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The Unruly World: The Case for Good Enough Global Governance

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Abstract (summary)

Despite the Obama administration's avowed ambition to integrate rising powers as full partners, there has been no movement to reform the composition of the UN Security Council to reflect new geopolitical realities. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization is comatose, NATO struggles to find its strategic purpose, and the International Energy Agency courts obsolescence by omitting China and India as members. The demand for international cooperation has not diminished. In fact, it is greater than ever, thanks to deepening economic interdependence, worsening environmental degradation, proliferating transnational threats, and accelerating technological change. But effective multilateral responses are increasingly occurring outside formal institutions, as frustrated actors turn to more convenient, ad hoc venues. "Global governance" is a slippery term. It refers not to world government (which nobody expects or wants anymore) but to something more practical: the collective effort by sovereign states, international organizations, and other nonstate actors to address common challenges and seize opportunities that transcend national frontiers.

Full Text

While campaigning for president in 2008, Barack Obama pledged to renovate the dilapidated multilateral edifice the United States had erected after World War II. He lionized the generation of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and George Marshall for creating the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and NATO. Their genius, he said, was to recognize that "instead of constraining our power, these institutions magnified it." But the aging pillars of the postwar order were creaking and crumbling, Obama suggested, and so "to keep pace with the fast-moving threats we face," the world needed a new era of global institution building.

Five years into Obama's presidency, little progress has been made on that front, and few still expect it. Formal multilateral institutions continue to muddle along, holding their meetings and issuing their reports and taking some minor stabs at improving transnational problems at the margins. Yet despite the Obama administration's avowed ambition to integrate rising powers as full partners, there has been no movement to reform the composition of the UN Security Council to reflect new geopolitical realities. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is comatose, NATO struggles to find its strategic purpose, and the International Energy Agency courts obsolescence by omitting China and India as members.

The demand for international cooperation has not diminished. In fact, it is greater than ever, thanks to deepening economic interdependence, worsening environmental degradation, proliferating transnational threats, and accelerating technological change. But effective multilateral responses are increasingly occurring outside formal institutions, as frustrated actors turn to more convenient, ad hoc venues. The relative importance of legal treaties and universal bodies such as the UN is declining, as the United States and other states rely more on regional organizations, "minilateral" cooperation among relevant states, codes of conduct, and partnerships with nongovernmental actors. And these trends are only going to continue. The future will see not the renovation or the construction of a glistening new international architecture but rather the continued spread of an unattractive but adaptable multilateral sprawl that delivers a partial measure of international cooperation through a welter of informal arrangements and piecemeal approaches.

"Global governance" is a slippery term. It refers not to world government (which nobody expects or wants anymore) but to something more practical: the collective effort by sovereign states, international organizations, and other nonstate actors to address common challenges and seize opportunities that transcend national frontiers. In domestic politics, governance is straightforward. It is provided by actual governments—formal, hierarchical institutions with the authority to establish and enforce binding rules. Governance in the international or transnational sphere, however, is more complex and ambiguous. There is some hierarchy—such as the special powers vested in the permanent members of the UN Security Council—but international politics remain anarchic, with the system composed of independent sovereign units that recognize no higher authority.

Cooperation under such anarchy is certainly possible. National governments often work together to establish common standards of behavior in spheres such as trade or security, embedding norms and rules in international institutions charged with providing global goods or mitigating global bads. But most cooperative multilateral bodies, even those binding under international law, lack real power to enforce compliance with collective decisions. What passes for governance is thus an ungainly patchwork of formal and informal institutions.

Alongside long-standing universal membership bodies, there are various regional institutions, multilateral alliances and security groups, standing consultative mechanisms, self-selecting clubs, ad hoc coalitions, issue-specific arrangements, transnational professional networks, technical standard-setting bodies, global action networks, and more. States are still the dominant actors, but nonstate actors increasingly help shape the global agenda, define new rules, and monitor compliance with international obligations.

The clutter is unsightly and unwieldy, but it has some advantages, as well. No single multilateral body could handle all the world's complex transnational problems, let alone do so effectively or nimbly. And the plurality of institutions and forums is not always dysfunctional, because it can offer states the chance to act relatively deftly and flexibly in responding to new challenges. But regardless of what one thinks of the current global disorder, it is clearly here to stay, and so the challenge is to make it work as well as possible.

BIG GAME

The centerpiece of contemporary global governance remains the UN, and the core of the UN system remains the Security Council—a standing committee including the most powerful countries in the world. In theory, the Security Council could serve as a venue for coordinating international responses to the world's most important threats to global order. In practice, however, it regularly disappoints—because the five permanent members (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China) often disagree and because their veto power allows the disagreements to block action. This has been true since the UN's inception, of course, but the Security Council's significance has diminished in recent decades as its composition has failed to track shifts in global power.

The Obama administration, like its predecessors, has flirted with the idea of pushing a charter amendment to update the Security Council's membership but has remained wary due to concerns that an enlarged Security Council, with new and more empowered members, might decrease U.S. influence and leverage. But even if Washington were to push hard for change, the status quo would be incredibly hard to overturn. Any expansion plan would require approval by two-thirds of the 193 members of the UN General Assembly, as well as domestic ratification by the five permanent members of the Security Council. And even those countries that favor expansion are deeply divided over which countries should benefit. So in practice, everyone pays lip service to enlargement while allowing the negotiations to drag on endlessly without any result.

This situation seems likely to persist, but at the cost of a deepening crisis of legitimacy, effectiveness, and compliance, as the Security Council's composition diverges ever further from the distribution of global power. Dissatisfied players could conceivably launch an all-out political assault on the institution, but they are much more likely to simply bypass the council, seeking alternative frameworks in which to address their concerns.

The dysfunction of the UN extends well beyond the Security Council, of course. Despite modest management reforms, the UN Secretariat and many UN agencies remain opaque, and their budgeting and operations are hamstrung by outdated personnel policies that encourage cronyism. Within the UN General Assembly, meanwhile, irresponsible actors who play to the galleries often dominate debates, and too many resolutions reflect entrenched regional and ideological blocs that somehow persist long after their sell-by date.

With the Security Council dominated by the old guard, rising powers have begun eyeing possible alternative venues for achieving influence and expressing their concerns. Shifts in global power have always ultimately produced shifts in the institutional superstructure, but what is distinctive today is the simultaneous emergence of multiple power centers with regional and potentially global aspirations. As the United States courts relative decline and Europe and Japan stagnate, China, India, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, and others are flexing their muscles, expanding their regional influence and insisting on greater voice within multilateral institutions.

Despite these geopolitical shifts, however, no coherent alternative to today's Western order has emerged. This is true even among the much-hyped BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and, since 2012, South Africa. These countries have always lacked a common vision, but at least initially, they shared a confidence born of economic dynamism and resentment over a global economy they perceived as stacked to favor the West. In recent years, the BRICS have staked out a few common positions. They all embrace traditional conceptions of state sovereignty and resist heavy-handed Western intervention. Their summit communiqués condemn the dollar's privileges as the world's main reserve currency and insist on accelerated governance reforms within the international financial institutions. The BRICS have also agreed to create a full-fledged BRICS bank to provide development aid to countries and for issues the bloc defines as priorities, without the conditionality imposed by Western donors.

Some observers anticipate the BRICS' emerging as an independent caucus and center of gravity within the G-20, rivaling the G-7 nations. But any such bifurcation of the world order between developed and major developing powers seems a distant prospect, for as much divides the BRICS as binds them. China and Russia have no interest in seeing any of their putative partners join them as permanent Security Council members; China and India are emerging strategic competitors with frontier disputes and divergent maritime interests; and China and Russia have their own tensions along the Siberian border. Differences in their internal regimes may also constrain their collaboration. India, Brazil, and South Africa—boisterous multiparty democracies—all have formed a coalition of their own (the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum, or IBSA), as have China and Russia (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). Conflicting economic interests also complicate intra-BRICS relations, something that might increase as the countries' growth slows.

WELCOME TO THE G-X WORLD

The analysts Ian Bremmer and David Gordon have written about the emergence of a "G-Zero world," in which collective global leadership is almost impossible thanks to a global diffusion of power among countries with widely divergent interests. But what really marks the contemporary era is not the absence of multilateralism but its astonishing diversity. Collective action is no longer focused solely, or even primarily, on the UN and other universal, treaty-based institutions, nor even on a single apex forum such as the G-20. Rather, governments have taken to operating in many venues simultaneously, participating in a bewildering array of issue-specific networks and partnerships whose membership varies based on situational interests, shared values, and relevant capabilities.

A hallmark of this "G-X" world is the temporary coalition of strange bedfellows. Consider the multinational antipiracy armada that has emerged in the Indian Ocean. This loosely coordinated flotilla involves naval vessels from not only the United States and its NATO allies but also China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Yemen. These countries might disagree on many issues, but they have found common cause in securing sea lanes off the African coast.

At the same time, the G-X world permits the United States to strengthen its links within the traditional West. Take the surprisingly resilient G-8, composed of the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, and Russia (plus the EU). For years, pundits have predicted the G-8's demise, and yet it still moves. The G-8 allows advanced market democracies to coordinate their positions on sensitive political and security issues—just as the parallel financially focused G-7 permits them to harmonize their macroeconomic policies. With the exception of authoritarian Russia, unwisely added in 1997, G-8 members share similar worldviews and values, strategic interests, and major policy preferences. This like-mindedness facilitates policy coordination on matters ranging from human rights to humanitarian intervention, rogue states to regional stability.

The wealthy G-8 members also possess distinctive assets—financial, diplomatic, military, and ideological—to deploy in the service of their convictions. At the Deauville summit of May 2011, the G-8 moved quickly to offer diplomatic support and material assistance to the Arab Spring countries. That action reaffirmed the G-8 as a practical and symbolic anchor of the Western liberal order while reminding the world that the G-8 remains the overwhelming source of official development assistance.

In global governance, as elsewhere, necessity is the mother of invention, and the global credit crisis that struck with full force in 2008 led to the rise to prominence of a relatively new international grouping, the G-20. Facing the potential meltdown of the international financial system, leaders of the world's major economies—both developed and developing—shared an overriding interest in avoiding a second Great Depression. Stuck in the same lifeboat, they

assented to a slew of institutional innovations, including elevating the G-20 finance ministers' group to the leaders' level, creating an exclusive global crisis-response committee.

The G-20 quickly racked up some notable achievements. It injected unprecedented liquidity into the world economy through coordinated national actions, including some \$5 trillion in stimulus at the London summit of April 2009. It created the Financial Stability Board, charged with developing new regulatory standards for systemically important financial institutions, and insisted on new bank capital account requirements under the Basel III agreement. It revitalized and augmented the coffers of the once-moribund International Monetary Fund and negotiated governance reforms within the World Bank and the IMF to give greater voice to emerging economies. And its members adopted "standstill" provisions to avoid a recurrence of the ruinous tit-for-tat trade protectionism of the 1930s.

As the immediate panic receded and an uneven global recovery took hold, however, narrow national interests again came to the fore, slowing the G-20's momentum. For the past four years, the G-20-whose heterogeneous members possess diverse values, political systems, and levels of development-has struggled to evolve from a short-term crisis manager to a longer-term steering group for the global economy. The reform of major international financial institutions has also stalled, as established (notably European) powers resist reallocating voting weight and governing board seats. So what looked for a brief moment like the dawn of a newly preeminent global forum proved to be just one more outlet store in the sprawl.

GOVERNANCE IN PIECES

For much of the past two decades, un mega-conferences dominated multilateral diplomacy. But when it comes to multilateralism, bigger is rarely better, and the era of the mega-conference is ending as major powers recognize the futility of negotiating comprehensive international agreements among 193 un member states, in the full glare of the media and alongside tens of thousands of activists, interest groups, and hangers-on. Countries will continue to assemble for annual confabs, such as the Conference of the Parties to the un Framework Convention on Climate Change (unfccc), in the Sisyphean quest to secure "binding" commitments from developed and developing countries. But that circus will increasingly become a sideshow, as the action shifts to less formal settings and narrower groupings of the relevant and capable. Already, the 17 largest greenhouse gas emitters have created the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, seeking breakthroughs outside the lumbering unfccc. To date, the forum has underdelivered. But more tangible progress has occurred through parallel national efforts, as states pledge to undertake a menu of domestic actions, which they subsequently submit to the forum for collective review.

There is a more general lesson here. Faced with fiendishly complex issues, such as climate change, transnational networks of government officials now seek incremental progress by disaggregating those issues into manageable chunks and agreeing to coordinate action on specific agenda items. Call it "global governance in pieces." For climate change, this means abandoning the quest for an elusive soup-to-nuts agreement to mitigate and adapt to global warming. Instead, negotiators pursue separate initiatives, such as phasing out wasteful fossil fuel subsidies, launching multilateral clean technology partnerships, and expanding the un Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries, among other worthwhile schemes. The result is not a unitary international regime grounded in a single institution or treaty but a cluster of complementary activities that political scientists call a "regime complex."

Something similar is happening in global health, where the once-premier World Health Organization now shares policy space and a division of labor with other major organizations, such as the World Bank; specialized un agencies, such as UNAIDS; public-private partnerships, such as the GAVI Alliance (formerly called the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization); philanthropic organizations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; consultative bodies, such as the eight-nation (plus the EU) Global Health Security Initiative; and multi-stakeholder bodies, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The upshot is a disaggregated system of global health governance.

Sometimes, the piecemeal approach maybe able to achieve more than its stagnant universalist alternative. Given the failure of the WTO's Doha Round, for example, the United States and other nations have turned to preferential trade agreements in order to spur further liberalization of commerce. Some are bilateral, such as the U.S.-South Korean pact. But others involve multiple countries. These include two initiatives that constitute the centerpiece of Obama's second-term trade agenda: the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The administration describes each as a steppingstone toward global liberalization. And yet future WTO negotiations will likely take a disaggregated form, as subsets of WTO members move forward on more manageable specific issues (such as public procurement or investment) while avoiding those lightning-rod topics (such as trade in agriculture) that have repeatedly stymied comprehensive trade negotiations.

THE RISE OF THE REGIONS

Ad hoc coalitions and multilateral networks are not the only global governance innovations worthy of mention. Regional organizations are also giving universal membership bodies a run for their money, raising the question of how to make sure they harmonize and complement the un system rather than undermine it.

This dilemma is older than often assumed. In the months leading up to the San Francisco conference of 1945, at which the un was established, U.S. and British postwar planners debated whether regional bodies ought to be given formal, even independent, standing within the un (something British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, among others, had proposed). Most U.S. negotiators were adamantly opposed, fearing that an overtly regional thrust would detract from the un's coherence or even fracture it into rival blocs. In the end, the Americans' universal vision prevailed. Still, Chapter 8 of the un Charter acknowledges a legitimate subordinate role for regional organizations.

What few in San Francisco could have envisioned was the dramatic proliferation and increasingly sophisticated capabilities of regional and subregional arrangements, which today number in the hundreds. These bodies play an ever more important role in managing cross-border challenges, facilitating trade, and promoting regional security, often in partnership with the un and other universal organizations. Consider peacekeeping on the African continent. Alongside classic un operations, we now see a variety of hybrid models, in which the un Security Council authorizes an observer or peacekeeping mission, which is then implemented by an ad hoc coalition (as in the NATO-led mission in Libya), a regional organization (as in the African Union Mission in Somalia, or AMISOM), or some combination of the two.

This budding role for regional organizations poses policy conundrums. One is whether regional organizations ought to be allowed to serve as gatekeepers for UN-mandated enforcement actions. This contentious issue arose in 2011 after NATO launched Operation Unified Protector in Libya, with the authorization of the un Security Council and the diplomatic support of the Arab League but not, critically, of the African Union. In January 2012, South African President Jacob Zuma, with South Africa occupying the rotating presidency of the un Security Council, blasted the Western powers for exceeding the intent of Resolution 1973 in treating their mandate to protect Libyan civilians as a license for regime change. "Africa," he insisted, "must not be a playground for furthering the interests of other regions ever again." Seeking to tighten the relationship between the un Security Council and regional organizations, Zuma

introduced a resolution proposing a system of codetermination for authorizing enforcement actions. Predictably, this gambit met with solid opposition from the five permanent members, and some dismissed the move as populist showboating. But Zuma had given voice to a larger concern: the perceived legitimacy and practical success of international interventions increasingly depends on support from relevant regional organizations.

Given how overstretched the UN and other global bodies can become, rising regionalism has distinct benefits. Regional bodies are often more familiar with the underlying sources of local conflicts, and they may be more sensitive to and invested in potential solutions. But they are in no position to replace the UN entirely. To begin with, regional organizations vary widely in their aspirations, mandates, capabilities, and activities. They are also vulnerable to the same collective-action problems that bedevil the UN. Their members are often tempted to adopt bland, lowest-common-denominator positions or to try to free-ride on the contributions of others. Local hegemony may seek to hijack them for narrow purposes. The ambitions of regional organizations can also outstrip their ability to deliver. Although the African Union has created the Peace and Security Council, for instance, the organization's capacity to conduct peacekeeping operations remains hamstrung by institutional, professional, technical, material, and logistical shortcomings. Accordingly, burden sharing between the UN and regional organizations can easily devolve into burden shifting, as the world invests unprepared regional bodies with unrealistic expectations.

GOVERNING THE CONTESTED COMMONS

If one major problem in contemporary global governance is the floundering of existing institutions when dealing with traditional challenges, another and equally worrisome problem is the lack of any serious institutional mechanism for dealing with untraditional challenges. The gap between the demand for and the supply of global governance is greatest when it comes to the global commons, those spaces no nation controls but on which all rely for security and prosperity. The most important of these are the maritime, outer space, and cyberspace domains, which carry the flows of goods, data, capital, people, and ideas on which globalization rests. Ensuring free and unencumbered access to these realms is therefore a core interest not only of the United States but of most other nations as well.

For almost seven decades, the United States has provided security for the global commons and, in so doing, has bolstered world order. Supremacy at sea and, more recently, in outer space and online has also conferred strategic advantages on the United States, allowing it to project power globally. But as the commons become crowded and cutthroat, that supremacy is fading. Rising powers, as well as nonstate actors from corporations to criminals, are challenging long-standing behavioral norms and deploying asymmetric capabilities to undercut U.S. advantages. Preserving the openness, stability, and resilience of the global commons will require the United States to forge agreement among like-minded nations, rising powers, and private stakeholders on new rules of the road.

From China to Iran, for example, rising powers are seeking blue-water capabilities or employing asymmetric strategies to deny the United States and other countries access to their regional waters, jeopardizing the freedom of the seas. The greatest flashpoint today is in the South China Sea, through which more than \$5 trillion worth of commerce passes each year. There, China is locked in dangerous sovereignty disputes with Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam over some 1.3 million square miles of ocean, the contested islands therein, and the exploitation of undersea oil and gas reserves. Beijing's assertiveness poses grave risks for regional stability. Most dangerous would be a direct U.S.-Chinese naval clash, perhaps in response to U.S. freedom-of-navigation exercises in China's littoral waters or the reckless actions of a U.S. treaty ally or strategic partner.

Geopolitical and economic competition has also heated up in the warming Arctic, as nations wrangle over rights to extended continental shelves, new sea routes over Asia and North America, and the exploitation of fossil fuel and mineral deposits. To date, cooler heads have prevailed. In 2008, the five Arctic nations—Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States—signed the Ilulissat Declaration, affirming their commitment to address any overlapping claims in a peaceful and orderly manner. Some experts contend that the Arctic needs a comprehensive multilateral treaty to reconcile competing sovereignty claims, handle navigational issues, facilitate collective energy development, manage fisheries, and address environmental concerns. A more productive strategy would be to bolster the role of the Arctic Council, composed of the five Arctic nations plus Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and several indigenous peoples' organizations. Although this forum has historically avoided contentious boundary and legal disputes, it could help codify guidelines on oil and gas development, sponsor collaborative mapping of the continental shelf, create a regional monitoring network, and modernize systems for navigation, traffic management, and environmental protection.

The single most important step the United States could take to strengthen ocean governance, including in the Arctic, would be to finally accede to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, as recommended by the last four U.S. presidents, U.S. military leaders, industry, and environmental groups. Beyond defining states' rights and responsibilities in territorial seas and exclusive economic zones and clarifying the rules for transit through international straits, UNCLOS provides a forum for dispute resolution on ocean-related issues, including claims to extended continental shelves. As a non-member, the United States forfeits its chance to participate in the last great partitioning of sovereign space on earth, which would grant it jurisdiction over vast areas along its Arctic, Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts. Nor can it serve on the International Seabed Authority, where it would enjoy a permanent seat with an effective veto. By remaining apart, the United States not only undercuts its national interests but also undermines its perceived commitment to a rule-based international order and emboldens revisionist regional powers. Both China in East Asia and Russia in the Arctic have taken advantage of the United States' absence to advance outrageous sovereignty claims.

At the same time, U.S. accession to the treaty would be no panacea. This is particularly true in East Asia, where China has been unwilling to submit its claims to binding arbitration under UNCLOS. Ultimately, the peaceful resolution of competing regional claims will require China and its neighbors in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to agree on a binding code of conduct addressing matters of territorial jurisdiction and joint exploitation of undersea resources. This is something that Beijing has strenuously resisted, but it seems inevitable if the Chinese government wants to preserve the credibility of its "peaceful rise" rhetoric.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

The international rules governing the uses of outer space have also become outdated, as that domain becomes, in the words of former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense William Lynn, more "congested, contested, and competitive." As nations and private corporations vie for scarce orbital slots for their satellites and for slices of a finite radio-frequency spectrum, the number of actors operating in space has skyrocketed. Already, nine countries and the European Space Agency have orbital launch capabilities, and nearly 60 nations or government consortiums regulate civil, commercial, and military satellites. The proliferation of vehicles and space debris—including more than 22,000 orbiting objects larger than a softball—has increased the risk of catastrophic collisions. More worrisome, geopolitical competition among spacefaring nations, both established and emerging, raises the specter of an arms race in space.

Yet so far at least, there is little global consensus on what kind of regulatory regime would best ensure the stability and sustainable use of Earth's final frontier. The basic convention governing national conduct in outer space remains the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. Although it establishes useful principles

(such as a prohibition on sovereignty claims in space), that treaty lacks a dispute-resolution mechanism, is silent on space debris and how to avoid collisions, and inadequately addresses interference with the space assets of other countries.

To address these shortcomings, various parties have suggested options ranging from a binding multilateral treaty banning space weapons to an informal agreement on standards of behavior. Given the problems with a treaty-based approach, the Obama administration has wisely focused on seeking a nonbinding international code of conduct for outer space activities that would establish broad principles and parameters for responsible behavior in space. Such a voluntary code would carry a lesser obligation than a legally binding multilateral treaty, but it offers the best chance to establish new behavioral norms in the short term. Washington should also consider sponsoring a standing multilateral consultative forum of spacefaring nations.

LOST IN CYBERSPACE

Cyberspace differs from the oceans or outer space in that its physical infrastructure is located primarily in sovereign states and in private hands—creating obvious risks of interference by parties pursuing their own interests. Since the dawn of the digital age, the United States has been the premier champion of an open, decentralized, and secure cyberspace that remains largely private. This posture is consistent with the long-standing U.S. belief that the free flow of information and ideas is a core component of a free, just, and open world and an essential bulwark against authoritarianism. But this vision of global governance in cyberspace is now under threat from three directions.

The first is the demand by many developing and authoritarian countries that regulation of the Internet be transferred from ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers—an independent, non-profit corporation based in Los Angeles, loosely supervised by the U.S. Department of Commerce—to the ITU (International Telecommunication Union). The second is a growing epidemic of cybercrime, consisting mostly of attempts to steal proprietary information from private-sector actors. Thanks to sophisticated computer viruses, worms, and botnets, what might be termed "cyber public health" has deteriorated dramatically. And there is no cyberspace equivalent to the World Health Organization for dealing with such dangers.

The third major flashpoint is the growing specter of cyberwar among sovereign states. Dozens of nations have begun to develop doctrines and capabilities for conducting so-called information operations, not only to infiltrate but if necessary to disrupt and destroy the critical digital infrastructure (both military and civilian) of their adversaries. Yet there is no broadly accepted definition of a cyberattack, much less consensus on the range of permissible responses; the normative and legal framework governing cyberwar has lagged behind cyberweapons' development and use. Traditional forms of deterrence and retaliation are also complicated, given the difficulty of attributing attacks to particular perpetrators.

No single treaty could simultaneously regulate cyberwarfare, counter cybercrime, and protect the civil liberties of Internet users. Liberal and authoritarian regimes disagree on the definition of "cybersecurity" and how to achieve it, with the latter generally seeing the free exchange of ideas and information not as a core value but as a potential threat to their stability, and there are various practical hurdles to including cyberweapons in traditional arms control and nonproliferation negotiations. So a piecemeal approach to governance in cyberspace seems more realistic. States will need to negotiate norms of responsibility for cyberattacks and criteria for retaliation. They should also develop transparency and confidence-building measures and agree to preserve humanitarian fundamentals in the event of a cyberwar, avoiding attacks on "root" servers, which constitute the backbone of the Internet, and prohibiting all denial-of-service attacks, which can cripple the Internet infrastructure of the targeted countries. Washington might start advancing such an agenda through a coalition of like-minded states—akin to the Financial Action Task Force or the Proliferation Security Initiative—expanding membership outward as feasible.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE FRONTIERS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The history of global governance is the story of adaptation to new technologies. As breakthroughs have been made, sovereign governments have sought common standards and rules to facilitate cooperation and mitigate conflict. For example, we now take for granted the world's division into 24 separate time zones, with Greenwich Mean Time as the base line, but in the middle of the nineteenth century, the United States alone had 144 local time zones. It was only the need to standardize train and shipping schedules in the late nineteenth century that convinced major countries to synchronize their time.

Today, the furious pace of technological change risks leaving global governance in the dust. The growing gap between what technological advances permit and what the international system is prepared to regulate can be seen in multiple areas, from drones and synthetic biology to nanotechnology and geoengineering.

When it comes to drones, the United States has struggled mightily to develop its own legal rationale for targeted assassinations. Initial foreign objections to U.S. drone strikes were concentrated within the target countries, but increasingly, their use has been challenged both domestically and internationally, and the rapid spread of drone technology to both state and nonstate actors makes it imperative to create clear rules for their use—and soon.

Rapid advances in biotechnology could pose even greater long-term threats. Scientists today are in a position to create new biological systems by manipulating genetic material. Such "synthetic biology" has tremendous therapeutic and public health potential but could also cause great harm, with rogue states or rogue scientists fabricating deadly pathogens or other bioweapons. At present, only an incomplete patchwork of regulations exist to prevent such risks. Nor are there any international regulatory arrangements to govern research on and uses of nanotechnology: the process of manipulating materials at the atomic or molecular level. Where regulation exists, it is performed primarily on a national basis; in the United States, for example, this function is carried out jointly by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. To make things even more complicated, most research and investment in this area is currently carried out by the private sector, which has little incentive to consider potential threats to public safety.

Finally, the threat of uncoordinated efforts at geoengineering—the attempt to slow or reverse global warming through large-scale tinkering with the planet's climate system—also demands regulation. Such schemes include seeding the world's oceans with iron filings (as one freelance U.S. scientist attempted in 2012), deflecting solar radiation through a system of space-based mirrors, and preventing the release of methane held in tundras and the ocean. Long dismissed as fanciful, such attempts to reengineer the earth's atmosphere are suddenly being taken seriously by at least some mainstream experts. As warming proceeds, countries and private actors will be increasingly tempted to take matters into their own hands. Only proper regulation has a chance of ensuring that these uncoordinated efforts do not go badly awry, with potentially disastrous consequences.

"GOOD ENOUGH" GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

As all these examples highlight, demand for effective global governance continues to outstrip supply, and the gap is growing. Absent dramatic crises, multilateral institutions have been painfully slow and lumbering in their response. So even as they try to revitalize the existing international order, diplomats and other interested parties need to turn to other, complementary frameworks for collective action, including ad hoc coalitions of the willing,

regional and sub-regional institutions, public-private arrangements, and informal codes of conduct. The resulting jerry-rigged structure for global cooperation will not be aesthetically pleasing, but it might at least get some useful things done.

A decade ago, the Harvard scholar Merilee Grindle launched a broadside against the lengthy list of domestic good-governance reforms that the World Bank and other agencies insisted were necessary to encourage growth and reduce poverty in developing countries. She implored international donors to put their long, well-intentioned checklists aside and focus instead on "good enough governance." Rather than try to tackle all problems at once, she suggested, aid agencies should focus on achieving the minimal institutional requirements for progress. This advice to lower expectations and start with the necessary and possible is even more applicable in the international sphere, given all the obstacles in the way of sweeping institutional reform there. For the Obama administration and its colleagues and successors, achieving some measure of "good enough" global governance might be less satisfying than trying to replay the glory days of the Truman administration. But it would be much better than nothing, and it might even work.©

Sidebar

Global disorder is here to stay, so the challenge is to make it work as well as possible

Regional organizations are giving universal bodies a run for their money.

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