

Global Democratic Realpolitik

Some proposals on UN reform towards a democratic world order

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It is not by chance that the financial crisis, global warming and nuclear proliferation have put the topic of democratizing the UN system at the top of the global agenda. Within the emergent global context, submissiveness and impotence have defined the real capacities of the international order composed of international agencies such as the G8, G20, IMF, WTO and the UN Security Council. Beginning with Mr. Boutros-Boutros Ghali, the speeches of UN general secretaries regarding the necessity of reforming the structure of the organizations they preside over constitute the clearest possible admission of the unfairness, elitism and undemocratic character of the current so-called “Global Governance”; that is, the nation state-centered world order administered by national and inter-national institutions. Indeed, the fashionable expression “Global Governance” veils a galaxy with neither transparency nor accountability.

Therefore, when a claim for democratization of the UN arises according to the principle “one nation, one vote,” crucial questions need to be asked. Questions such as, is the current *democratic deficit* of the inter-national system the simple product of some previous mismanagement or is it rather intrinsic to every nation state-centered structure?

There are five possible types of political organizations whose goals and powers are global:

1. Nation states whose goals and powers are global (such as the United States).
2. Self-elected international organizations based on undemocratic rules (such as the UN Security Council).
3. International organizations based on the principle of one dollar, one vote (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank).
4. International organizations based on the principle of one nation, one vote (the World Trade Organization, the UN General Assembly).

5. World democratic representative institutions based on the principle of one man, one vote (such as a theoretical World Parliament).

What have the existing political organizations done and what can they do to create a more democratic global order?

As the destructiveness of global interventions by self-elected global gendarmes of Peace and Democracy was recently shown by the invasion of Iraq, there is little left to say on the matter of nation states whose goals and powers are global. The case is quite similar for international organizations based on undemocratic rules, such as the UN Security Council, which are intrinsically unbalanced, biased and dependent on the will and interests of the more powerful.

Financial collapses, which started during the past decade in Mexico, Brazil, Russia, ASEAN member countries, and Argentina, are now developing all over the world. The consequent justifiable wave of criticism on the role played by the IMF has offered consistent evidence for how the principle of one dollar, one vote is ineffective in providing appropriate responses to the challenges of globalization. Predictably, using principles and methods that are typical of economic institutions inside the political field tends to consolidate power in the hands of the richest, exactly contrary to the rules of modern democracy, which are based on conferring political rights on the poor majority. In fact, if somebody were to argue that the voting power of a national citizen must be proportional to the size of their salary or bank account, a scandal would arise. Why should it be different for nations within the context of inter-national institutions ruled by the one dollar, one vote rule?

The idea that a global democratic order can be managed by international institutions based on the one nation, one vote principle seems to be more rational. However, at least six objections must be made:

1. The one nation, one vote principle does not assume that nations involved in the international structure are democratic. A global order comprised of authoritarian-totalitarian states could theoretically compose a “democratic” one nation, one vote-based structure. This is the case with the current UN, where the democratic character of many members is doubtful, at least.
2. The application of one nation, one vote in global affairs would put the same share of the political pie in the hands of the 800 inhabitants of the Vatican as in those of the 1,336,000,000 inhabitants of China, which means that each Vatican citizen would have about 1,670,000 times the power of each Chinese person. Such an undemocratic rule results in no democratic representation and legitimizes the traditional role of big national powers.
3. The process developed by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in which each nation has a vote has never been applied to a real decision-making process, because the projects presented inside the WTO by the most powerful national states have always been approved by unanimity, a rejection of the idea of a more democratic order stemming from the one nation, one vote method.
4. In the best situation for an inter-national order based on the one nation, one vote principle, national citizens elect a delegate, who votes for a president, who elects a minister, who then designates a member to participate at the UN. Each step increases institutional remoteness and dissolves representation, legitimacy and accountability. Global democratic representation becomes international; international becomes intergovernmental; and intergovernmental becomes an affair among executive powers. In the end, a bureaucrat who is worried about the balance of power within the national government makes decisions on behalf of humanity and future generations.
5. Despite the parliamentary appearance of the UN General Assembly, the international/intergovernmental process based on the one nation, one vote principle, must be developed – by definition -- inside the field of executive powers, in perfect contrast with recommendations by authors such as John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville, who identified parliament as the very core of democracy.

6. Using the one nation, one vote principle for the entire UN would predictably lead to a “WTO scenario,” improving the situation that reigns inside the Security Council in some ways, for example. However, it would hardly be the fundamental strategy towards a truly democratic world order. Indeed, the current model of global commerce led by the WTO benefits the richest and most powerful states and confirms that the international field has never been the territory of human collaboration and solidarity, but rather the arena of competition for economic and military hegemony. Within the wild international jungle, where the most powerful states preserve the capacity to impose their interests and will on others, the one state, one vote principle cannot embody the interests of the 80 percent of the world population inhabiting weak, third-world nation states.

As other options seem unavailable, the principle of one man, one vote in global democratic institutions remains the only tool able to achieve and ensure a democratic world order. Moreover, the recent experience of the European Union has shown the feasibility of an articulation between national and super-national political systems through the progressive delegation of sovereignty to a federal structure through its subsidiaries. This basic principle of democracy, which has been applied successfully at the national and regional levels, establishes two rules that are perfectly applicable to the global scale:

1. FEDERALISM: Political decisions must be made on different levels. Democratic representation must be applied and democratic representative institutions must be established on each and every scale; local, national, continental-regional and global.
2. SUBSIDIARITY: Decisions must be made on the smallest scale at which the citizens affected by them are democratically represented.

Whereas the first rule extends the *democratic* character of the system the second puts severe *liberal* limits on the concentration of political power.

No democratic global order can be built without democratic representation applied to each and every scale of the political decision-making process. Yet, some “realistic” objections could also be made:

1. The application of the democratic principle, one man, one vote, to the global scale would concentrate about one-third of the political power in the hands of the inhabitants of just two nations, China and India.
2. Applying the one man, one vote principle to the world political order would involve such an outstanding redistribution of power that the minority of humankind inhabiting the First World would object and oppose every World Parliament, World Court of Justice or World Constitution.

Are these objections insurmountable, or can they be managed at the global level by applying the experience developed through the democratization of cities, nations and the European Union? How can humanity change the current world where human rights are mere abstractions, subject to national discriminations imposed by passports, into a democratic world where human rights become “perfect,” in Kant’s terms, which means defended by concrete institutions? Finally, is the UN a useless tool destined for the dustbin of history, or, in spite of its democratic deficiencies, can the UN play a relevant role in the democratization of the global order?

To show a feasible resolution of all these questions, I would briefly propose a scenario in which the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) promotes a more democratic world order through the use of some principles already applied by nation states and the European Union:

1st step: The UN General Assembly (UNGA) creates an advisory organization, the UNPA, devoted to proposing rational solutions to the many crises (global economic recession, global warming, nuclear proliferation and so on) that menace present and future humanity. The UNPA is not a legislative but a consultive agency; it is not constantly in session, but meets at least twice per year; it is not formed by directly

elected delegates but by national parliamentarians. This initial step of the UNPA is similar to the start of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Community of Carbon and Steel, the Parliament of Mercosur, and other parliamentary regional institutions.

2nd step: The UNPA gives inputs to the UNGA and other UN agencies, which are eventually used to establish international agreements on global issues such as reform of the IMF or renewal and improvement of the Kyoto treaty on pollution emissions, as well as to prepare a complete program for progressive reform of the United Nations.

3rd step: The UNPA's capacity for giving suitable answers to global crises that have escaped the control of national institutions and the reform of the UN system increases worldwide recognition of and prestige for the UNPA and opens a political space for its transformation into a true World Parliament, as happened in Europe with the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Community of Carbon and Steel.

4th step: A worldwide campaign led by global NGOs which includes the support of political leaders, national and regional parliamentarians, and academic experts, raises the question of democratizing the political world order, convoking global public opinion in favor of the creation of a World Parliament.

5th step: The UN General Assembly calls for the immediate, planetary, nonterritorial and democratic election of the Chamber of Deputies of the World Parliament, which redacts a World Constitution and a World Code of Justice founded on the principles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by most nation states of the world.

6th step: The UN General Assembly proclaims itself the World Chamber of Senators (territorial delegates of each nation) and prepares a scheduled program on the progressive transfer of powers and sovereignty (only what pertains to global matters,

according to the principle of subsidiarity) from nation states to world-democratic parliamentary institutions.

Why should this scenario be utopian when the vast majority of the world population, including that of the First World countries, and the governments of the most powerful nations including that of the most powerful state of the world, are democratic and accept the federal and subsidiary principles as a basic part of democratic forms of government?

The acts performed on September 11, 2001 have convincingly suggested that the building of schools and hospitals in third-world countries can offer more security for citizens of the richest nations than can national agencies of espionage, or missiles and missile-shield projects. By contributing to the global fulfillment of basic human needs in exchange for the central role that developed nations aspire to keep in the world, citizens and governments of the advanced regions of the planet would respect a principle enunciated by one of the most revered US presidents, John F. Kennedy, who affirmed: *“If a free society cannot help the poor majority, it cannot save the few who are rich.”* Recent events such as the global economic recession, which is based on insufficient demand, demonstrate that this statement becomes meaningful for the emergent world civil society. Not to mention that global financial collapses, global warming, globalization of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, plagues, and mismanagement of technology create severe risks that affect the life and future of the population of the First World.

Thus, the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly could hopefully become a catalyst for a democratization of the world order that is already part of the best aspirations of all human beings, no matter their national belonging or the color of their skin.