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At the World's Summit: How Will Leading Nations Lead?

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The implosion of the European system of alliances which produced World War I convinced the statesmen of that era that global security had to be governed by a new system, embodied in a new institution—the League of Nations. The subsequent calamities of the Great Depression and pitiful failure of the league to deter the Axis powers prompted another round of anguished introspection and a new generation of institutions—the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank, and The World Trade Organization. Now, sixty years later, we stand, or so it is widely said, at the threshold of another burst of invention—"Creation 2.0," as it has been called. Rather than a war, the ferment this time comes from a global financial crisis, the emergence of novel and interconnected transnational problems, and the swift rise of a new cohort of powerful states, all of which have exposed the limits of the post-war institutions, and perhaps rendered them obsolete. Even hard-shell realists have become converts. "We've got a new world now," says Brent Scowcroft, the first President Bush's national security advisor. "But we still have habits of mind of the 20th century and the Cold War, and all the institutions we have were built for a world which has disappeared."[1]

And so we have reached a kind of Darwinian pivot—adapt or die. Or have we? It takes a crisis of immense proportions to overcome the inertia which inheres in institutions—and even more, in the distribution of power within those institutions. There is surely no more glaring example of institutional archaism than the UN Security Council (UNSC), which affords permanent membership to the five states which emerged victorious from World War II, and excludes the losers, Germany and Japan, as well as such rising powers as India and Brazil. Yet an alliance of incumbents and second-tier powers has defeated all attempts at change.

And so a political handicapper would insist that the central issue is not, "Which institutions most need reform?" but rather, "Where have the pressures for change become irresistible?" By this calculus the membership of the G-8, and the alignment of power in the IMF and The World Bank, is far likelier to change than the UNSC. Why? In no small part because you can't keep China out of the world's inner councils, and while China is already on the Security Council, it remains an outsider for other prominent forums. Other dynamics are also at work. The financial crisis has empowered the IMF, but not the bank. No institution now coordinates national policies on climate change, but cataclysmic fears about global warming still seem over the horizon. And so on. Creation 2.0, in short, will probably not be a big bang, but a protracted evolution.

Fading Relevance of the G-8

One fundamental difference with the post-war moment is that the great powers now have a club of their own—the G-8. Although diplomats and scholars debate its effectiveness, much of the discussion over institutional reforms revolves around the composition and the sphere of competence of this global board of directors. The G-8 consists of the leading Western democracies and Russia, which was admitted only in 1997. But the West no longer has a monopoly on economic power, and the G-8, which unlike the Security Council focuses more on economic concerns than on questions of inter-

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national peace and security, has been compelled to look beyond its narrow membership. Since 2007, the eight have extended to China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa a kind of ex officio status. But the global financial crisis has made this arrangement not only vaguely insulting but also untenable; in November of 2008, President George Bush, no friend of multilateral institutions or of emerging powers, convened a meeting of the G-20. The twenty leaders met again in London in April, and are next scheduled to convene in the Pittsburgh, September 24-25, 2009.

The economic meltdown has made the G-8 obsolete. As Robert Hormats, a former Treasury and State Department official who attended the first meeting of what was the G-6, in 1975, puts it, "You didn't need a lot of countries to constitute a steering group for the global economy; they could manage the global economy among themselves. That's inconceivable now."[2] It is just as inconceivable on trade, or on climate change. Does that mean that an updated version of this elite club—which in essence consists of a two-day meeting of heads of state at some decommissioned palace in or near a global capital—should become the central node of global governance? This view is becoming increasingly common. One prime mover of G-expansionism, former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, recently joined two scholars to argue that, in addition to the current financial crisis, "future G-20 summits should also drive the reform of the international financial institutions and address other major global concerns—climate change, poverty and health, and energy, among others."[3] Such a "global apex forum" would operate not as an executive, decision-making body (as the Security Council is), but rather as an instrument to shape consensus on major transnational issues, which would ultimately be adjudicated by other organs with universal or near-universal membership, such as the United Nations. The authors of a recent study, *Power and Responsibility: Building International Order in an Era of Transnational Threats*, describe the role they see for a more inclusive G-grouping to serve as a "prenegotiation forum" bringing together "the smallest possible grouping of necessary stakeholders"; "a mechanism for building knowledge, trust, and patterns of cooperative behavior among the most powerful states"; and a device for such states to "encourage one another to take responsibility" for their global obligations.[4]

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The G-8 itself has already evolved along these lines. These conclaves began as strictly financial sessions, with a head of state accompanied by his or her finance minister. Then the finance ministers began holding separate sessions—eventually expanding to include the twenty largest economies—while the agendas of the heads of states grew to include poverty and development, immigration, climate change, and the like. As the issues confronting the major states become increasingly complex, and increasingly insoluble in the absence of concerted international action, leaders have found these annual retreats a congenial forum. The lack of effective institutions to deal with these problems and the increasing immobility of the Security Council have left a vacuum which the G-8 has filled. It is thus likely, both for substantive reasons and as a matter of momentum, that the expanded G-8, whatever its composition, will broaden in scope just as the G-8 has.

One of the most striking examples of this ad hoc phenomenon is the Major Economies Forum, launched by President Bush in 2007 as the Major Emitters Forum. Bush's objective was to establish a kind of climate change "coalition of the willing," bringing together the sixteen largest emitters of greenhouse gas to discuss the issue outside the framework of the United Nations. Despite its anti-multilateral origins, the states themselves considered the forum a useful instrument to develop common approaches. The Obama administration has agreed to preserve the body, rechristening it the Major Economies Forum. President Obama will chair the forum's meeting on the margins of the July G-8 meeting in Italy. The goal is to achieve rough consensus both on mechanisms for financing adaptation to climate change (none now exist) and on the development and dissemination of key technologies. Climate negotiators also hope to get a head start, though not much more, on the terms of a new treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol—a process which formally begins in December, when all parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) meet in Copenhagen.

If the expanded G-8 is truly to become a "global apex forum," then the question of who sits on it becomes a momentous one. Picking the right criteria for membership has thus become a cottage industry within the Washington think tank world. In one intriguing paper, three officials at the Center for Global Development have proposed that any such institution must both bring together states with the most resources, thus ensuring that decisions will be effective, and those with the most people, so that deliberations will also be seen as truly representative.[5] Setting a threshold of states that represent more than two percent of the world's population or its total GDP, they come up with a G-16 of major stakeholders. As a way to make the group more representative without too great a cost to effectiveness, they suggest adding five regional representative countries—thus producing a version of the G-20 that gives smaller nations a place at the global high table. The population criterion would link its legitimacy to the representation of people and not just states, and the use of transparent objective criteria could help preclude endless haggling over particular candidate nations. Alternatively, the Center for American Progress has suggested that the current membership be retained until 2014, at which point the group be reconstituted to comprise the two largest economies from each of five regions, as well as the ten largest remaining economies.

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The criteria, whatever they are, must be transparent and objective. It is, after all, harder to slam the gate at twenty than it is at seven or eight: Spain, which felt unfairly excluded, has been invited to the next meeting of the G-20, in September; so Thailand, an "emerging nation," has also been invited. As many as thirty states are now expected to attend that session. Even twenty is a large number; the "sherpas" who organize such events describe coordinating twenty states as an organizational nightmare, and question the value of a conference call among twenty deputy finance ministers trying to work out an agenda. Indeed, the chief argument for twenty, as opposed to some other number, is that it already exists; any smaller number would require removing countries which already have what they view as an entitlement. The counterargument is that the G-8 Plus 5 also already exists, predates the G-20, and makes sense in terms of real global power, as the G-20 does not.[6]

Perhaps, alternatively, the occupants of the seats at the head table might change depending upon the issue—a principle known as "variable geometry." In other words, the criteria for inclusion could be subject specific. Anne-Marie Slaughter, the director of policy planning for the US Secretary of State and a leading scholar of global governance, describes variable geometry as "a solution to a world in which you need many different configurations for many different problems."[7] How would such configurations be determined? One scholar has suggested that membership be established by the answer to three questions: "Who caused the problem? Who is most affected? Who can do something about it?"[8] Such a calculus would produce a different guest list for climate change than for, say, nuclear nonproliferation. It might also cause some real difficulties if the issue were, say, state-building, since Somalia might find itself sitting alongside Afghanistan.

One possible inference to be drawn from this exercise is that the world would be best served by modest expansion of the G-8, bringing in other states depending on the problem in question. No matter what the seating arrangement, deliberation will become hopelessly diffuse absent some sort of informally tiered system, with a core group and others somewhere below the salt. Of course, such a de facto system already exists, as Canada or Italy would readily attest.

Given the mounting pressures for the inclusion of pivotal 21st century powers, change in the G-8 has become unavoidable, but the timing and scope of G-8 expansion remains hard to pinpoint. On the one hand, Canada, Italy, and Japan are not particularly eager for new members. On the other hand, Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom and Nicolas Sarkozy of France are outspoken proponents of expansion; before the financial crisis, in fact, Brown had made global governance reform his signature international issue. Washington, however, is a wild card. One senior US official says that "we've made no commitment to continue" the G-20. "It's useful for this moment and these problems. We're agnostic whether it goes on beyond the crisis. We're going to go through this year" and then review the effectiveness of the various fora.[9] Others in the administration are more sanguine about an expanded G. Thanks to the financial crisis, as a Treasury Department official says, "the G-20 came into its own,"[10] and cannot be wished out of existence. Yet another official notes that the bloating of the 20 to 24 (and beyond) may have rendered it unwieldy, and thus argues for an expanded G-8.

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Need for 'Heavy Lifting' by the US

It is virtually as true today as it was in 1919, or 1946, that global institutions look the way that the United States would like them to look. The United States has been the fons et origo of such institutions for the last century. From the time the United States became the preeminent world power, American leaders have regarded an ordered, and orderly, global system as a matter of national interest in itself. Unlike previous hegemonic powers, the United States was willing to constrain its own freedom of action in order to bind all states in such a system. In campaigning for the League of Nations, Woodrow Wilson openly espoused an arrangement in which the United States "would willingly relinquish some of its sovereignty...for the good of the world."[11] A quarter of a century later, Harry Dexter White, the US Treasury official who was John Maynard Keynes' partner in designing the Bretton Woods Institutions, insisted on giving extra votes to smaller states in the IMF, since a strictly proportional system would "give the one or two powers control over the Fund" and thus "destroy [its] truly international character."[12] Harry Truman, who brought FDR's dream of the United Nations to fruition, famously kept in his pocket a wrinkled copy of Tennyson's poetic vision of "The Parliament of Man."[13]

Over the last generation, however, that vision has faded. Bill Clinton was deeply engaged with the global economy, but not with global institutions; and unremitting hostility from conservatives led him to view the United Nations as politically radioactive. George W. Bush believed in multilateral action, but not multilateral institutions, which depend upon mutual rules which bind the greatest power as well as the weakest. Bush simply did not believe that accepting such constraints could be in our national interest. Barack Obama, by sharp contrast, believes in institutions, and in his evocation of America's role in the world one hears echoes of the magnanimity of his internationalist predecessors. In his very first major foreign policy speech as a presidential candidate, Obama spoke of the post-war institutions, noting that "Leaders like Harry Truman and George Marshall knew that instead of constraining our power, these institutions magnified it." He went on to declare that while it had "become fashionable to disparage" these bodies, reform will be possible only if "we convince others that they too have a stake in change—that such reforms will make their world, and not just ours, more secure."[14]

It is not just the exigencies of the moment, but the convergence of the moment with this American leader that has prompted hopes for a latter-day internationalist "creation." Yet the building of really meaningful institutions, and the fundamental reform of existing ones, requires an enormous expenditure of political will. The UN reform package drafted by Kofi Annan in 2005 failed because only Annan was willing to devote himself to its passage; he was no match for inertia, vested interest, or hostile ideology. The passionate advocacy of Gordon Brown, who in a speech in New Delhi in early 2008 asserted that "the post-war rules of the game...must be radically reformed to fit our world of globalization," has gone largely unnoticed outside the United Kingdom (especially as Brown's own popularity has plummeted).[15] Ultimately, the heavy lifting must come from Washington.

Barack Obama will not carry a dog-eared copy of a poem in his pocket; he is a pragmatist with an acute awareness of the limits of the possible. But neither is he confined, as older figures might be, by the need to demonstrate toughness through elaborate displays of American supremacy or autonomy. Obama's commitment to institutional reform will likely be guided, and limited, by pragmatic considerations. While his chief of staff, Rahm Emmanuel, has famously remarked that "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste," the primary preoccupation of the Obama administration in the near term will be the imperative of crisis management.

UN Security Council expansion is the briar patch of global governance reform.

Policy experts have been greatly encouraged by the appointment of figures from among their own ranks, including Anne-Marie Slaughter, to key positions within the administration. Slaughter is now leading a broad State Department policy review of the whole range of global institutions. The process, Slaughter says, has been focusing especially on the issue of G expansion, with the goal of devising broad principles which can be applied to subject-specific institutions. Slaughter also expects to stress the need for deeper connections between the "informal institutions," like the G-8, and the formal ones, such as the United Nations. Of course, there is no guarantee that whatever ideas emerge from such deliberations will survive the interagency process. Slaughter notes that both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are "pragmatists" who "don't want process for process' sake." But they are also, she adds, acutely aware of the imperative to adapt to the realities of the 21st century.[16]

Security Council expansion is the briar patch of global governance reform. Fifteen years of failed efforts to add permanent members to the council have produced a hardened sense among UN experts that reform is an exercise in futility. Expanding the council was a centerpiece of Kofi Annan's reform effort; the effort not only failed, but came close to dragging down the rest of the reform program with it. Current members of the "P-5" do not wish to see their power diluted through the addition of new permanent members, even if the newcomers would not command the same right of veto as the current members; and for all the Non-Aligned Movement protestations about the UNSC's composition, the candidacy of India and Japan provoked a good deal of opposition within Asia, as did that of Brazil within Latin America.

And yet at the same time the Security Council is the single most glaring emblem of the legacy culture of global institutions. The council, it is true, has not been disabled by its purported illegitimacy—though it has been disabled by internal divisions—but the apparent immovable entrenchment of the five longstanding members undermines all hopes of achieving a truly representative global order. Even a hardened realist like Brent Scowcroft says that he supports adding permanent members to the council, despite the very strong case that it will render the council yet less effective. While the Bush administration supported the candidacy of Japan, but not of the others, the Obama administration recognizes that this stance is simply untenable. Security Council reform is very much within the remit of the State Department policy review, and a number of prominent officials now in the Obama administration are on record as supporting expansion. Even Washington, it's true, may be unable to move this boulder, and it remains unclear whether or when or how hard President Obama will try. But as Joanna Weschler of the organization Security Council Report observes, "The only thing that will move the process forward at this stage would be a very clear position from the United States."[17]

Global High Finance

Washington will have to play an equally central role in expanding the inner circle of the Bretton Woods Institutions, which have a more complicated governance system than the United Nations. Each member of the IMF is assigned a "quota," based on a set of economic measures which, in theory, determines both how much it can borrow as well as its weighted vote. The current apportionment reflects the world of a full generation ago. China currently has a quota of 3.7 percent—about the same as Belgium. The United States has 17 percent; Western Europe, collectively, has 30 percent. Moreover, Europe holds one-third of the 24 seats on the IMF board. In addition, the United States, by tradition, selects the president of The World Bank, and Europe, the president of the IMF. And the United States enjoys an effective veto over the many issues at the IMF that must be decided by 85 percent of shares.

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The IMF and The World Bank's graduated system of ownership is inherently more malleable than the privileged-membership design of the UN Security Council; it is theoretically possible to tinker your way toward a representative distribution of power. In its final communiqué, the G-20 meeting in London states that "emerging and developing countries, including the poorest countries, should have greater voice and representation."[18] The IMF has agreed to move up its next quota adjustment, from 2013 to 2011, and to initiate a reform process of its own. Critics, however, have not been impressed. One recently wrote that the proposed internal reform "fails to recognize how much the world has already changed, not to mention the further acceleration in change currently underway as a result of the crisis."[19] The financial crisis has, in fact, done wonders for the IMF, which as recently as 18 months ago was confronted with a dwindling base of core "customers," i.e. governments of emerging economies seeking the fund's low-interest loans. The IMF looked like an institution which had outlived its mission. But the November meeting of the G-20 called on the fund to use its regulatory and surveillance powers to stem global economic failure; at the April meeting, the heads of state, in addition to demanding structural reform, called on the fund to issue $500 billion in new loans, as well as another $250 billion worth of the fund's own currency, known as Special Drawing Rights.

There is an obvious relationship between restored relevance and the urgent calls for change: if the IMF is to become the central instrument for overseeing the global economy and predicting and preventing future meltdowns, then questions of voice and legitimacy matter greatly. To take the most prominent example, China has kept its currency artificially low in order to fuel its export-driven economy, and has plowed the resulting revenue into treasury bills, feeding the American addiction to easy credit and inflating the financial bubble, which finally burst. China and other Asian nations will have to change this policy if we are to avoid another such crisis.

China is loath to lets its currency rise more than incrementally, but almost certainly won't do so as long as it remains a bit player in the world of global finance. The financial writer Sebastian Mallaby has drawn a parallel between Britain, "the proud but indebted imperial power" at the end of World War II, accepting an American design for the IMF in order to get the benefit of American savings, and the United States' current dependence on China.[20]

A Grand Bargain for Stakeholdership?

How are China and other emerging powers to be incorporated into the system as full stakeholders? Several scholars have proposed a "grand bargain," in which the United States surrenders its veto right at the IMF and The World Bank, while European countries give up both shares and seats on the board.[21] The United States relinquishes the prerogative of automatically running The World Bank, while Europe does the same at the fund. The emerging economies then fill these vacuums. The big losers would be European countries like Belgium and Switzerland which now enjoy outsized status at the IMF.

All of this catering to emerging powers raises a fundamental question: Will full incorporation into the global system make these states more inclined to embrace the rules and conventions which govern these institutions—that is, the core principles of Western liberalism? Would China, which makes concessional loans to authoritarian leaders in the Third World, with no questions asked, agree to accept the principle of "conditionality" which governs The World Bank, as well as bilateral lending by the major Western states? Presumably, the Chinese would do so only if they thought, to use President Obama's language, that such practices would be good for them, not just for us. They would, more broadly, need to accept that binding oneself in global institutions enhances one's own power and security.

How are China and other emerging powers to be incorporated into the system as full stakeholders?

China's experience in the Security Council shows what an extremely slow process of socialization this is. Only in recent years has China begun contributing troops to peacekeeping missions, or contributing to global appeals in the aftermath of natural disasters. China routinely opposes resolutions in the council proposing any form of punitive action, whether sanctions or the use of force, on the grounds that coercion violates state sovereignty. And aspirants to permanent status, such as India and Brazil, have espoused the same, classically "nonaligned" views during their own stints on the council. In fact, the political incentives linked with those aspirations seem to drive them to show the developing nations whose votes they need that they stand firm on sovereignty, even in the face of atrocities. This poses the disturbing possibility that the legitimacy of greater representativeness, far from enhancing "effectiveness" legitimacy, will erode it—a transaction scarcely worth the having.

This danger is probably greater in the United Nations, where many issues are seen in intensely ideological terms, than at places like the IMF, where straightforward calculations of self-interest normally reign. Perhaps the paradoxical virtue of the stalemate which governs the UNSC is that it puts off the day when the United States, the United Kingdom, and France will be joined by states more aligned with Russia and China's worldview than with that of the West. The fact that most, or all, of those new states will be democracies exposes one of the major flaws in the idea of a "concert" or "league" of democracies. This idea has been championed in the United States by neoconservatives like Robert Kagan, liberals like Ivo Daalder, and the mainstream scholars and practitioners of international relations who comprised the Princeton Project.[22] All share the premise that authoritarian states, above all Russia and China, have blocked, and will continue to block, effective action on many fronts, including attempts to bring predatory regimes to heel. But most non-

Western democracies are equally loath to intervene in such cases. And since countries like Mexico and South Africa do not view others as we tend to, primarily as democracies or nondemocracies, they might bristle at joining a club which excluded authoritarian states. Moreover, any club which does not include China simply cannot, as was mentioned earlier, reach solutions on global finance, trade, or climate change, among other issues.

Stemming Climate Change

Climate change lends itself most naturally to the logic of global governance reform. At the most simple level, while the consequences of climate change are experienced globally, the policies that determine the level of emissions are set domestically. Nevertheless, the question of "who should be at the table?" needs to be answered not just with a roster of states but also a catalogue of nonstate actors: scientists, NGOs, investors, perhaps even insurers. And while the public policy debate has focused on the issue of mechanisms to price carbon, and thus to reduce emissions, there are equally pressing questions about the development of new technologies, the financing of alternative energy sources and the imperative (uppermost for much of the developing world) to adapt to the changes in climate that have already begun to wreak havoc. Yes these problems are so new that no transnational regulatory, standards-setting, finance, and monitoring body—no global-warming IMF—even exists.

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Global policy debate over climate change is now shaped by two institutions, both growing out of the United Nations: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a network of states, NGOs, and scientists, which issues a report every five years (and, along with Al Gore, won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC), a treaty body which drew up the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and which is due to establish the superseding document in 2012. The Major Economies Forum, the innovation mentioned earlier, now functions as a climate change G-16. The one problem with this potentially crucial body is that it operates outside the ambit of the United Nations, and thus of the UNFCC. Since negotiations over the new treaty agreement will be the global policy focal point on climate change, the Major Economies Forum will convey its proposals to UNFCC negotiators who are likely to resist decisions made in a more exclusive forum from which they were themselves excluded.

At the same time, one simple, ineradicable issue lies at the heart of all these dizzying complexities: US willingness to sharply curb emissions. If the US Congress fails to pass legislation attaching a cost to carbon emissions (presumably through a "cap-and-trade" system) and does not set a high enough price to sharply reduce greenhouse gases, then the emerging economies will never accept a similar, perhaps greater, burden. And if China, India, Indonesia, and others do not make drastic changes in their carbon footprint, there can be no hope at all of keeping global temperatures within a range that will forestall cataclysmic ecological disruption. Here, as elsewhere, large hopes are being pinned on Barack Obama who, in a radical break from his predecessor's rejection of all such proposals as an unacceptable brake on US economic growth, appears ready to use his office to spur the urgently needed policy, economic, and cultural change.

Because the Congress almost certainly will not finalize legislation until 2010, negotiators at the Copenhagen meeting will lack a basis for agreement on country-specific targets for emissions—the sine qua non of climate change mitigation. The authors of *Power and Responsibility* suggest that diplomats focus instead on how to finance the staggering investments in alternative energy and energy-saving technologies that will be required to make such targets even feasible. They also suggest that only the UNFCC can serve as the forum where "all actors can voice demands and seek clarification."[23] The UNFCC is a universal body; what's more; it has brought states together with the scientific community, NGOs, financiers, and others. Many of the transactions through which emerging states accept painful restrictions on emissions, and industrialized states agree to foot much of the bill, will probably be thrashed out in some version of the Major Economies Forum and in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. But only the UNFCC can formalize these understandings and provide input to the full range of other actors. The UNFCC, in turn, must extend its consultative network toward other UN bodies, The World Bank, and energy-related institutions like OPEC.

The IPCC is an intriguing example of a boundary-crossing institution. At its core, 3,000 climate scientists around the world are exchanging information, which they codify in an assessment report every five years. The 2007 report, in asserting that the evidence for climate change had become "unequivocal," and that the likelihood that human activities had caused the change was 90 percent, essentially put to rest the case against global warming.[24] The IPCC has no secretariat, no headquarters, no capacity to enforce its views and, in fact, no policy views at all; its legitimacy rests squarely on the quality of its research. It is a virtual, "networked" institution of the kind which Anne-Marie Slaughter has advocated as a scholar—a paradigmatic example of an institution fully adapted to our globalized, Internet-enabled world.

Updating Nonproliferation

The issue of nuclear nonproliferation, like climate change, spans a wide variety of domains, and thus poses an intrinsic challenge to institutions. But since nonproliferation is a problem of longer standing, institutions already abound. The essential governing mechanism of control over nuclear weapons and fuel is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which enshrines three principles: no new states may develop nuclear weapons; existing nuclear-weapons states must progressively disarm; and all states have a right of access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a UN body established in 1957, monitors state members to ensure that nuclear energy is not diverted to military uses, while at the same time promoting the peaceful use of nuclear power. The United Nations Conference on Disarmament serves as a forum for debate for the 66 states which currently have nuclear capacity. The conference negotiated the basic terms of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the mid-1990s. The Nuclear Suppliers Group, established in the aftermath of India's 1974 test of a nuclear weapon outside the terms of the NPT, seeks to prevent noncompliant states from receiving nuclear fuel.

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To survey these organs, however, is to recognize how difficult it is for institutions to keep pace with the problems they were originally created to solve. Technological advances have made it relatively simple for states possessing enriched nuclear fuel to produce a bomb—which means that the first and third of the NPT's objectives, not to mention the two core functions of the IAEA, are now at odds with one another. In the 21st century, nonstate actors like Al-Qaeda now pose even a graver proliferation threat than outlier states like North Korea or Iran, yet the NPT applies only to states. Nor does the treaty apply to nonsignatories like India, Pakistan, or Israel, which have actually developed nuclear weapons. The formally recognized nuclear weapons states covered by the NPT regime have also failed to take seriously their obligation to disarm. In part for that reason, the 2005 NPT Review Conference ended in mortifying disarray, while the Conference on Disarmament has been deadlocked for a decade, and is now widely deemed useless.

Just as with climate change, the nonproliferation stalemate will be broken not by institutional reform but by an exercise of political will. Once again, that political will must originate in Washington. The Bush administration's push on nonproliferation achieved modest results, due partly to its insistence on keeping nuclear weapons at the heart of strategic doctrine, including development of a new generation of battlefield nuclear weapons. Once you insist, as one nonproliferation expert puts it, that "nuclear weapons are no different from other weapons; they're just bigger," then such weapons come to seem not only usable, but indispensable.[25] In decades past, many mid-level powers abandoned the pursuit of nuclear weapons; now a number of states, including in the Middle East, are making new threats to develop weapons programs. Others, especially in Asia, are seeking to develop or increase nuclear power, which will increase the available supply of nuclear fuel.

This momentum cannot be reversed, as the Bush administration found, absent a firm and meaningful American commitment to reduce the stockpile of nuclear weapons. Barack Obama has recently stated that the US will do just that. In a speech in Prague earlier this year, Obama said that "the United States will take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons."[26] These steps included reducing "the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy"; negotiating sharp arms reductions with Russia; ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (which the Senate rebuffed during the Clinton administration); drawing up a new treaty to ban the production of fissile material; and strengthening the NPT regime, in part by establishing an international fuel bank as a reliable source of nuclear fuel for NPT-compliant states' civilian reactors. The night before the speech, North Korea had announced the launch of a missile which could carry a nuclear payload. In response, Obama declared that in order to put a stop to such rogue actions, "All nations must come together to build a stronger, global regime."

...all major states will have to acknowledge their stake in a new global order.

Some of the obstacles which seemed insuperable in the past may be surmounted if Obama makes good on these vows. The major emerging states might prove more amenable to tough action against Iran and North Korea, and might be more open to strengthening enforcement. The atmosphere this past May when states gathered in New York City for the preparatory meeting of the 2010 NPT Review Conference was vastly more cooperative than it had been the last time around. Still, the trade-offs that will be required of states—whether in the form of disarmament, accepting stricter regulatory regimes, and/or foregoing development of the "closed fuel cycle" which leads to the enrichment of nuclear fuel—will be both extremely difficult and extremely complicated. For that reason, one leading expert advocates the establishment of a "nonproliferation G-20," which would bring together the guardians of the "broad nuclear order"—declared and undeclared nuclear states as well as middle-tier powers who, until now, have forsworn the bomb—to work through these tough choices in advance of the NPT Review Conference.[27]

The changes we are living through, daunting though they are, are not nearly so cataclysmic as the Great Depression and the Second World War, for which we can only be glad. But our own world is, of course, vastly more complicated than the world of 1946. This means that today's "creation" moment, if there is to be one, will be both politically and conceptually more difficult than the one crafted by a tiny circle of British and American statesmen. The emphasis throughout this paper has been on the need for American will and creativity. But that is only a prerequisite; all major states will have to acknowledge their stake in a new global order. Emerging countries that have been content to act as "free-riders," reasoning that they have no real authority anyway, will have to accept the burdens of global citizenship. China, above all, can no longer hide behind its status as a "developing" nation. Europeans who view themselves as the ultimate global good citizens will, in some cases, have to accept a smaller slice of the pie. So, indeed, will the United States, which has grown accustomed to unrivaled hegemony.

That is the political challenge. The conceptual challenge arises from the inherent complexity of problems like climate change, of the interrelationship among diverse problems, the many categories of actors who must be accommodated, and the sheer velocity of events and of change. As Gordon Brown put it in his New Delhi speech, we need to develop a framework "not of a new order already made, but a new order that is permanently in the making."

Emerging countries that have been content to act as "free-riders"...will have to accept the burdens of global citizenship.

Endnotes

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