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The Future of National and Global (Dis)order: Exclusive Populism versus Inclusive Global Governance

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The demise of the Cold War system promised to engender a new global order. Yet this didn’t happen. Instead, the world has grappled with many monumental crises, turning points, and transformative events without drawing the right lessons from them, resulting in reactive and conjectural formulas that have aggravated the problems. The international system has consequently accumulated a plethora of issues, problems and crises, each built upon the remnants of previous unresolved or frozen crises. Therefore, when we speak of the current crises we should beware of the dangers of conjecturalism, short-termism, and particularism in analyzing them. Unfortunately, while the responses and reactions to the present election cycles in the West—which generously rewarded populist, xenophobic and neo-nationalist groups—have led to some soul-searching among the political and intellectual class, as well as concerned citizens in the West and elsewhere, few have shown a willingness to investigate the root cause of this trend by situating it in a historical context. Recent developments aren't occurring in an evolutionary way, and as I have suggested elsewhere, we can best respond to our current cycles of change if we understand the ensemble of earthquakes that are shaping our world.

1. Earthquakes in World Politics

The global system was first shaken by a geopolitical earthquake following the end of the Cold War. During this period, the map of Eurasia was redrawn, Cold War geopolitics came to an end, and new states emerged. With the breakdown of the authoritarian political structure of the Communist bloc, a new wave of democratization came to the fore in Eastern and Central Europe as well as new regional initiatives, such as the European Union. Then, just over a decade later, the global system witnessed a security earthquake with September 11, 2001. While values such as freedom and democracy were at the center of the geopolitical

earthquake, the basic conceptual framework after 9/11 has revolved around the issue of security, creating an atmosphere of animosity, anxiety and distrust in the international sphere. The third major earthquake, which has been even more deeply felt, struck the financial systems, first in the United States in 2008, followed by the Euro crisis in 2010 and an unfolding global financial crisis. The fourth major earthquake emerged in the Arab World from 2010 onwards and was sociopolitical/economic in nature. Until and unless this earthquake fulfills its initial promise to deliver dignity, freedom, democracy, and economic advancement to Arab peoples, it will continue to shake the whole region to its very foundations.

Short-termism and conjectural policies were primarily employed to deal with these earthquakes, leaving them unresolved and paving the way for what is now taking place: *a systemic earthquake* characterized by a rising tide of extremism that ranges from the terrorist activities of groups like DAESH to the populist surge in recent elections in Europe and the United States. One of the more worrying consequences of these earthquakes has been a rise in populist autocracies, exclusivity, unilateralism, the selfish pursuit of narrowly defined national interests at the expense of common values and goods.

On a more personal note, Turkey has been at the center of all these earthquakes. As an academic who has spent a significant amount of his intellectual and academic life examining the root causes of these earthquakes, and later as foreign minister and prime minister of Turkey who had to formulate policy responses to these seismic events, I came to recognize a pattern of short-termist and reactive national, regional, and international responses that fail to address broader questions of global governance and systemic order.



Press Secretary Sean Spicer and Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to the President.

2. Challenges and shortcomings of the current ‘order’

Post-truth, post-order, post-fact and similar concepts have been abundantly utilized to describe what the world is going through. For instance, while the term ‘post-truth’ is employed to account for the context—the factors that have paved the way for what we are now experiencing—the term ‘post-order’ is used to describe the global system, or lack thereof.

If not viewed with some skepticism and distance, these concepts invite a lack of intellectual or analytical rigor, serving the unintended purpose of relieving agents of their responsibility for what is happening. Fresh thinking not held hostage by newly popularized concepts should be combined with the understanding that the traditional usage of once explanatory concepts, such as right and left, is significantly limited in accounting for the current phenomenon.

The present international ‘order’ sustained largely by the American power—supposedly underpinned by values such as democracy, rule of law, free

markets, and by institutions such as UN, G20, IMF, WB, WTO—is facing severe challenges. First, the Trump administration with its declared policy of “America first” seems to be turning away from the system, the most topical of the crises today. Arguably, its impact could be mitigated through either the US establishment’s commitment to world order, or a more collective ownership of it. Secondly, the declared value system of the prevalent order has either been selectively applied or not applied at all in many contexts. For instance, during the fourth earthquake engendered by the uprisings across the Arab World, international actors largely adopted short-termist and self-defeating policies instead of standing by the order’s declared values such as democracy. This has left people with the unpalatable choice of terrorism versus police states, which in turn has significantly diminished the legitimacy of the international order for large segments of the world population. Third, the institutions of the prevalent international order are in dire need of reform and updating. Take the example of the UN: it is an institution largely devoid of success stories, and hence credibility. Moreover, the governance structure of these institutions isn’t inclusive, so they act like exclusive clubs primarily designed to serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the weak. As long as international institutions are regarded this way, their legitimacy will always remain doubtful.

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The recent debates on the future of the international ‘order’ have been triggered by Brexit and the election of Trump. Yet the heated nature of the present shouldn’t inform our responses to this deep crisis. Some concepts, issues, and ‘facts’ should come under serious scrutiny. The ideas of change and order, as well as the agent of change and order, should be thoroughly examined before we can offer any sustainable, inclusive, and just response to the current systemic crisis.

3. The necessity of change and modalities of order

Given the present systemic earthquake, the political and intellectual classes should begin by recognizing that change is both necessary and inevitable. Once this is established, the next questions are about what must change, and how. One of the defining shortcomings of the current international ‘order’ has been its overreliance on technocracy. It is unrepresentative, with a democratic deficit at its core, which has led to the progressive dwindling of social ownership of the system. This in turn has created a vicious circle: the more the social basis of the current order has diminished, the more it has relied on globalist technocracy for its survival, yet the more it has relied on this technocracy, the further people have become alienated from the system. A large proportion of societies across the world regard this system as a tutelary imposition on a global scale. This grievance plays right into the hands of populist autocrats. Therefore, the tension between the technocratic nature of the system and the rising demand that it be more representative needs to be tackled head on.



Once this is settled, then proponents of maintaining a reformed version of the present ‘order’ should counter the more regressive and exclusionist demands for change advanced by the populists with a much more progressive and inclusive idea of change. This means that any international order that isn’t rule and value-based and isn’t in principle reflective of a large segment of humanity’s values and interests will be bound to fail. Easier said than done, obviously. Still, there are two main

approaches.

The first option is to agree on a set of principles and values and build the order based on them. That way, the value foundation of the order is clear to everyone. We would have a set of rules and a playbook that are applicable to everyone. Moreover, this approach also provides the criteria and benchmarks with which to judge performance and detect any malfunctioning of the system. Such a value-based and inclusive order would give it further legitimacy and a broad social basis worldwide.

The second approach is to try to build some kind of order based on conjecture and pragmatism. This form of order will be on shaky ground and from day one it will be questioned. It will face a cycle of crises engendered by zero-sum competition and rivalries. As such, rule-based inclusivity and principle-driven fairness should form part and parcel of any order—and the current order should at least strive to update itself with these factors in mind. While the present system should already in theory reflect the first approach, its applications in practice show it to be closer to the second.

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Who has responsibility to establish or maintain the order? At the national level we have two candidates: the establishment or the populist leaders of the new anti-systemic waves. The trouble is that the establishment doesn’t possess the necessary legitimacy to build a new or dramatically update the old order. But the new populists have neither the intention nor the know-how to establish a new order or significantly revise the incumbent one. The interaction, the struggle between them will shape the national order, which in turn will shape the international order. At the international level, the UN should have functioned as the primary platform for discussion on a reformed or new order, yet its track record doesn’t encourage high hopes.

4. The need for a more inclusive global governance

All in all, the rising populist tide and systemic crises have clearly illustrated that the current international ‘order’ is in the process of delegitimation on two levels. First, it

is rejected as a source of injustice, unfairness and imposition, a symptom of the decay of the global elite and its indifference to or detachment from people's grievances in societies across the world. Second, the current 'order' is questioned by large groups of states, particularly the rising powers including Turkey, who rightly regard it as unrepresentative, as almost exclusively reflecting the projections and priorities of the victorious Western powers of World War II. The system's inability to fairly accommodate and represent them not only reduces its legitimacy, but undermines its functioning. The combined impact of these two factors generates the contemporary crisis of legitimacy. At this stage, the crucial question is whether this delegitimation will lead to the complete dis-integration of the system. In other words, it is yet to be seen whether this systemic earthquake will culminate in the dissolution of the present order, or in its refinement. To avoid dis-integration, major reforms need to be undertaken to reestablish legitimacy, which is the only way that the current order will survive this systemic earthquake.



Otherwise, present trends are worrisome and resemble 19th century politics or the pre-World War II period. An ongoing economic crisis, an increase in isolationist tendencies among major powers, an uptick in populist policies and autocracies, unilateralism, a perception of politics and international interactions as zero-sum

games, and similar features represent frightening trends that can, however, be reversed. The choices are clear. The world will either once again head towards the mutually destructive ‘balance of power system’ or strive to establish a mutually rewarding, more benevolent, inclusive, fair, and humanitarian global governance structure. While narrowly defined interests and self-defeating unilateralism form the main character of the former system, shared values and rules, and a mutually-rewarding multilateralism, will define the general contours of the latter option.

The unfulfilled hope since the 1990s has been to realize a future shaped by global governance. The difference between global governance and international order is that international implies that nation-states are main units and the order is formed as a result of the relations and dialogue between nations. Global governance is more interactive, more dialogue-based, and more transnational. In that sense, it is not only dialogue among nation-states but among human beings, with an interactive, interconnected system creating an international order. Therefore, humanity at this stage needs rule- and value-based, multilateral, consensual, fair and inclusive form global governance.

Tags

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