

Global Governance: What would it look like and do we want it

MICHAEL CORNISH

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THE development of a truly international and democratic system of governance – one that is based on direct representation of all of the people on the planet – still eludes the world even after the advent of the United Nations in 1945. The UN is an incomplete arrangement for international decision-making in the modern world and is increasingly unrepresentative of the shifting international landscape. It is time for a new generation of policymakers to dream large and envision a stronger system of representative global governance.

Although several representative governance models have been proposed at the international level, the model with the most support is that advocated by the Campaign for the Establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA). Launched in April 2007, the Campaign is a global network of parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations advocating representation of the world's citizens at the United Nations.

A UNPA would come by way of gradual implementation of democratic participation and representation in the UN system. The Campaign recognizes that an attempt to displace quickly the existing international power structures is unlikely to win any campaign much support. Inevitably, a UNPA would undergo a slow accumulation of functions and powers.



The currently proposed United Nations Parliamentary Assembly Flag.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL CORNISH

As for methods of representations, policy-makers hold many competing views on how it would be determined. However, degressive proportionality – the idea that nations with bigger populations would receive more parliamentary seats but at a decreasing rate compared to smaller nations – is the current favorite approach. For example, although China with 1.35 billion people would receive a large share of the seats in any legislature, the fact that its population is almost 60 times Australia's would not entitle it to as many as 60 times the seats. Degressive proportionality would attempt to give countries with larger populations more seats, but it would also try to give weight to national sovereignty in its allocation. In the very long run, one would hope that national boundaries would be less meaningful, and the degressive component could be removed.

Many hurdles remain to the implementation of any representative system. However, momentum has accelerated recently as more public figures and institutions -- including the European Union in 2011-- have endorsed the Campaign.

Whatever form a global parliament may take, there are some underlying principles to which I believe any good model for global governance must adhere – independent of what the Campaign advocates.

First, it needs to be democratic. Other systems could work, or we could hold out for the next stage in the evolution of democracy. But any good system will still have its roots in the fundamental tenets of democracy with its genuine competition of ideas and candidates in the political process.

Moreover, it needs to be a pragmatically formulated system of governance. This means democracy by representation but also a structure of government that can keep powerful and vested interests happy enough to assure their support whilst yet still retaining a meaningful and workable democratic system.

Next, it needs to be a system of governance that is adaptable to change but not prone to subversion. This means it needs to have a structure flexible enough to allow it to cast aside relics of ages past (for example, the World War II-era permanent membership of the United Nations Security

Council) but rigid enough to prevent any group being able to dominate by undermining or subverting the system for their own selfish cause (such as Hitler's use of emergency powers in the Weimar Republic).

Lastly, if it wants to be an institution able to actually enforce its decisions, it will eventually need to have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, as per Max Weber's conception. This must be accompanied with appropriate checks and balances including, but not limited to, the doctrine of the separation of powers in order to prevent this monopoly on force from being turned upon its own international citizenry.

To my mind, any system of global governance that can adhere to at least these basic principles has a good chance of being both successful and a force for good in the world.

I have avoided the most important question until last: do we actually want it?

The most common argument I hear against the idea of global governance is that since the United Nations is a toothless tiger where diplomats only talk and never act, other systems of international governance would be just as weak and ineffective.

Firstly, I would contest the notion that the United Nations is an ineffective organization. Toothless at times, absolutely - Rwanda and the Srebrenica massacre immediately spring to mind; but the fundamental objective of the UN has been achieved, namely, we have not (yet) seen World War III. To argue that the United Nations, as the world's premier international political forum, has not at least contributed to this significant achievement is

absurd. To those who argue it is merely a talk-fest, I agree. That's the whole point! It is much better to be talking than shooting!

However, the real criticism of the United Nations should be that it is not genuinely representative of the world's people. The UN is a community of nations and not a system of governance. A nation's interests are pursued through appointed delegates who are insulated from public opinion and are not direct representatives of a nation's people.

A global and democratic government, on the other hand, could provide a much broader representation of the wide range of views held by ordinary people throughout the world. The purpose of any system of international governance would be to allow people to elect representatives who will directly represent their views on the world stage. If democratic nations of the world believe in the cause of giving voice to their own people at the sub-national and national levels, surely it is justi-

fied they support democracy at an internationalist level as well. In a time when global issues – climate change, terrorism, international refugees, the threat of nuclear weapons – affect us all in different ways, a strong system of international governance is necessary. However, it should not be from these fears that we draw inspiration for a global parliament but from an internationally shared hope. We can hope for a truly representative forum through which we can work more effectively to resolve conflicts,

alleviate poverty, combat climate change and address any of the issues that unite citizens of the globe.

I believe that to give a genuine voice to all the world's people would make our international system stronger. Perhaps I am naïve to think even that it would make the world a better place. But to not work for it is to not seek it actively; it is an admission of defeat.

A bright future of global democracy is possible. And so we must persist to champion a genuine voice for all.
