INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE: ITS IDEA AND INCARNATION

The human propensity for conflict poses a grave threat to global stability. As an impediment to conflict, progressive thinkers have long envisioned the establishment of an effective system of international governance.   Today, the crafting of such a system is advancing.

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In the course of human civilization, no scourge has inflicted more anguish or proven so corrosive to progress than that of war. As humanity's body of knowledge has magnified over time, so has our capacity for self-destruction; thus, as we have chosen to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors in resorting to the sword, the horrors called down upon us have grown exponentially in scale. Consequently, we have sought a means out of this morass, fashioning the idea of international governance as a method of securing lasting peace. First in concept, and now in practice, international governance has undergone steady development. Increasingly, states have chosen to surrender a measure of sovereignty in order to promote stability and escape the chaos that exists in the absence of collaborative action.

Underlying the push toward international governance is the concept of world order. Many times throughout the past, forward-looking thinkers would ponder the tragedy of war and theorize on ways to avert such disaster in the future. Today, this ancient idea has begun to materialize in earnest, driven by the unmitigated catastrophes of the twentieth century—an age in which interstate war became global, entire nations were brought to the brink of annihilation, and tens of millions (chiefly non-combatants) were killed.

Envisioning Order

As early as the third century B.C.E., disciples of Confucius were expounding on ideas such as the "Great Principle," according to which, correct relations among people, when established, would generate peace within societies and ultimately give rise to a benevolent world commonwealth.[1]

Across ancient Greece, meanwhile, during the post-Alexandrian period, the Stoics propagated the idea that within the universe there exists Divine Reason or the *Logos*, a principle of order infusing all things. As reason is common to all, they maintained, all men are brothers, regardless of whether they be "Greek, barbarian, free man or slave," as all are "fellow citizens of a world community."[2]

More than a thousand years later, during the time of the Holy Roman Empire, Dante penned *De Monarchia*, in which he examined the power structure of religious and secular authorities and crafted a philosophical vision for an international system of governance. Describing human purpose as the actualization of our collective intellect, Dante posited that such achievement would be impossible in a world wracked by conflict. Instead, to attain the perfection of our intellect, humanity required a universal peace; this, in turn, Dante suggested, could be attained only by constructing some type of universal polity, which he characterized as the ideal political order. This body, he envisioned, would be governed by a universal, common law and commanded by a universal leader. This scheme did not preclude individual states from retaining their own monarchs or

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[1] Helmut G. Callis, "Confucius' 'Great Principle' of World-Wide Harmony," W. Warren Wager, ed., *History and the Idea of Mankind* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1971) 28.
[2] Steven Kreis, "From Polis to Cosmopolis: Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World, 323-30 B.C.," *Lectures on Ancient and Medieval European History*, 4 Aug 2004 *The History Guide* 7 Dec 2009 <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture9b.html>.

magistrates, but the legitimacy of their rule did rest upon their relationship to the universal monarch.[3]

In the wake of the tremendous upheavals generated by the Reformation, early modern Europe proved fertile ground for ideas. Indeed, as war followed upon war, subsequent theories of international governance were soon forthcoming. In the early years of the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic, Hugo Grotius, a revolutionary philosopher, theologian, and legal theorist, broke new ground in the realm of diplomacy, ultimately becoming one of the fathers of international law. Synthesizing a natural law grounded in theology and an emerging secular understanding of relations between states, Grotius declared that both individuals and states were bound by the same moral law.[4] In so doing, he helped fashion the idea of the world as an international society—a community of states sharing rules of governance that are applicable to all. What's more, he called for quarreling parties to confer and negotiate before resorting to combat, and if necessary, to compromise, surrendering a portion of their demands in exchange for peaceful resolution of the dispute.[5]

New Order, New Ideas

Only three years after Grotius' death, a new political system emerged across Europe. With the coming of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the wars of religion were ended, and religious toleration was extended to many peoples. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, the Peace also formed the foundation upon which the modern system of states is built. And herein, according to the traditional realist view of international relations, lies the greatest significance of the Peace of Westphalia: it established the principle of state sovereignty—no longer were states to be merely monarchical possessions; it declared a condition of legal equality to be in existence among sovereign states; and it established the principle of non-intervention, prohibiting one state from interfering with the internal affairs of another. With this, there arose "the beginning of respect for the territorial integrity of other nations."[6]

But it was only a beginning. Other wars were soon to come, and with them, further development of theories of international governance. In 1713, the Congress of Utrecht was convened to help settle a number of dynastic and religious disputes among the monarchies of England, France, and Spain. At this time, Charles-Irénee Castel, Abbé de Saint-Pierre, released the *Project to Render Peace Perpetual in Europe*, a pioneering work that confirms him as one of the earliest proponents of international collective security.[7]

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[3] John J. Reilly, "Dante's World Government: *De Monarchia* in the 21st Century," 2003, 2 Dec 2009 <http://www.johnreilly.info/dwg.htm>.

[4] "Hugo Grotius," *Peace Palace Library* 2004, 7 Dec 2009 <http://www.ppl.nl/100years/grotius/>.

[5] "Hugo Grotius 1583-1645," 7 Dec 2009 <www.oregonstated.edu/instruct/phl302/philosophers/grotius.html>.

[6] "Peace of Westphalia," *New World Encyclopedia* 2 Apr 2008, 8 Dec 2009 <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Peace_of_Westphalia?oldid=682190>.

[7] J.B. Shank, "The Abbé de Saint-Pierre and the Emergence of the 'Quantifying Spirit' in French Enlightenment Thought," Papers, Gustave Gimon Conference on French Political Economy, Stanford University, Apr 2009, 7 Dec 2009. < http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/hasrg/frnit/pdfs_gimon/shank.pdf>.

In his *Project*, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre proposed an international court and called upon the monarchs of Europe to submit interstate disputes to a league of states, arguing that such would be in accord with the public good of their respective kingdoms, and with their own individual self-interests. His ideas, however, were met with skepticism, and ultimately dismissed—even by many idealists of the day—as naïve.[8] And yet, toward the close of the eighteenth century, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's theories were reinvigorated, as they served to inspire Prussian philosophical luminary Immanuel Kant in his contemplation of the idea of international governance.

As Allen W. Wood writes in his essay "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace," by the 1780s: "Kant's lectures on moral philosophy had made the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's project the focus of their conception of humanity's final end in history."[9] Indeed, in his 1784 essay *Idea toward a Universal History in a Cosmopolitan Respect*, again citing the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Kant declared that humanity must establish a free federation of states in order to pursue lasting peace.[10]

Eleven years later, with the signing of the Treaty of Basel between France and Prussia in 1795, Kant published *Perpetual Peace*, a landmark essay that has proven remarkably prescient in its proposals. In it, Kant suggested that peace could be achieved if, through earnest labor and good fortune, a commanding, enlightened state were to "educate itself up to the form of a republic," and then transform itself into the "focal point for a federative union of other states."[11]

Perpetual Peace directly addresses heads of state, presenting Kant's argument that a measure of natural harmony does exist between "the commands of moral reason and reasons of state…" However, the essay was not composed only—or even chiefly—for leaders of nations; rather, as Wood writes, the main audience of *Perpetual Peace* is "humanity in general; it sets forth principles of international right that are binding on all human beings collectively, and only for this reason pertinent especially to those who hold power over states. Kant regard[ed] perpetual peace between nations as both a demand of right and a final end of the human race."[12]

Kant's ideas concerning international governance were extraordinary, to the degree that they have materialized during the course of the last century. His project seems to anticipate tremendous undertakings such as the erection of the League of Nations and the United Nations, and appears to provide a blueprint for the great European project of the past half-century—the construction of the European Union. It is particularly striking, however, in its universal intent. Wood observes that "Its articles are meant not merely as precepts…applying to the relations between sovereign states," but as precepts applying to mankind as a whole, regarding all peoples as a "single universal community" founded upon a "universal right of humanity."[13]

It must be noted, however, that this concept of a universal community differs from the idea of a global state. Again quoting Wood, Kant regarded "the separation of

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[8] Allen W. Wood, "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace," *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 60.
[9] Ibid. 60.
[10] Ibid. 59-60.
[11] Ibid. 60.
[12] Ibid. 61.
[13] Ibid. 62.

peoples from one another in independent states as a necessary protection both of individual liberty and the tendencies to social progress." His project intends to escape "the destructive effects of a system of states whose security is based on military power," holding that "If the historical development of [humankind] is to continue, a system of mutually independent states must gradually grow toward a federal union," one that is "naturally grounded on ties of commerce and mutual self-interest, and effected by an increasing unity of principles based on ever-expanding communication and the consequent emergence of a single enlightened world culture."[14]

The Concert of Europe

On the heels of Kant's death, Napoleon Bonaparte was crowned emperor of France. This unleashed a new series of wars between France and every major European power of the time. When this storm ended a decade later, there followed the Congress of Vienna of 1814-1815, during which the major powers of Europe met to resolve a number of territorial and diplomatic issues stemming from the Napoleonic Wars and the demise of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1815, Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia signed an accord binding them together as the Quadruple Alliance. This agreement committed the signatories to convene periodically in order to confer over common interests, to uphold peace across Europe, and to guarantee the "repose and prosperity of the Nations." This clause was cause for the creation of the Concert of Europe, an informal mechanism dedicated to ensuring the balance of power across the continent.[15]

The code of the Concert was a mix of idealist ambition and realist practicality: while all important decisions affecting the states of Europe were to be made by Concert members, these powers were pledged to refrain from challenging one another, and any disputes arising among them were to be adjudicated by the Concert.[16]

As the first rudimentary structure of international governance, the Concert met with initial success; it was responsible for guaranteeing the independence of two new states within Europe, Belgium and Greece, and it forestalled the creation of two others, a united Germany and Italy. However, the Concert was weakened by the revolutionary tumult that erupted across the continent in 1848, and in the ensuing decades, it was unable to prevent a series of wars between a number of member states.

The League of Nations

Whereas the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Project* and Kant's *Perpetual Peace* were intellectual signposts signaling an incipient move toward the establishment of world order, their visions remained almost wholly theoretical (the Concert of Europe notwithstanding) until the carnage of World War I compelled renewed creative action. With international society wracked by bloodshed and citizens of combatant countries disillusioned and desolate, world leaders began undertaking new efforts to escape international anarchy and establish long-lasting peace. This entailed the establishment of

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[14] Wood 63.
[15] "Diplomacy," *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2009, 8 Dec 2009 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/164602/diplomacy>.
[16] Ibid.

a league of nations that would act collectively against any state that chose to violate the existing order—in effect, regarding an attack against any state as an attack against the entire system of states. The strength of the League, however, was undermined from the very start.

Although largely the brainchild of American President Woodrow Wilson (among others), the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the treaty of membership, opting instead to retreat once more into the isolationism that had defined American foreign policy prior to the war. Also, at the outset, the Soviet Union refused to join, as the League was designed to promote democracy—a system of government diametrically opposed to its own. (And, although it did sign up some years later, it was ultimately expelled following its invasion of Finland.) The Central Powers, meanwhile, were initially prohibited from joining as punishment for their role in the war. Germany was finally admitted in the mid-1920s, but later withdrew as the Weimar Republic gave way to the Third Reich. For its part, France, although a member, was more concerned with developments inside Germany than what it saw as other, more distant problems. Finally, Britain's power was compromised by the effects of the war; with its economy decimated, it labored for years to recover before it was sent reeling once again by the onset of the Great Depression. In the end, such circumstances coalesced to paralyze the League of Nations, just as the conditions for war began to ripen once again.[17]

Dissolution and Regeneration

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the League of Nations, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist. For the organization's idealist enthusiasts, this was a stinging setback. While they had recognized the human inclination toward conflict, they trusted that such drives could be arrested by a collective countering of aggression. Yet human reason, in which they had placed such faith, failed to halt the ideologies preparing the way toward war, and collective security fell far short in confronting the Axis juggernaut, even in its earliest stages in Manchuria and Ethiopia. In the wake of such aggression, nations resorted en masse to the realist maxim that power is the ultimate guarantor of peace, and began a large-scale build-up of their armed forces.

Well before the official disbanding of the League in 1946, however, world leaders—recognizing that another world war could destroy all of human civilization— were already planning its successor, an international organization to be built anew with the pitfalls of the League in mind.

These founders understood that this new idealist enterprise had to encompass all the world's great powers in order to maintain international security, and that it demanded of all parties consistent focus and active participation. Recognizing the threat to peace posed by economic disruption and chaos, as well as the self-reinforcing downward spiral created by economic isolationism, they also determined to create a new global financial system based upon free-market capitalist theory. What's more, stunned by the profound moral evil of genocide and other affronts to the dignity of the human person, they set out to design an international system that would never again tolerate the systematic slaughter of entire peoples or (in theory) turn a blind eye to other abuses of human rights.

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[17] Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man* (New York: Random House, 2006) 13-18.

The design of this ensuing institution, the United Nations, proved to be incredibly complex; it had to strike an extremely delicate balance between respecting state sovereignty—its core principle—and asserting supranational authority. Thus, from its very inception, the United Nations was constructed to guarantee that all international obligations stemming from it resulted from the explicit consent of states, freely given. Initially, the U.N. Charter was regarded as simply another treaty to which states had recourse if they so chose; the body itself had no legal or lawmaking authority—this was left to the states.

In the six-and-a-half decades since its founding in 1945, the United Nations has grown tremendously in scope. As the world has transformed into an increasingly integrated and complex global society, the challenges facing the U.N. have changed, as have estimations of the organization's efficacy and purpose.

In recent years, the threat of interstate war has eased; supplanting it however, is the specter of intrastate warfare—in appalling abundance since the end of the Cold War. One consequence of this is that the concept of state sovereignty, though still bedrock, has begun to erode. Whereas once the tenets of self-determination and non-intervention were regarded as sacrosanct, today the idea of limited sovereignty is ascendant, as the recurring phenomenon of genocide has galvanized the international community (at least in principle) to come to the aid of peoples who are being systematically molested by their own governments.

This has incited controversy about the role of the U.N. Whereas it has undertaken peacekeeping operations since its earliest years, today it is grappling with the question of peacemaking and even state-building. Such initiatives have proven tremendously costly, and significant mistakes have been made in carrying them out. Many U.N. detractors in wealthy states—particularly the United States—have used such missteps to denigrate the organization, portraying it and its agenda as an absurd waste of time at best, and an actual detriment at worst.

As the United Nations moves into the twenty-first century, it is fielding proposals on how best to reform in order to meet the unparalleled trials of our age. A strengthened international judiciary, an expanded Security Council, increased action to sustain the health of the global commons, a more secure system for peacekeeping and state-building operations, a more robust defense of human rights, and improved stability of the global financial system—these issues and many others will continue pressing to the fore of the international diplomatic sphere, demanding resolution.

Certainly, history has demonstrated that international governance and its pursuit, although often halting and achieving only limited success, will undoubtedly continue to advance, as such challenges necessitate a global, cooperative approach. With the transformation of the idea, and the incarnation, of international governance, there will arise new challenges and new opportunities for the betterment of humankind. History will not allow the engineers and operators of the transforming system to forget the central tenet rousing them to action: that above the system of states there remains only anarchy, and in the absence of international governance, anarchy will swell until it consumes our civilization, for the phantom of war is always lurking on some nearby horizon.

Indeed, it is important to remember the words of Robert Cecil, one of the architects of the League of Nations, as he spoke before the final assembly of that body:

Let us boldly state that aggression wherever it occurs and however it may be defended, is an international crime, that it is the duty of every peace-loving state to resent it and employ whatever force is necessary to crush it, that the machinery of the Charter, no less than the machinery of the Covenant, is sufficient for this purpose if properly used, and that every well-disposed citizen of every state should be ready to undergo any sacrifice in order to maintain peace…I venture to impress upon my hearers that the great work of peace is resting not only on the narrow interests of our own nations, but even more on those great principles of right and wrong which nations, like individuals, depend. The League is dead. Long live the United Nations.[18]

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[18] George Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London: Hutchinson & Co LTD, 1973) 404.

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