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The Global Governance Crisis

International experts are turning to the troublesome question of why the nations of the world can't "govern" themselves better and why law and politics are not keeping up with economic globalization. Here, three leading analysts—Princeton's Anne-Marie Slaughter and G. John Ikenberry, and University College London's Philippe Sands—suggest what's going wrong and who needs to take charge.

The group of networks—governments, NGOs, corporations and all their counterparts overseas—is spreading, but they lack legitimacy and accountability.
by Anne-Marie Slaughter



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With all the hubris of youth and recent tenure in 1997, I published an article in *Foreign Affairs* called "The Real New World Order." At the time, although it seems hard to believe now, prominent academics and pundits were arguing that the world was moving toward the end of the nation-state system, to be replaced by "the new medievalism," in which territorial boundaries would blur, city-states would proliferate, and power would shift increasingly to networks of corporations and nongovernmental organizations. I argued that the state

was not disappearing, but rather "disaggregating" among different branches of national government, as well as regional and even local governments. These governmental components, in turn, were all networking with their counterparts abroad, creating globe-spanning networks of financial regulators of every description, antitrust officials, environmental agencies, militaries, law enforcement agencies, and even judges and legislators. These networks were less visible than heads of state and foreign offices engaging in traditional diplomacy, but no less powerful.

Equally important, I argued, these horizontal "government networks" were the *real* new world order, as opposed to the post-1945 world order based on the United Nations system. Flexible, fast, informal networks were more effective than creaky, treaty-based international institutions, and at least potentially more accountable, given that they are composed of appointed—and sometimes elected—national officials who could be directly held accountable for their actions. Further, as international problems became increasingly rooted in domestic issues, ranging from ethnic conflict to environmental policy, international solutions would have to depend ever more on implementation by these same government officials.

By 2004, when I published my book, *A New World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2004), I had seen the light, at least from a UN perspective. Government networks are indeed proliferating, and indeed becoming controversial in some quarters—witness, for

instance, the fierce debate in the United States over whether judges should be able to cite foreign legal decisions, a trend fueled by regular meetings of top constitutional judges around the world. The watchdog group Public Citizen maintains a website devoted to tracking the activity of government networks, such as the International Organization of Securities Commissioners. And a new book by *Foreign Policy* Editor Moises Naim called, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (Doubleday, 2005), details the global networks that engage in illegal trade of arms, people, drugs, money and counterfeit goods—all of which must be countered in part by parallel networks of public officials.

All these networks, however, suffer from problems of legitimacy and accountability, in part, due to a lack of transparency and, in part, due to the nature of their membership, which is dominated by developed countries. Some networks are more effective than traditional international institutions; all have the great advantage of connecting officials on the frontlines of global problems, but they cannot constitute a legitimate and effective system of global governance on their own.

Thus, the task for all those seeking to design global governance mechanisms to tackle the myriad problems in the world—mechanisms that transcend the powers and reach of individual nations—is to figure out how best to combine and connect traditional international institutions, such as those in the UN system, with government networks. Can the UN do more to convene and coordinate networks of national officials in various areas? Can the UN create new networks of legislators and judges? Can the UN use smaller government networks as pilot groups to resolve problems in a smaller forum that could eventually be expanded to a larger organization?

The Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change recommended the creation of one government network: a G-20 of the leaders of 10 developed and 10 developing nations, following in the footsteps of the G-20 of finance ministers that helped resolve the East Asian financial



crisis in the late 1990s. Such a group could play a valuable role in making the UN more representative in the absence of—or while waiting for—Security Council reform. It is a promising example of how international institutions and government networks can work together to create a system of global governance for the 21st century. ■

—Dr. Slaughter is dean of Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

All around us, institutions are failing, but there is one primary reason for the system breakdown: the attitude of the major powers and the trend they are spurring worldwide.
by G. John Ikenberry



Woodrow Wilson School/Jon Roemer

Global governance is indeed in crisis. Over the last few years, it is difficult not to notice a general and quite alarming erosion of the authority and capacities of international institutions and regimes across the board in security, economic and political affairs: the United Nations, European Union and NATO, chief among them.

Consider the record. The fall 2005 World Summit in New York was the much-anticipated moment when the member states of the UN were poised to make their organization more relevant as a tool for cooperation in the 21st century. But it failed—and the moment

has now passed. Many efforts to advance vital reforms are at a standstill, although small steps are being made.

The federal vision of Europe is dead, buried in the rejection of the new European Union constitution in France and Holland. A new era of European political drift has begun.

NATO still exists as a security treaty but, as Iraq demonstrates, has steadily declined as a vehicle for serious strategic cooperation between the US and Europe.

Efforts at the World Trade Organization to reach agreement on a new round of negotiations tackling agriculture and other tough issues have so far failed. Some argue that the age of big, multilateral trade agreements is over.

The May 2005 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference collapsed in disarray. Iran refuses to provide credible guarantees that it will not develop a nuclear weapons capability while the “nuclear have-nots” felt the “nuclear haves,” including the US, fell far short of meeting their obligations. With no progress in sight, most observers agree that the NPT is in crisis.

This crisis is generated primarily from choices made by the US government. The US does not appear to be doing as much today as it has in the past to sponsor and operate within a system of consensual rule-based governance. *Why* the US is less willing to do so is actually a complex issue. Some of it is very specifically about the Bush administration—and therefore these biases and viewpoints will pass from the scene as Bush and his team leave office. But America's global position and the structure of incentives that this setting generates is also part of the explanation.

It might be useful to think of the dynamic this way: the US is unique in that it is simultaneously both a provider of global governance and a great power that pursues its own national interest. America's liberal hegemonic role is manifest when it champions organiza-

tions, such as the World Trade Organization, engages in international rule or regime creation, or reaffirms its commitment to cooperative security in Asia and Europe. Its great power or nationalist role is manifest, for example, when it seeks to protect its domestic steel or textile industry. When the US acts as a liberal hegemon, it is seeking to lead or manage the global system of rules and institutions; when it is acting as a nationalist great power, it is seeking to respond to domestic interests and its relative power position. The point is that, today, these two roles—liberal hegemon and traditional great power—are increasingly in conflict.

But Europe is also part of the problem. Europeans and, in particular, France and Germany, seem to be looking for ways to avoid the international system and isolate themselves from its effects rather than engage and shape it. American power actually makes it easier for Europe to take this inward-looking path. We call this free riding and it reinforces all the wrong tendencies in the US.

If nationalism is more evident in America, it is in Europe as well. This certainly is not the nationalism of Europe's past, but it is a soft nationalism that reflects a decline of the left not to mention class politics and popular worries about economic openness, globalization and immigration. With the return of nationalism, the cosmopolitan and post-nationalist aspirations of European elites have been forced into retreat, and as a result, slowly disappearing is a Europe that ties itself to an expanding system of global governance.

In the meantime, the big post-war multilateral institutions that provided governance in past generations are weakening. Today's leaders appear content to undo these bargains and let collective management of the global system wither. But a day will come when American and European leaders seek to rediscover the logic and benefits of global governance. The harsh reality of problems and threats going unaddressed will demand it. ■

—Dr. Ikenberry is an author and the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School.

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