A Global Authority—Classical Arguments and New Issues

Author(s): W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz

Source: *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 106, Fundamentalism, Authority and Globalization (April 2005), pp. 81-92

Published by: Berghahn Books in association with the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803817>

Accessed: 07-02-2019 12:35 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803817?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR

Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Berghahn Books are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*

A Global Authority—Classical Arguments and New Issues

W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz

The world being one is a perennial dream of humanity. Since we are a single species, ideally and logically, there should be all-embracing justice and a better life for all. Should this vision come to pass, the material, political, cultural, and religious differences among human beings could be to at least some degree reconciled, and prospects for lasting peace greatly enhanced. Threatened by unsolved world problems, we might thus begin to consider the prospect of a global authority, a political organization that would transcend the nation-state and could bring about the unity of humankind, global justice, and earthly peace. Like Thomas Magnell, we might start to believe that 'the predicament of vulnerability of nation-states calls for a global authority with sufficient power to redress or prevent attacks on themselves'.¹ Accepting an elaborate argument of Alexander Wendt, we might even come to think that such an authority and a universal world state were inevitable.²

In this article I explore the question whether the condition of insecurity in which states are placed calls for the creation of a global authority. I present classical arguments for and against a world government, and inquire whether the tragedy of September 11 provides a new support for the idea of a world state. I argue that the real alternative to international anarchy, where no one is secure, is neither a powerful nation that is able to provide security for itself nor a world state but an international society.

Classical arguments for/against a world state

Political theory offers two different solutions to the problem of insecurity caused by the situation of the absence of a ruler on the international scene. These correspond to the idea of *raison d'état* and to the idea of a world state.

On the one hand, in the tradition of political realism, associated with Machiavelli and Hobbes, sovereign states in their dealings with

Theoria, April 2005

one another are in a state of nature, unrestrained by bonds of law, and are free to conduct policies towards one another according to the dictates of the idea of reason of state. Viewed from this perspective, the international environment is marked by ongoing conflict. Placed in a situation of anarchy, with no ruler above them, states are caught in a continuous struggle for power and survival. Perhaps the greatest problem with realism is that it has a tendency to slip into an extreme version. In the extreme realism of power politics, the state's egoism and power become glorified, instead of being kept within reasonable limits. In the writings of Hegel, and in 19th century German historical thought, this tendency, in the case of Germany, led to the affirmation of *Machtpolitik* and subsequently to two world wars.

On the other hand, reflection on the conflicting character of interstate relations can lead to a conclusion that peace among nations can be secured by bringing international anarchy to an end. Another paradigm is the idea that states can be made subject to a global authority and thus escape from the state of nature. Advocates of this idea attempt a radical transformation of the existing international system. They believe that what is needed for perpetual peace is to transfer the sovereignties of individual states to a world government, one which would be as sovereign over individual nations as the individual nations are over their respective territories.

The argument that to save the world from war and provide security it is necessary to employ a kind of social contract transferring sovereignties of individual states to a global authority rests upon an analogy with domestic societies. Relations among states in the anarchic international system are compared to those among individuals in a Hobbesian state of nature. The conditions of an orderly social life are believed to be the same among states as they are among individuals; thus they require that domestic institutions be reproduced on a global scale. It was indeed Thomas Hobbes who identified the absence of a ruler, literally *an-archy*, with the state of conflict and argued that, without a central authority with sufficient power to keep humans in awe, the war 'of every man against every man' would be the universal condition of humankind.³ On the basis of the analogy between states and individual human beings, it would seem logical to conclude that peace among nations could only be secured by bringing international anarchy to an end and establishing a world state comprising all nations of the earth. However, the domestic analogy stops short at this point.⁴ It was not the view of Hobbes himself that a social contract between nations should bring international relations to an

end. Political thinkers and international relations theorists had traditionally rejected the case of a world state.

In his essay on *Perpetual Peace*, written in 1795, Kant says that the existence of many separate states is 'rationally preferable to their being overrun by a superior power that melts them into a universal monarchy'.⁵ Since 'laws invariably lose their impact with the extension of the domain of governance', he apparently fears that upon the transformation of the existing society of nations into a world state, the latter would be unable to keep dissenting groups within the bounds of law. Turning into a soulless despotism, which maintains peace solely by force, the world state would finally disintegrate into anarchy. Since nature has prevented people from intermingling by differences in language and religion, Kant suggests, they cannot be artificially united by a supranational structure imposed from above. It is not then the despotism of a world state, but 'the growth of culture and men's gradual progress toward greater agreement regarding their principles [that can] lead to mutual understanding and peace'.⁶ A stable world order is guaranteed by liberal republics that, when established, will progressively lead to peaceful relations among themselves. The effects of international anarchy, in Kant's view, are tamed in the relations among states of a similarly liberal character.⁷

The idea of a global authority was strongly advocated during the late 1940s. Under the impact of the Second World War and prospects for a third one, the propaganda for a world state reached broad masses and imparted to them a sense of urgency.⁸ In the article, 'The Illusion of World Government' published in 1949 in *Foreign Affairs*, Reinhold Niebuhr summarized what he deemed to be the fallacy of world government in propositions that resemble Kant's critique. The advocates of world government, Niebuhr claims, labour upon a misconception about the nature of governmental authority. They base their advocacy on the analogy of the social contract, by which individuals living in a Hobbesian state of nature, where no one is secure, surrender aspects of their individual sovereignty in exchange for security and protection. The notion of the social contract led them to believe that the authority rests on government's monopoly of law and lawful force. However, 'the authority of government is not primarily the authority of law, nor the authority of force, but the authority of community itself. Laws are obeyed because the community accepts them as corresponding, on the whole, to its conception of justice'.⁹ Realism did indeed prompt Hobbes to an unqualified endorsement of state power, but this was because, Niebuhr argues, he was not realistic enough.

What in his realism Hobbes did not understand was that although government was indispensable for the maintenance of domestic peace, it could not rely on force alone. This was the great omission of Hobbes' political philosophy. Analogically, world government, created by social contract, whereby individual nations merely transfer power and relinquish significant elements of their sovereignties to a central authority, cannot perform its task of maintaining global peace.

The argument for a global authority, which rests on a domestic analogy, involves two premises. First, the world government will provide peace and security. Second, security is the primary need of individuals and states, so that liberty should, if necessary, be sacrificed to it. Hans Morgenthau, best known for his famous book *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948 when the Cold War had just started, has shown that the first premise is not true. In the chapter of his book devoted to a world state, he wrote: 'The peace of society whose inter-group conflicts are no longer limited and neutralized by overriding loyalties, [and] whose processes of social change no longer sustain expectations in all the major groups ... —the peace of such a society cannot be saved by the state, however strong'.¹⁰ For any society, including world society, Morgenthau argues, to keep individuals in awe by overwhelming force is an essential but not a sufficient condition for an orderly social life. To remain in peace, individuals must be able to expect from society at least an approximation of their conception of justice. They must also feel loyalties to society as a whole which surpass their loyalties to any one part of it.

That the power of a global authority, 'as great as it would be', is alone not sufficient to keep peace is proved by the experience of civil wars. In the research of Quincy Wright, to which Morgenthau refers, it is shown that between 1480 and 1941, 28 per cent of the total 278 wars were civil wars. They were costly both in lives and economic losses far in excess of contemporary international wars. The frequency and destructiveness of civil wars demonstrates that the establishment of a world state, especially if its task is strictly limited to the large matters of security, does not give any assurance of security and peace. Morgenthau, and earlier Niebuhr, noted that the state is not merely an artificial creation of a constitutional convention, but a product of a community from which it springs.¹¹ The forces of destruction arising from within the world community in the form of class, racial, religious, regional, or purely political struggles can erupt in revolutions and civil wars. Hence, as the cases of the partition of India in 1947, the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and the cur-

rent Palestinian-Israeli conflict can show, the existence of a plurality of sovereign states may often be less dangerous than an attempt to hold potentially hostile ethnic and religious groups within the framework of a single state.

Thomas Magnell's recent suggestion that the United States, the relatively successful melting pot of nations, can serve as a paradigm for creating a world state 'here and now' in the form of a global federation seems difficult to defend.¹² Morgenthau convincingly argues that the exemplar of the United States proves only the dependence of any state that is expected to endure on a pre-existing moral and political community.¹³ The 13 states that united in a federation that became the United States were sovereign in name rather than in actuality. By declaring their independence from Britain in 1776 and then establishing the United States, they merely exchanged one sovereign power for another. More importantly, however, they exchanged one common loyalty for another common loyalty. Meanwhile, they retained the same language, the same culture, the same national heritage, and the same moral convictions that were tested during the American War of Independence.¹⁴ Reflection on this immediately reveals that at the global level a similar community of moral and political values does not exist. Humanity perhaps more than ever is divided by immense religious, cultural, and material differences. To obtain peace through the transformation of the present anarchic international system into a world state is, therefore, unattainable under the moral, social, and political conditions prevailing in the world in our times.

For the self-styled realist Hans Morgenthau, who surprisingly at the same time was a keen supporter of the idea of world government, the value of Unesco and other agencies of the United Nations lay not in themselves, but in what he believed to be their final cause, a world authority. He saw in them a means to create a world community, which he defined as 'a community of moral standards and political action' and which in his realism he believed was necessary to sustain a world state.¹⁵ Like Niebuhr, Morgenthau did not question the analogy with domestic societies on which the argument for a global authority rested, but denied that any state that was expected to endure could be created by way of a social contract or a mere constitutional convention. He believed that just as the community of the American people antedated the American state, so also a world community of the people sharing the same moral and political values had to antedate a world state. He feared that without the support of a world community, a world state would be 'a totalitarian monster resting on feet of

clay' and torn apart by civil wars and revolutions.¹⁶ However, if it is the case, as Morgenthau believed, that through the work of international organizations common global values can be introduced, the interests and life of all nations can be gradually integrated, and world order maintained by collective political action, then the domestic analogy no longer holds true. Anarchy, which is the central fact of international relations, cannot be identified with the Hobbesian state of nature. It was the work of Hedley Bull and of other members of the English school, whose lessons remain largely unlearned today, to show that international anarchy was unique, and could not be compared with the Hobbesian anarchy.¹⁷ States could be linked to one another by mutual obligations. They could thus form international society, a great society of nations, the fullest, practical expression of which is the United Nations.

If we agree that a world community, based on universally recognized principles and accepted procedures for political action, is necessary to sustain a world state, then it follows that anarchy among states that accept international norms can be tolerable to a degree to which it is not among individual human beings. There can exist in anarchy a society of sovereign states, a society without government.¹⁸ There is then no parallel between nation states and individuals concerning security. Consequently, there is no need to bring international anarchy to an end by establishing a global authority. Furthermore, what is missing from the history of the formation of a world state is an account of identity change. It assumes that actors are merely rational, self-interested, utility maximizers. It does not take into consideration their cultural, religious, and national identities that, when suppressed under the umbrella of a world government, would suddenly violently revolt in the desire for recognition. The real alternative to Hobbesian anarchy, where no one is secure, is thus not a despotic and potentially unstable world state, but a strong international society. Does this still hold true in the world after the events of September 11 and issues pertaining to them?

The vulnerability of states after 9/11

During the Cold War the mutually assured destruction by the nuclear arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union certainly placed the American people under a much graver threat than the risk of a terrorist attack. The threat, however, was material, and the logic of ter-

ror assured that it was predictable. Both superpowers played the nuclear game in strict adherence to rules of deterrence. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 confirmed the worst fears that in the post-Cold War environment the security dilemmas have changed. The age of absolute deterrence between states ended as non-state actors, proven to be deterrent-proof, emerged.¹⁹ The attacks of September 11 were a tragedy. Yet they were also of great political significance. They were constructed as scenario threats for the 21st century. From the beginning they were presented as a lesson in strategic realities in the uncertain future, a situation of the absence of a clear danger from any major power and the lack of what Anthony Giddens terms 'ontological security', the firm knowledge of what one can expect next.²⁰ The way of constructing '9-11', Mikkel Rasmussen contends, manifested itself in the conclusion that even the United States had become a 'reflexive risk society'.²¹ It points to the 'equality or near equality of vulnerability' to which Thomas Magnell refers.²² In the words of President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address of January 29, 2002: 'thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning'. Do the events of September 11 provide new support for the idea of world government?

'For the first time since the end of the Cold War', Robert Harris wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'one has the uneasy feeling that the future is not as settled and monolithic as it once appeared, that the American empire may one day go the way of the Roman'.²³ This uneasy feeling that anarchy may be loosed upon the world can be interpreted as a beginning of imperial power rather than its end. The school of Republican intellectuals—including Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz and former Chairman of the Defence Policy Board Richard Perle—believed that the events of 9/11 proved the need for the United States to assume the duties of an international Leviathan. They called for the U.S. government to take on an imperial role and act decisively to counter terrorism and reinforce Western values all over the world.²⁴ Prepared by Paul Wolfowitz and released September 17, 2002, the National Security Strategy, known as the 'Bush Doctrine', calls for pre-emptive action against hostile states and terror groups, and it declares that the United States will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise its right of self-defence by acting pre-emptively. However, the fact that all nations, as Thomas Magnell argues, are now, because of this doctrine, 'subject to military

incursion of the United States',²⁵ proves neither any abridgment of the concept of national sovereignty nor a need for a world government. On the contrary, by developing a strategy that violates the accepted norms of international community, the United States has affirmed its sovereignty over other nations and fortified its position as a nation-state. By changing the name of 'French fries' into 'freedom fries' in the cafeteria of the American Congress, the American people have symbolically shown that in times of uncertainty they prefer their own freedom rather than collective security. They have proved that the case for the nation-state remains strong.

One can argue that we are entering into a new era where states no longer afford the protection from aggression that they once at least seemed to provide. In the new technological conditions, facing state-sponsored or individual terrorist activities, even large nation-states are no longer able to provide security to their citizens and become as vulnerable to violence as individuals in the state of nature.²⁶ Hence, just as fear of violent death made it functional for individuals to submit to a common power, the changes in the forces of destruction make it functional for states as well. The fact that nuclear weapons are possessed by relatively few states limits the force of the argument today, but it becomes more powerful if nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction spread. Do we need a global authority in a world in which the weapons of mass destruction become more readily available and cheaper?

Because of the changes in war technology, it indeed seems functional for security to be organized on a global scale. Yet this does not mean that it has to take the form of a world government. The United Nations Organization has been devised to ensure collective security, and is a system in which all member states undertake a common action against any country that threatens the security of another state. The logic of collective security is flawless provided that all nations subordinate whatever conflicting interests they may have to the common good defined in terms of collective defence of all member states.²⁷ In practice, however, the security system of the UN can only function where there is a consensus among those major powers that are permanent members of the Security Council. For most of the history of the United Nations, the principal member states did not share a consensus. What this does prove is not a failure of this organization but rather how great is the power of human self-interest, as well as ideological, religious, and material differences between nations. Similarly, it can be expected that egoism, mutual mistrust, and the desire

for national and religious recognition would obstruct any attempt to build an efficient world government. What is perhaps the greatest problem with the idea of a global authority, as recently promoted in Thomas Magnell's writings, is that it represents wishful thinking and tends to diminish the real solutions to today's world problems that can be provided by the existing international organizations.

The UN and the idea of international security

In the months immediately preceding the beginning of the war in Iraq the United Nations Organization came under challenge from the Bush administration. This challenge was clearly expressed by Richard Perle, one of the most outspoken and influential American advocates of war against Iraq. In an article, which he significantly entitled 'Thank God for the Death of the UN', published in the *Guardian* on March 21, 2003 and reprinted in other newspapers, Perle accused the United Nations of being ineffective in realizing its objectives. Any criticism of the United Nations, that in spite of its well-considered principles it is unable to provide a foundation for a more secure world order, is, nevertheless, unfounded if it does not consider, firstly, the limitations inherent in the structure of this organization, the work of which is based on collective decision-making, and, secondly, possible alternatives to it. With reference to the latter, in the dangerous world in which we live today an alternative to the United Nations cannot be a state driven by its national self-interest, a state which violates the norms of international society. To put our trust in such a state is to go back to the *Machtpolitik* of the 19th century with all of its possible negative consequences. A world state is also an unacceptable alternative, since it can amount to a Kantian 'soulless despotism' or, as noted earlier, 'a totalitarian monster resting on feet of clay'. What is needed to keep the world maximally secure is not the transformation of the present society of sovereign states into a world state, nor the corruption of the international society through unilateral actions, but rather to make this society stronger by the voluntary limitation of the exercise of national sovereignty on the part of individual states through international institutions, obligations, and good customs.

The uniqueness of the UN lies in the fact that it can make the world safer by enacting multilateral measures. With the increased interdependence of peoples and states, international security has come to mean protecting people from natural disasters, civil conflict, and mas-

sive violations of human rights that may occur within a given state, in addition to the more familiar function of protecting one state from attack by another. Yet perhaps the greatest value of the United Nations is not its practical successes in peace-making and peace-building in various parts in the world, or in providing humanitarian relief from disasters, but its contribution to the growth of the universal consciousness of humankind. The force of universality which it promotes is a challenge to national particularism. Through its work common global values are introduced, and the interests and life of all nations are gradually integrated. It provides us with a sense of universal moral obligation to other humans, an obligation that transcends the limit of national communities.

Without the United Nations, the world in which we live today would be even more dangerous. Therefore, attempts to undermine this organization by affirming individual state sovereignty and idealizing power politics are harmful to the international community as a whole. The idea of protecting individuals and states from harm can be put into practice only through sustained co-operation and an increased community of interests on the part of all major powers. It is only within the society of states that the individual state, however strong, can prosper in the longer run. Making this society stronger rather than weaker is a better solution to international problems than imposing a world government on a divided and potentially unwilling humanity.²⁸

NOTES

1. Thomas Magnell, 'Vulnerability, Global Authority, and Moving away from a Local Maximum of Value', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36, 2002, p.5.
2. Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State is Inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations*, 9, 4, 2003, pp.491-542.
3. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Edwin Curley (ed.), Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994, p.76.
4. Hedley Bull, 'Society and Anarchy in International Relations', in J. Der Derian (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, London: MacMillan, 1995, p.78.
5. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (transl. by Ted Humphrey), Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983, p.125.
6. Ibid.

7. Thus, Kant provides foundations for liberal or democratic peace theory. See Michael W. Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12, 1983.
8. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (2nd ed.), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956, p.469.
9. Reinhold Niebuhr, 'The Illusion of World Government', *Foreign Affairs*, April, 1949. Quoted by H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.191.
10. Morgenthau, p.476.
11. Ibid.
12. Magnell, p.6.
13. Morgenthau, p.484.
14. As John Jay expressed this in the *Federalist* No. 2, providence gave the United States 'to one united people; a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts, fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war, have nobly established their general liberty and independence'.
15. Morgenthau, p.489.
16. Ibid., p.482.
17. Bull, p.86. Recent years have brought a revival of interest in the English School. However, the ideas of the school are still largely confined to a narrow circle of IR scholars. For an extensive biography of the English School organized by Barry Buzan, see the website at www.leeds.ac.uk/polis/englishschool/. Of special interest are the following introductory articles: Bary Buzan, 'The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 23, 3, 2001, pp.471-88, and Richard Little, 'The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 6, 3, 2000, pp.395-422. For a debate between American realism and the English School, see Dale C. Copeland, 'A Realist Critique of the English School', *Review of International Studies*, 29, 3, 2003, pp.427-41, and Richard Little, 'The English School versus American Realism: The Meeting of Minds or Divided by a Common Language', *Review of International Studies*, 29, 3, 2003, pp.443-460.
18. Bull, p.82.
19. Mustafa Kibaroglu, 'Changing Security Environment and the Concept of Deterrence,' forthcoming in Nedžad Basic and Fred Tanner (eds), *Security Studies: An Agenda for Security Studies in Transition*.
20. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, pp.35-69.
21. See Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "'A Parallel Globalization of Terror": 9-11, Security and Globalization,' *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, 37, 3, 2002, pp.323-349.
22. Magnell, pp.4-5.
23. Quoted in Rasmussen, p.337.
24. As Rasmussen convincingly argues, following the end of the Cold War the West has come to define itself in terms of globalization, the civilizing process, by which the values of democracy, market economy, and civil society are promoted.

'The perception of the threat of terrorism fed on the West's construction of its own future in terms of a powerful process of globalization. As the dark side of globalization, terrorism had a power equal to the bright side of globalization': Rasmussen, p.333.

25. Magnell, p.2.
26. Thomas Magnell, 'For Global Federation', *Concerned Philosophers for Peace Newsletter*, 24, 1, 2004, p.15.
27. Morgenthau, p.389.
28. An early version of this paper was presented at the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, Washington, D.C., December 2003.