

Prepared for the IIPS Symposium on

Japan's Role in the Forthcoming World Order

Tuesday, 1 November 2005

Tokyo

Session 1

The Precarious State of International Order: Assessment and Policy Implications

Hanns W. Maull

Chair of Foreign Policy and International Relations
University of Trier, Germany

The Precarious State of International Order: Assessment and Policy Implications

Paper prepared for the Conference “Japan’s Role in the Forthcoming World Order”

Organised by the Institute for International Policy Studies (IIPS)

Tokyo, Nov.1 and 2, 2005

Hanns W. Maull

Chair of Foreign Policy and International Relations University of Trier, Germany

I. International Order: Where are we, where are we headed?

Today’s international order has been shaped by one major force, the force of globalisation, and two series of important events, the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of Sept.11, 2001, which have battered the dynamics of globalisation into the specific shape of global governance which we observe today.

Globalisation is not new - the dynamics of international relations have long been driven by the secular processes of modernisation which we today call “globalisation”, but they have assumed a new quality since around the 1960s. Ultimately, it was the forces of globalisation which undid the Soviet empire and thus produced the first set of events which have shaped today’s world politics: the disintegration of the East-West conflict, which had come to dominate world politics since the late 1940s.

The second major event which has shaped world politics was the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon carried out by al-Qaida on September 11, 2001. More specifically, what changed the trajectory of world politics since 2001 was the new sense of vulnerability which the attacks injected into American politics and the way in which American foreign policy reacted to those attacks. The Bush Administration chose to define the challenge of September 11, 2001 as a declaration of war by international terrorism against the civilised world, and it has responded to this by waging a “global war on terror”, with far-reaching consequences for international relations.

Those forces and events together have produced a state of international order which seems increasingly precarious. The dynamics of globalisation offer enormous opportunities (such as the defeat of hunger and poverty worldwide), but they also carry huge risks (such as pandemics, terrorism, environmental destruction and climate change), and its force is corrosive to political order. As pointed out already, the dynamics of globalisation were the underlying cause for the implosion of the Soviet empire, which in turn has taken away much of the external pressure which in the past had obliged countries to focus resources and political energy on foreign policy and security policies. With the end of the East-West confrontation, attention began to wane from international relations; domestic politics now rules the roost in most countries. Moreover, America’s response to the attacks of 9/11 2001 on balance have been detrimental, rather than conducive to international order. As a consequence, most multilateral institutions and international regimes are plagued by symptoms of crisis – think only of the recent World 2005 Summit at the United Nations, the state of the WTO-Round, or the failure of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference this summer.

What characterises the precarious state of today’s international order? I see seven major trends which, taken together, describe where we are with regard to global governance:

1. Concentration of power resources in the international state system

From the perspective of inter-state relations, the United States occupies an overwhelmingly powerful position. This American preponderance finds its most obvious expression in the fact that the United States alone today accounts for roughly forty percent of global military expenditure; in fact, the annual American budget for military research and development in 2003 was larger than the total defence spending of the People's Republic of China, America's only conceivable long-term rival for the status of a dominant power in international relations.¹ And on top of its military superiority, America also boasts the world's largest economy, one of its largest markets, superior technological innovation capacities and an excellent elite education system which continues to promote America's cultural attractiveness. Overall, America's overwhelmingly powerful position will probably remain unchallenged for several decades to come, at least in terms of its relative power resources position.

In the league below America, we have a group of two "rising" powers, China and India, and three "declining" powers, (Germany, Japan and Russia), as well as one power of a still rather uncertain kind, the European Union. As a "civilian power", the European Union may or may not represent the wave of the future in world politics; for now, its ability to effect its external environment, while growing, is still limited both geographically and functionally. In the next league below them, we have several important regional and middle powers, and a large array of other states. Overall, the number of states in world politics is approaching 200 – up from 165 before the dissolution of the Soviet empire and former Yugoslavia.

2. Diffusion of Power in International Relations

Putting the focus on inter-state relations to assess the state of international order can produce very misleading results, however, for international relations are (to follow a felicitous image suggested by Joseph S. Nye, jr.²) acted out on at least three different chessboards simultaneously. Apart from the traditional chessboard bringing together the major powers and states, there is the chessboard of transnational economic relations and that of transnational societal processes of interaction. If one includes all those three dimensions in the analysis of international order, the overall picture changes from one of concentration of power to one dominated by power diffusion. This diffusion of power is owed importantly to the exponential growth of the number of relevant actors with the ability to influence international relations. Not only has the number of states increased significantly over the last fifty years, as we just noted, but that of transnational corporations and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) has also grown exponentially. So has the amount of transnational interactions of all kinds. As a result, if we define "power" as the ability to control outcomes, that is, to influence future developments in line with one's own preferences, then it has become significantly more dispersed and diffused than it used to be during the period of the Cold War.

3. The Erosion of State Authority and Political Legitimacy

One important reason for this diffusion of power lies with the growing difficulties of political institutions at all levels to command loyalty and following. Politics worldwide are confronted with growing expectations and demands, while its ability to meet those expectations by "allocating resources authoritatively" (which is what politics is about) is increasingly challenged. An expression of this trend is the "third wave"³ of democratisation, which since

¹ IISS, *The Military Balance 2003/2004*, London: Oxford UP 2004

² Nye, Joseph S.: *The Paradox of Power. Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Oxford: OUP 2002; idem: *Limits of American Power*, in: *Political Science Quarterly* 117:4 (Winter 2002/3), pp. 545-559

³ Huntington, Samuel P: *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*,

the 1970s has swept the world and brought a form of governance to a whole range of new countries which institutionalizes critical scrutiny of those exercising power and subjects them to electoral scrutiny.

From the perspective of international order, perhaps the most serious erosion of authority and legitimacy has concerned America's international leadership. Across the world, America no longer is perceived as a benign hegemon, but as an assertive and potentially dangerous power.⁴ This erosion of American authority and legitimacy has serious implications not only for the effectiveness of American foreign policy, but also for global governance and, hence, international order. For the present international order not only has largely been created by American diplomacy, but it also rests above all on the ability and the willingness of the United States to uphold its rules and its institutions. The present administration in Washington has lost much of its previous *interest* and increasingly also is risking its *ability* to sustain international order, thus contributing to its growing fragility.

4. The Growing Weight of Markets

The diffusion of power in international relations has enhanced the importance of markets and market-type processes. In markets, outcomes are determined not by specific actors and their strategies, but by "invisible hands" which spontaneously "order" the interactions of huge numbers of individual players. Yet that order can be precarious, and sometimes quite problematic. Markets are prone to overreactions, to bubbles and violent corrections - in short, to turbulence. To function well from the broader perspective of people's well-being, they have to be embedded into a politically determined and sustained order which they cannot, as a rule, generate by themselves.

5. Growing Importance of Fundamentalist Ideologies

Ideologies are in many ways a natural response to the complexities and turbulences of globalisation: they offer a sense of belonging, they question and challenge the logic of globalisation and thus respond to people's uneasiness and anxiety, and they also claim to offer "solutions" to its problems. As a powerful response to the individual search for identity under circumstances where many traditional ties are dissolving, fundamentalist ideology really is a twin brother to globalisation, the other side of the coin of ever closer integration of individuals and institutions into global contexts. Thus, such ideologies can be expected to remain important, or even increase their salience in the future. They will also continue to pose a significant potential for violence.

6. The Declining Utility of Military Force

The violence exercised by international terrorist organisations, which has been on the rise, has tended to obscure a larger trend away from organised violence in international relations. However cruel and devastating the "new wars" are – statistically, war and civil war has been on the retreat since the early 1990s in what may well be a secular trend towards the obsolescence of major war. As Norman Angell argued famously as early as 1913⁵ (but only a few months before World War One), the logic of globalisation (while the world was not yet in use, the phenomenon certainly existed already), with its ever more complex divisions of labour over ever larger distances at ever shorter intervals and ever more precise rhythm, requires the absence of organised violence to function well. This means that force ought to be contained, sterilised and ritualised – and this indeed has been happening. Yet precisely

Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press 1991

⁴ Pew Global Attitudes Project, US Image Up Slightly, But Still Negative, Survey released June 23, 2005, available at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=247> [accessed Oct.17, 2005]

⁵ Angell, Norman: The Great Illusion, London & New York 1913

because the use of violence has become increasingly dysfunctional and thus a “taboo”, it also has attracted those who want to provoke, to express their protest, and to destroy.

There is thus a deep paradox about war and organised violence: it is becoming less and less useful yet simultaneously more attractive as the ultimate provocation. But it is very difficult to deploy force constructively, and this in fact constitutes a second paradox: while military power is becoming ever more destructive in its possibilities, and increasingly also available even in the extreme form of weapons of mass destruction to “rogue states”, as well as to non-state actors (think of 1995 and the Aum Shin Rikyo attacks), it is hard to wield force in ways which are conducive to national or international order. As we are observing in Iraq, US military power could easily overwhelm the *ancien regime* of Saddam Hussein, but finds it extremely difficult to establish a new political order. While the monopoly of force still represents the ultimate foundation of political order at the state level, and continues to be relevant to international order, as well, the actual invocation of military power often quickly demonstrates how difficult it is to restore political order once it has been lost. American foreign policy under this Administration has severely underestimated those paradoxes of force, and its over-reliance on superior military power and preventive strikes risks to do damage to America’s interests in the world, but also to global governance.

7. The Nation State: The Indispensable but Increasingly Fragile Foundation of International Order

International order does not exist in a political vacuum: it still rests very largely on the ability (and the willingness) of states to impose order within their own boundaries and cooperate in building, sustaining and effectuating international order. Other actors, such as INGOs, transnational corporations or international organisations, can contribute to international order only if and when they find support among governments. But functioning modern statehood, which enables governments to impose order at home and contribute to international order abroad, in many states is more fiction than reality, while in many others, already existing elements of modern statehood are disintegrating.⁶ Even among those countries which have fully developed modern statehood, including democratic forms of governance and broad welfare state systems, the state is, in the words of Susan Strange, coming under pressure from below, above and from the sides, through the forces of globalisation.⁷ It therefore needs to adjust and adapt. In short, functioning modern statehood remains the essential ingredient of international order, but this is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. It is therefore hardly surprising that “state building” – i.e., the reconstitution of failed or deficient statehood – recently has become an important task of the international community.

Taken together, these trends combine to produce an increasingly fragile international order. It begins to resemble the famous Potemkin village: the facades of international institutions and regimes are still there, but there is little of importance going on inside. This precarious state of global governance reflects an underlying problem of globalisation: it encourages a revolution of rising expectations and demands on politics, but it simultaneously hampers the ability of politics to meet that demand. The result is an opening gap between the demand and the supply of governance in international relations (as, probably, at all levels of politics). The most serious manifestation of that gap today is America’s deficient response to the imminent problems of global governance.

⁶ Gurr et al: State Failure Task Force Report, Findings Part III, available at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/stfail/SFTF%20Phase%20III%20Report%20Final.pdf> [accessed Oct.17, 2005].

⁷ Strange, Susan: *The Retreat of the State, The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge: CUP 1996

II. What Do We Mean By “International Order”, and How Much Do We Need?

In a nutshell, political order is about the management and resolution of conflict without recourse to physical coercion or elimination, and the creation of opportunities for people to pursue their individual ambitions and dreams. A minimum requirement for international order would be that it can plausibly prevent major war or other global disasters. As far as the former is concerned, this may be the case for today’s international order; whether it would be able to cope with the less obvious systemic vulnerabilities of an increasingly interconnected world to, e.g., asymmetric violence or pandemics seems much less certain. Under present conditions, the international order may thus seem deficient even against a fairly modest set of expectations.

A second, more ambitious definition would describe “international order” as a system of global governance which would allow mankind to manage well both the opportunities and the risks of globalisation. What this could imply specifically has been laid out rather well by the *High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* in its report to the Secretary General of the United Nations.⁸ The political will to implement this ambitious programme for a refurbished international order has so far been largely absent, however: the 2005 World Summit Meeting at the UN produced very meagre results - and, as we know, no reform of the UN Security Council.

One problem with this summit was the idea that the international order could be reformed in one large package deal at one go. A third possibility to define international order would therefore aim at a long-term vision, the vision of “civilising” international relations in the way domestic politics have been civilised within advanced Western democracies. What this could imply can be described with the civilisational hexagon developed by Dieter Senghaas (see Chart). This hexagon sets out six interdependent political objectives which need to be advanced, as much as possible, simultaneously so as to make advances mutually supporting. Overall, the hexagon illustrates an ambitious but realistic political agenda for global governance, which has a number of practical advantages: it provides a sustainable vision, it can be realised in steps, but it also suggest clear and reasonably precise criteria for advances. Moreover, it enjoys widespread political support already: the ideas of democracy and human rights represent the most powerful (yet moderate) political ideology of today, and their appeal and legitimacy is universal, no longer only Western. The vision of civilising international relations can therefore count on substantial implicit support, at the popular as well as at the state level. The reform agenda pursued by Kofi Annan at the World Summit, which was built on the High Level Panel report, was in many aspects entirely compatible with such a vision and tried to specify it concretely.

Whichever way we imagine “international order”, to be real it needs to be both effective and legitimate. In other words, a sustainable international order will incorporate appropriate responses to two fundamental questions. First, how much and what kind of global governance will be required to manage the opportunities and risks of globalisation? And, second: which arrangements of global governance will be supported by international society? This latter issue of legitimacy really consists of two different components: legitimacy among states, and legitimacy among peoples. One of the more troubling aspects of today’s international order is that the prevailing arrangements of global governance by and large seem to enjoy legitimacy among states, but much less so among peoples, and that their capacity to manage globalisation effectively and efficiently seems to be rather less than what is widely deemed necessary.

⁸ A more secure world: our shared responsibility, Report of the Secretary General’s High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, <http://www.un.org/secureworld> [7.10.05]

III. Policy Implications

Let me now briefly draw some policy conclusions from this analysis:

- First, national foreign policies of all major powers ought to develop long-term strategies to enhance international order, built on a coherent vision of the future, as a way to provide perspective to day-to-day management of international affairs. At present, such coherence seems to be missing in most countries. Or should we see the stark contrast between formal commitments of governments at major international diplomatic events, such as the Millennium Summit, and their actual behaviour simply as cynicism?
- Second, America continues to be of overriding importance for international order, but its policies increasingly also contribute to its erosion. For America's allies and partners, the conclusion must be a) to exercise all their influence in Washington to encourage constructive policies, b) to support those policies by word and by deed, but c) also be prepared to disagree with the United States and act in concert with others towards the shared objective in the context of strengthening international order. This should not be done in the spirit of opposing the US, in general, but as a means to advance international order, if necessary, against American objections. It is important in this context to keep open any resulting arrangement for future American participation. There are examples for this: think of the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, specific agreements within the context of the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services.
- Third, Europe and Japan (and others) should expand both their political attention and energies and the share of resources they devote to international order, so as to enhance their ability to contribute to strengthening global governance, either with the United States or, if necessary, without and even against it. So far, international order has come fairly cheap to others, and Americans have a case when they complain about a tendency towards free-riding on Uncle Sam's dovetails by others.
- Fourth, Europe and Asia should deepen and widen regional integration. If successful, as in Europe, regionalism can create spheres of peace, stability and prosperity and thus both relieve the political burden on global governance and contribute to its ability to manage globalisation. Regionalism does not, and should not, preclude close co-operation with America on issues arising in the regional context, but the US should not be allowed (nor should it wish) to determine the pace and direction of regional co-operation and integration.
- Fifth, international co-operation and integration can also be promoted along functional lines, as shown by the WTO. Strengthening, deepening and enlarging functional arrangements of global governance strengthens the international order overall in rather the same way regional integration does. Functional co-operation and integration as a rule will need to involve America, and there would best include it.
- Six and last, effective and legitimate global governance requires the ability to forge and effectuate broad political coalitions. The US used to be in a class of its own in that regard in the past, as well, but it has been losing some of that skill more recently. The same applies to Germany, and probably also to Japan;⁹ China, on the other hand, has recently played this role very skilfully.¹⁰ Germany and Japan in this context both have particular opportunities, but also particular responsibilities; they ought to be able to do better than they have been doing recently.

⁹ For Japan, see Hughes, Christopher W.: *Japans's Re-emergence as a Normal Military Power*, London: Routledge 2004 (= IISS Adelphi Paper No.368-369) and Hughes, Christopher W.: *Japan's Economic Power and Security, Japan and North Korea*, London and New York: Routledge 1999

¹⁰ This has been most clearly visible in Asia. See the superb analysis in Shambaugh, David: *China Engages Asia, Reshaping the Regional Order*, in: *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter 2004/05), pp. 64-99

The Civilisational Hexagon

