

The "realism" of the past gives way
to the functionalism of tomorrow

World Federalism Reconsidered

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One of the most tiresome arguments in international affairs is the "realist" case against world federal government. It has been permitted to prevail for much too long.

For decades "political realists" have asserted that nationalism is too strong and stubborn a force for a world rule of law to be established. They have been all too persuasive—but have contributed thereby to their own self-fulfilling prophecies. "Realists" have typically voiced boredom and condescension toward federalists and have indulged in raw caricatures of the federalist case. The plausibility of such caricatures has been abetted by the fact that too many of the most visible (and audible!) federalists have been senior citizens whose fervent idioms suggest a dreamy one-worldism of an earlier era. It is time to renew and restate the case for world federal government.

I do not come to this task as a federalist insider or as a specialist in international law. I have never been a member of conspicuously federalist organizations. Rather, my involvement in a range of seemingly diverse international problems and my intellectual struggle both to define relationships among them and to design strategies for coping with them have driven me to a kind of *existential federalism*. More and more I perceive this existential federalism to be implicit in the emerging viewpoints of very sober persons who have never really resonated to the slogan of a "world rule of law" nor regarded themselves as "federalists."

There is a mounting conviction, in both domestic and world affairs, that the piecemeal, pragmatic mode of American "realists" is no longer an adequate response to increasingly systemic crises. On the domestic front the renewal of ideology—and, more

specifically, of options which must be labeled "democratic socialism"—is an imperative second to none in its urgency. But the case for reconstructing the American political economy must not be wholly separated from models of world order. Until and unless we forge new social disciplines for our own institutions and resources in America we shall not be capable of playing a very constructive role in international life. So a major assumption of these paragraphs is that the advent of effective and humane institutions of world governance depends, in considerable measure, upon the achievement of effective and humane governance within the world's wealthiest and most powerful country.

World government is anything but a nonideological issue. Some homegrown federalists have wished



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it could be—and have thereby projected their own Anglo-Saxon constitutionalism across Latin, Arab, Asian, and African societies. There are tough ideological questions which federalists must confront: Who controls international economic power in its various forms? How is political power to be distributed? How is social change possible under international law and order?

Some American antifederalists have fantasized that world government would mean Communist control: Communists tend to view federalism as a capitalist-imperialist plot; but Third Worlders understandably fear that federalism would thwart their demands for radical social change, since it would impose the law and order of the status quo—perhaps a joint capitalist-Communist status quo. It is a curious thing that some domestic liberals in America have expressed their internationalism in static, if not repressive, legalisms.

If a major component of a viable federalism is an effective balance of social change and social discipline in domestic life, what other minimal assumptions can we specify so as to ward off the crudest caricaturists of federalism?

First, let federalism be truly federal—that is, there should be a pluralistic pattern of power in which sovereignty would be shared between central and local authorities. There would be no omnipotent or omniscient world state, but there would be effective central authority in such clearly defined areas as military authority and control of ocean resources.

Federalism should ultimately be universal and representative.

It should be democratic in balancing at least three essentials in the international system: majority rule, minority rights, and individual liberties.

It should permit and encourage a diversity of forms and centers of economic power.

It should welcome regional forms of cooperation and regulations which do not impose injustices on other regions.

It should foster cultural autonomy and variety and protect them from cultural imperialism.

These normative components of federalism are compatible enough with the political faiths espoused by most Americans and, indeed, by most of the world's peoples. Blueprints for global governance which embody these assumptions have not been lacking. Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, through successive revisions of their *World Peace through World Law*, have elaborated their proposals for developing the United Nations into an effective set of federal institutions (including a reconstituted General Assembly, an executive council, a strengthened World Court, judicial tribunals, organs of mediation and conciliation, a world police

force, and a world development authority). The Institute for World Order (formerly the World Law Fund) for several years has been working on a crosscultural basis with eight regional teams designing their own "preferred worlds" for the 1990's, several of which have essentially federalist features.

But it is not in the details of such blueprints that the case for federalism is most persuasive. Rather, it is in reading the signs of the times and grasping the logic of survival.

As a student in the late 1940's who had been nurtured on an idealized view of the United Nations—which view I am struggling to recover!—I was stunned by the World Federalist attack on the U.N. led by some World War II veterans. Most stunning of all was a much-wounded Marine captain, Cord Meyer, Jr., who had been named an aide to the U.S. delegation to the San Francisco Conference of 1945. Shortly after, Meyer wrote his federalist tract *Peace or Anarchy* in conspicuous disillusionment:

From the Pacific where thousands risked and lost their lives for barren strips of sand, I found myself suddenly transferred to the committee rooms where we had been promised that a peaceful world order would rise from the ruins of the war. . . . The victory won at such cost on the battlefield was squandered at the conference table. Instead of an effective instrument of international security, an organization was created that was even weaker than the old League of Nations. I left San Francisco with the conviction that World War III was inevitable, if the U.N. was not substantially strengthened in the near future.

I did not then, nor do I now, accept that unfavorable contrast of the U.N. with the League of Nations. The resourcefulness of the U.N. proved greater than Meyer anticipated; after a long dry spell the resiliency of the U.N. is again, I believe, about to be demonstrated in the face of a radically transformed world agenda. Captain Meyer, unfortunately, became disillusioned with federalism, too, and wound up working for the CIA.

But the most compelling case for world federalism in the late 1940's had to do with the relationship between national sovereignty, war, and morality. Cord Meyer saw the nation-state as the cause of war, saw sovereignty as a myth and illusion, a legal fiction for mass murder. Thus did the very vocabulary of political realism serve the veterans of an earlier generation.

While war—especially in its nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological forms—remains a threat to human survival, that "realism" of a quarter century ago has had increasingly to take account of other terracid threats: ecocatastrophes, resource

exhaustion, famine, population explosion, world depression. Any of these alternate threats, related as they are to each other, may also be a cause of war. It is precisely in this fresh range of threats to global survival that federalism must find its new rationale—and may find its new lease on the hopes and actions of the legions of peace.

Again, wars and arms races and military establishments continue. In fact, the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and the USSR is now badly out of control. But there is much less certainty now that arms will actually lead directly to war. There is much more of a belief that arms races are an extravagant irrelevance; that the burden of foreign policy is shifting toward economic and ecological matters; that if these matters are not well managed, Doomsday is coming.

It is in these nonmilitary areas that the “realist” critics of federalism and the U.N. are least equipped to cope with the burdens of foreign policy. It is in these same problem areas that Nixon-Kissinger priorities are most ill-adapted. And it is in these nonmilitary areas that almost all nations are now most dramatically experiencing the vulnerability and inadequacy of the nation-state system.

Oil supplies and spills, inflation, hijacking, drought, expropriation, closed beaches, mercury poisoning, vanishing species, redundant population, linguistic imperialism—these and many other problems testify to the widening gap between the doctrine of national sovereignty and any society’s real capacity for self-determination. In a growing number of states people are more and more alienated by appeals to patriotism, by paying heavy taxes to support military establishments that increase their insecurity and deprive them of public services, by curtailment of civil rights and liberties and disruption of their families in the “national interest,” even while special interests seem to gain power and profit at their expense. It is not at all clear to tens of millions of citizens that they are being effectively or fairly served by their national governments.

Thus the nation-state is ever more battered by external pressures even as moral and ethnic alienation weaken it from within. It is, willy-nilly, being integrated into centripetal global systems and being fragmented centrifugally by domestic dissensus. Card-carrying federalists and others may now meet on the common ground of *functionalism*: practical action on problems of global survival, regulation, and cooperation.

But functionalism, if it means only the international extension of piecemeal pragmatism, can compound the threats to human survival. It is just here that a thoughtful federalist perspective can help bring some absolutely vital additives to functionalism: (1) An insistence that international programs be orchestrated in terms of an increasingly comprehensive strategy for global survival; (2) a sense of

the linkage between military and nonmilitary problems; (3) a capacity to discern the realities of sovereignty, old and new, in a rapidly changing international system; and (4) an imaginative projection of the new supranational institutions required to cope with survival problems.



The U.N.-sponsored Law of the Sea Conference recently held its first meeting in Caracas. Too many otherwise well-informed people have little awareness of what is at stake in this effort to create a new international ocean regime. That stake was more than hinted at in a statement of principles adopted in December, 1970, by the Political Committee of the U.N. General Assembly—principles “placing the seabed beyond the reach of national sovereignties, linking benefits from peaceful use to the needs of developing countries and looking forward toward conservation and antipollution measures.” Lester Brown of the Overseas Development Council has written that such an oceanic regime, if established, would have “a profound impact on the way the global community is organized, greatly strengthening the case for international sovereignty and collective approaches to meeting mankind’s needs vis-à-vis that of national sovereignty and independent national approaches.” Brown notes further that this regime would establish United Nations sovereignty over two-thirds of the earth’s surface; that revenue from corporations or governments licensed to exploit oceanic resources could provide the U.N. with an independent income and with capital for international development; and that such licensing might provide that most important precedent for the taxing and regulation of multinational corporations.

This is perhaps the most exciting current example of a “functionalist-federalist” approach to a global problem. But there are many others: the new U.N. Environment Program, the U.N. Development Program, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, disaster relief, authoritative research through the new United Nations University, the specialized agencies. In all these programs there is the prospect that nations may realize their own interests more effectively through the sharing of sovereignty. That

prospect, however, requires public awareness and political will. It is certainly unfortunate, and may yet be tragic, that the post-1965 impotence of the U.N.-related NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), including the churches, has yet to be overcome by a fresh commitment to the cause of international cooperation.

The linkage between disarmament and development is clear enough in the simultaneous escalation of defense-spending and decline of development assistance. Another linkage needs more stress than it has been getting, the connection between disarmament and the creation of U.N. peacekeeping forces. Federalists have rightly emphasized that the strengthening of U.N. peacekeeping capacities, such as through a standby force of 25,000 men recruited from earmarked contingents of smaller powers, could at once make a major contribution toward disarmament, directly mitigate hostilities in a variety of hot spots, and augment the authority of the "U.N. presence" in international conflicts.

World federalism has acquired a new credibility, although it may need a new name. That credibility relates most clearly to manifold opportunities to revitalize the United Nations. With nearly universal membership in the U.N., with a shift toward economic and ecological issues, with a mounting sense of multiform threats to global survival, with the exposure of the vulnerability of even the most powerful nation-states, with the sudden awareness of the bargaining power of "weaker" states deriving from such resources as petroleum and bauxite, with proliferating nuclear and terrorist capabilities, the realities of international politics are kaleidoscopically different from what they were in the 1950's or even the 1960's.

Those who envision world government—whether in fond dreams or terrible nightmares—as the product of an international constitutional convention are quite possibly mistaken. Those who see world government as a product of organic growth in which new forms of *international* activity gain *supranational* authority through utility are perhaps discerning what is already well advanced.

I suspect that the true nature of our choice is whether to promote or resist this growth of authority-through-utility. There are abundant opportunities to promote the functional advance of legitimate global authority. Of course, we may well spurn these opportunities. But the price of the spurning may be world government of a much less desirable form: the primitive empire erected by the traumatized survivors of some nuclear or ecological or demographic or bacteriological holocaust. To become a federalist is not necessarily to become a giddy optimist. I personally admit to great inconstancy between my hopes for functional federalism and my fear that only a series of awful catastrophes will be able to transform our political consciousness adequately.

Three years ago, addressing the annual meeting of the American Society of International Law, U.N. General Assembly President Edvard Hambro declared:

We must realize that it is not enough any more to consider international law as the law of co-existence, or the law of co-ordination. International law of the future must be a law of collaboration of all nations. We, as lawyers, ought to use our knowledge of the law and our respect for the law in such a way that we can teach statesmen, politicians and diplomats that it is obsolete today to stress the absolute sovereignty of national states. Much more important than absolute sovereignty is the overriding rule of human solidarity. . . . We ought not to be satisfied when people tell us that politics is the art of the possible. Politics should be the art to make possible tomorrow what seems impossible today.

That's the kind of political realism we need, even and especially in this season of blighted hopes and cynical disengagement. I'm becoming more and more of a federalist, not because an omnipotent world government is possible or desirable today, but because a limited world government seems to be emerging which just may save us from terracide tomorrow.