associated anew with Mexico, the Caribbean, northern South America, and the richer world of America south of the Amazon.

#### **A "Club" of Democracies**

As the Cold War fizzled out, all sorts of world-scale issues elbowed their way to center stage. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the global coalition it brought into being, is the most dramatic of these. But many others were evident: eruptions of long-suppressed ambitions for cultural identity in Eastern Europe; the need for international machinery to anticipate, deter, and resolve conflicts around the world; the probability of vast, unprecedented migrations of people; and the need for education, which affects the behavior of whole populations.

Issues such as these become a collective responsibility. Our nobody-in-charge world system will now require a more consensual style of leadership, featuring less command and compliance and more consultation and compromise.

Each issue requires action by a different community of those concerned. A "club" of democracies is now becoming the gyroscope for world security, the world economy, and world development. It is a consultative grouping of those willing and able to act together, with a different mix of leadership for different is-



Antarctica — and its penguins — should be seen as part of a "global commons" and protected as such.

GLEIZES / GREENPEACE

## **The Global Commons**

Managing human activities in the global commons — Earth's oceans, its atmosphere, Antarctica, and outer space — offers a very large new field for new forms of international cooperation. These endangered physical environments impinge on each other; they affect each other's geophysical and biochemical behavior.

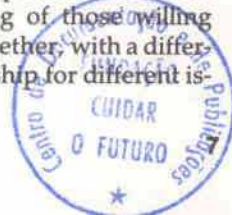
A public agency acting for humanity as a whole should be setting the boundary conditions of human impact on the global system. The U.N. Trusteeship Council could form a special Commission on the Global Commons to

act as trustee for our great surrounding environments and for the preservation of biodiversity on land. Its task would be to negotiate norms and standards for exploring and exploiting the global commons and to keep the health of these environments under open and continuous review.

Much of the needed analytical and monitoring work could be farmed out to corporations, to universities, and to nongovernmental organizations, such as environmental groups.

—Harlan Cleveland

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Slum shanties in India testify to the fact that standards of living vary widely around the world.

CARL PURCELL / AID

## Fairness and International Development

Development is the conscious promotion of economic growth with social fairness. The starting point is a world consensus that everyone is entitled to a minimum standard of living and literacy by virtue of having been born into the human family.

A planetary bargain to make good on that promise will have two main elements. First, each developing country must define "basic human needs" for its own people in its own situation and propose a strategy of needed internal measures and actions by outsiders. Second, these strategies should be reviewed internationally so that outside investors and aid givers are assured that their efforts will actually result in meeting human needs.

Removing national barriers to trade and investment is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable economic growth. That will require a goal-setting political act — such as setting a 10-year target for eliminating all such barriers — and an extranational body to spur stalled negotiations about changes in domestic policies needed to bring this about.

The global exchange of money, accelerated by information technology, moves so much faster than trade that in 1989 total foreign-exchange transactions were 34 times the value of goods and services bought and sold. No government now controls the value of "its own" currency. The international monetary system — out of national control, yet not internationally regulated — is chronically on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Beyond international policy making for trade and financial markets, the continuing integration of the world economy will require, sooner or later, a common world currency with a world central bank to manage it. *The Economist* has already suggested a name for the new world currency: the Phoenix. But since the new international money will result, like other policy shifts these days, from people pushing their leaders into the future, the world monetary unit might be better named the Demos.

— Harlan Cleveland

sues. It was the core of resistance to Iraq's thrust to the south; it has been the core of U.N. peacekeeping; it is the main source of development aid; and it is the key factor in protecting Earth's environment. It is a center of initiative with a habit of consultation and an activist caucus within the United Nations and other international organizations — what Massachusetts Institute of Technology political science professor Lincoln Bloomfield calls a "coalition of the willing."

The "club," of course, is open-ended. A good many nations that were democracy's adversaries are trying now, in various ways, to chart paths to government by consent. Moreover, this informal "club" will consist more and more not only of governments, but also of non-governmental organizations influential in world affairs.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems probable that the "club" of democracies will still provide most of the knowledge, imagination, energy, and resources required for international governance. But the broadening leadership of that informal grouping will likely make the global community, even more than it is today, a world with nobody in charge — and, therefore, with many elements of the world's breathtaking diversity partly in charge.



### About the Author

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This article is adapted from a book-length report resulting from the Humphrey Institute's four-year project on rethinking international governance. The project, guided by a group of 31 people from 24 countries, was co-directed by Cleveland and three colleagues: Geri Joseph, former U.S. ambassador to the Netherlands; Professor Magda Cordell McHale of SUNY Buffalo; and Professor Lincoln Bloomfield of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.