

V. International Limitations on National Sovereignty

We live in a world of growing interdependence. In many practical ways, we feel like “citizens of the world” as well as citizens of the national state in which we were born or currently live. Travel is easy and relatively inexpensive. Media instantly bring world events into our living rooms. Music artists are international stars, and their nationality may not even be known to their fans. Many of the companies for which you might work are global enterprises with directors and investors from all over the world. So we have to ask ourselves, has the nation state lost some of its relevance?

Governing is a part of the larger social context in which it operates. Do countries make it easy or difficult to enter and leave their jurisdiction? Are corporations able to operate easily in the global economy? Can “international public opinion” be measured, and ought national leaders consider it when making decisions? Should countries promote their own artists or use their tax policies to attract international stars? Should countries promote free trade or try to protect their domestic industries? These examples show how global social and economic changes challenge the logic and wisdom of our depending exclusively on national states for political organization.

A. Limitations of the National State

The greatest threats to world peace today are international political terrorism, internecine ethnic conflicts, and sectarian (religious) violence.

Consider the suicide bombers of the Middle East and Sri Lanka, separatists in Chechnya and Kashmir, and religious violence in Northern Ireland and the Philippines. Each of these types of violence exacts a toll in killed, maimed, and traumatized people. In the wake of terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has commented, "New threats make no distinction among races, nations, or regions. A new insecurity has entered every mind, regardless of wealth or status" (Annan, 2002: 18). Terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and sectarian violence also are sparks that threaten to blow up into more global conflict as nations and factions within nations take sides with the various combatants. For our purposes here, the point is that we no longer live in a world where stable relations between national states is a sufficient guarantee of peace. We have to ask ourselves, can national states guarantee world peace or even security within their own boundaries?

Similarly, drought, pestilence, and ecological destruction know no national boundaries. Some areas of the world do not have rich natural resources to begin with and are especially susceptible to natural disasters. The countries that can least afford earthquakes and floods often seem the most likely to suffer them. Can even the best-intentioned national government ease the suffering of its people if the country is unable to sustain the population?

Secondly, prosperity and deprivation are now more than ever international rather than purely national conditions. There has been a global economy for hundreds of years, dating at least from the mercantilist days of the

16th through 18th Centuries during which the European powers operated international networks with their colonies. But today, more and more corporations are truly international in their ownership, organization, and operations. An employee might hold U.S. citizenship but work for a manager who is a Dane and be assigned to an office in Japan. Production facilities might be located in Mexico, Taiwan, Russia, and South Africa. The investors who own the company could be Saudi, Dutch, and Swiss nationals, and the Board of Directors might include people from all over the world. Even if the company is chartered in New Jersey, is it really an “American company?” In fact, what country can hope to control any of the major multinationals that dominate much of today’s economic scene?

We are obviously asking ourselves if the national state is “up to the job” of dealing with the political and economic realities of the 21st Century. Perhaps a look at the instruments of international relations among national states can provide us with some sense of where the governing of human society is headed.

B. Bilateral Cooperation Pacts

Sometimes a national state can address its problems if it has the help of another country. Two countries that reach an agreement about political cooperation, economic aid, and/or mutual defense often sign a *bilateral* (two-party) *cooperation* pact. Typically, a wealthier and more powerful nation state helps a poorer and less powerful one. Examples include the former Soviet Union

and Cuba, the United States and Taiwan, and France and Senegal. The smaller country obviously benefits in many material ways such as foreign economic aid and military assistance. And the larger country enjoys gains as well; perhaps the small country offers markets, military bases, or a supportive vote in international bodies such as the United Nations. The bilateral cooperation benefits both parties.

C. Regional Cooperation Organizations

Specific regional concerns have led to the creation of many special purpose international organizations. These regional groups negotiate *multilateral* (multi-nation) *agreements* in which they pledge themselves to follow certain principles of cooperation and mutual support. By extending cooperative ventures beyond the simpler bilateral agreement, the multilateral partners bring greater political and economic resources to the table.

Neighboring national states and their superpower allies create *regional alliances* in an effort to achieve collective political and economic goals. Some of the regional organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are security oriented, while others such as the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) are multi-purpose political and economic development entities. Many regional organizations – including NATO – seem to evolve, adapting to changing needs. Other regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) have evolved into quasi-

confederations with some of the trappings of sovereignty such as open trade borders and a common currency.

D. Special Purpose Organizations

In the second half of the 20th Century, the number and variety of *special purpose international organizations* steadily increased. The scope of concerns that such organizations address is very broad, ranging from regulating international airlines to monitoring the safety of nuclear reactors to providing humanitarian aid to the world's poor. Official representatives of the participating national states deliberate on policy matters, and professional staff provide actual services. In the case of humanitarian organizations, *non-government organizations (NGOs)* such as the French-based organization Doctors Without Borders or the Swiss-based International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement may provide services. Personnel employed by special purpose organizations usually can count on the cooperation of the national governments where they serve. They are assigned only to countries that have agreed to participate in the activities of the special purpose organization.

E. International Organizations

Truly international organizations with broad concerns and almost universal membership of national states arose during the second half of the 20th Century. Two world wars, global demands for the self-determination of peoples,

and an increasingly interdependent world economy made the need for consultation and cooperative action obvious to the industrialized powers. They came to see that they could prosper through dialogue with each other and with the peoples of the non-industrialized, or *Third World*.

1. The United Nations. The UN was created after World War II to promote peace, administer the transition of colonies to statehood, and encourage economic development. Virtually all of the world's 200 national states belong to the organization and are represented in its General Assembly. A smaller group of national states that includes the world's major military powers make up another chamber, the Security Council. The executive function of the UN is carried out through the Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice hears cases of disputes for member states that wish its assistance.

There are other, specialized bodies that are a part of the UN. The Trusteeship Council oversaw the transition of countries from colonial to national status. The Economic and Social Council sponsors a variety of commissions that study issues ranging from the Status of Women to Population and Development. Some of the better-known programs of the UN are the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Food Program. Obviously, the work of the United Nations has grown into a broad program of voluntary action. And yet the UN is not a world government

Learn more about the UN at:
<http://www.un.org/english/>

because membership and compliance with its wishes are purely voluntary.

[Learn more about the UN at: <http://www.un.org/>].

2. The World Bank. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

- also called the World Bank - was originally created to help rebuild Europe after World War II. It has evolved into a specialized UN agency that helps underdeveloped countries by offering them loans from a fund created by the wealthier North American and European nations. The World Bank also promotes private investment in those countries that can offer stable political and economic conditions. In order to participate in the programs of the World Bank, a country's government must assure that the funds can be repaid and that the interests of foreign investors can be protected.

[Learn more about the World Bank at: <http://www.worldbank.org/>].

3. The International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF was created at the same time that the UN was established, 1944. The founding members sought to prevent the recurrence of the international depression of the 1930s. Its 183 members cooperate in promoting international economic stability by establishing agreeable trade relations, managing the exchange rates of currencies, stabilizing balance of payments problems, and refinancing national debts. Governance of the IMF is vested in an independent Board of Governors made up of the heads of the central banks of member countries. An Executive Board of 24 and a Managing Director oversee daily operations. And 2,650 employees carry out the

work of the organization. The IMF currently enjoys a maximum financial commitment of \$265 billion from its member countries. [Learn more about the IMF at: <http://www.imf.org/external/about.htm>].

4. The Group of Eight. There is a true power elite operating behind the scenes in the world of international economics. The G-8 is a political forum for the world's most industrialized nations. The heads of government for Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Russia meet annually to stimulate and stabilize world economics. Obviously, their dialogue carries great weight with countries and corporations around the world. As G-8, they do not have to have a structure or staff. Practically speaking, representatives to the world's formal international organizations that coordinate the global economy receive their marching orders after each summit of the G-8 leaders.

5. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The industrialized countries of the world are dependent upon oil for transportation, energy production, and petrochemicals. OPEC has 11 oil-producing member countries: Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. The OPEC members meet as a group to determine the price and supply of crude oil and thereby have great influence with Europeans, North Americans, and the Japanese. They form a block of relatively wealthy but not heavily industrialized countries that may

question the economic and development policies of the industrialized power elite. OPEC's Web address is: <http://www.opec.org/>.

6. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In response to the cold war between communist and capitalist countries, many national states opted for an official and cooperative posture of avoiding participation in military or political blocs. One of the founding leaders, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India, articulated five key pillars as a basis for international relations, which are now known the world over as 'Panchsheel' : (a) respect for territorial integrity, (b) mutual non-aggression, (c) mutual non-interference in domestic affairs, (d) equality and mutual benefit and (e) peaceful coexistence. Although the NAM does not have a continuing organization, its members meet annually to consider the impact of world political and economic events on the less developed national states. You can learn more about the NAM and its policy positions at: http://www.igd.org.za/nam/non_aligned.html.

7. Transnational Religious Networks. People who share a religious faith often form worldwide denominational and ecumenical networks. Jewish people throughout the world are asked to support the State of Israel. Christian organizations such as the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches and the World Council of Churches promote world peace and humanitarian relief. Wealthier Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia sponsor aid and development programs, political forums, and educational opportunities for believers from poorer Islamic countries. All of these faith-based networks give global

expression to the religious and ethical points of view from their teachings. And yet these viewpoints often have pointed political and economic implications. For a sample Web sites, see those maintained by the World Council of Churches at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/> and the Islamic Summit Conference at <http://www.president.ir/oic/index-e.htm>.

F. International Limitations on Sovereignty Summary

We live in a world of many levels of political organization. Governing in an interdependent world requires different types of structures: bilateral cooperation pacts, regional cooperation groups, special purpose agencies, and truly international organizations. The autonomous and sovereign national state is still the basic workhorse of government. But there is there writing on the wall? Consider the following evidence from the experience of the former Yugoslavia:

- European and American armed forces engaged in a police action within the formerly sovereign borders of Yugoslavia.
- Yugoslavia's deposed head of state was brought before an international tribunal.
- Factions from within Yugoslavia and the European powers partitioned the country into smaller national states.
- Troops from Europe and the United States monitor the cease-fire imposed on warring factions within the former Yugoslavia.

The “international community” may have been correct in its intervention in the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, a veil of international law has been drawn over the action, and virtually no one except the deposed war criminal Slobodan Milosevic claims that Yugoslavia’s national sovereignty has been violated. But does that mean that he is wrong?

We are not at a point in human history at which most people are prepared to shift their loyalties from their national state to a world government. In fact, some people like the Palestinians and the Tamils have yet to achieve statehood. But we would be well advised to remember that fashions in governing change. The forces of globalization may someday lead to government on a planetary scale, and national states may join city-states, theocracies, monarchies, and empires as quaint footnotes in the history of governing.

VI. National Accommodations to a Changing World

The human effort at governing ourselves is obviously subject to ever-changing currents of economic and social change. Given that world government is not imminent, what types of adjustments or accommodations can we expect national states to make in an effort to keep apace of changing times? There are centrifugal forces that bind us together in national and international union, and there are centripetal forces that would spin us apart into many small fragments of human society.

We pride ourselves on living in a great, new information age. But will information technology enslave us or liberate us? Are media outlets brainwashing us or giving us new venues for self-expression? Will consumerism turn us into shallow puppets of the advertising industry or will it empower us to go out and choose the lifestyle that we want? What awaits us: one mass culture or a litter of cultural enclaves? The information society is our 21st Century double-edged sword.

A. The Unitary State or Federalism

A national state that reserves all of the meaningful governing powers for a central government is called a *unitary state*. Mass cultural influences such as network television, retail franchising, compulsory military service, and public schooling are centrifugal forces that encourage support for unitary institutions. *Federalism* is a governing arrangement in which power is shared between a national government and several subnational governments such as provinces or (American) states. Diverging interests and loyalties such as parochial lifestyles, multiple languages and literatures, and competing environmental priorities are centripetal forces that support a vital federalism.

Some countries including the Switzerland and the United States have patiently and successfully tinkered with federal relations for many generations. Others such as Great Britain are relative newcomers to shared governance, witness the autonomy offered Scotland and Wales for self-rule. For yet other

countries such as Russia and Yugoslavia, the experience with federalizing has been negative; autonomy has led to violent demands for national independence. Federalizing is clearly not a “one-size-fits-all” solution to ethnic diversity, empowered minorities, and the global ideology of self-determination. And yet it does offer one technique for accommodating change while preserving the national state.

Thinking on Your Own 2.1 Latin American Union?

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) lowers barriers to economic cooperation between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Other countries want to join. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages to participating countries in a broader union?

B. Teledemocracy or Libertarianism

Computers make it possible to conduct a wide range of business transactions from home or office. Theoretically, they could also enable us to conveniently interact with our public officials. We already have scientific opinion polls that politicians consult. Could we not combine the polling concept with laws on referenda and Internet access so that we can have more *direct democracy*, which is public decision-making by the citizens themselves? Advocates of *teledemocracy* believe that technology will soon permit a virtual (in the computer sense) town meeting at any level of governing. We could gradually replace – or at least supplement – representative government with

direct citizen decision-making. Such an accommodation would benefit middle-class citizens who often feel estranged from traditional politics.

Information technology is intrusive as well as convenient. Civil libertarians already are concerned that our Web surfing habits are being monitored by e-marketers. Employers use surveillance cameras to monitor their workers. Traffic officials videotape busy intersections watching for driving violations. Perhaps we should be less concerned about convenience and more concerned about the protection of personal privacy. Libertarians think so; they are people who think that personal liberty should be the centerpiece of political and economic relations. The last thing they want is for all of us to be hard-wired into the national government. Information technology is a wonderful convenience. Someday, it may make it possible for us to vote, pay taxes, and decide referendum issues more easily. Perhaps that accommodation between unity and fragmentation will be a treatment that can extend the life of national government.

C. Virtual Reality or the Power of Place

If we become more and more self-centered and less and less place bound, will our loyalties shift to “virtual nations” (Dillard and Hennard, 2002)? Will communities of shared interests replace societies, as we have known them? In this case, we have the struggle between two types of parochialism, one of interests and the other of place.

If we can use the Internet to associate only with people like ourselves, then perhaps we can use that resource to create the conditions for a nation: protection, well-being, and wealth (Dillard and Hennard, 2002: 25). We already have virtual universities and virtual offices, so is it so hard to imagine a virtual community? What if it were based on deeply felt religious, philosophical, or political principles? Or we might be drawn to a charismatic leader who reaches us through virtual reality. Ultimately, we might feel loyalties that supercede those we have for the national state. The al Qaeda terrorist network certainly manages to pursue its agenda without the territory or trappings of national statehood.

There are many place-bound parochial groups all over the world ranging from political survivalists to environmental recluses to religious aesthetics. There is also the great majority of humankind who are involuntarily place bound. They do not have an information superhighway upon which to travel. Their associations are with family, neighbors, coreligionists, and a few local officials. In most cases, they are not that involved with their national state. Whether by choice or by circumstance, the place bound have withdrawn from all but the most local politics, government, and public policy. They typically want to be left alone, and if that fragments society, so be it.

National states may have to make all of these accommodations and more in order to survive in the 21st Century. If they have not used federalism to extend greater autonomy to enclaves of citizens, they may have to consider

doing so. They may have to offer teledemocracy to citizens who want it while restraining themselves from using information technology to control people. They will have to keep themselves from regulating the Internet where virtual communities gather, even if doing so facilitates parochial fragmentation of all kinds. National governments simply cannot survive if they try to use unmodified blueprints from the 18th Century to govern people and places in the 21st Century. Like all other human and natural systems, national states must adapt or die.