1 GOVERNANCE, ORDER, AND CHANGE IN WORLD POLITICS

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At a time when hegemons are declining, when boundaries (and the walls that seal them) are disappearing, when the squares of the world’s cities are crowded with citizens challenging authorities, when military alliances are losing their viability – to mention but a few of the myriad changes that are transforming world politics – the prospects for global order and governance have become a transcendent issue. As the scope of the transformation widens and as its pace intensifies, the more urgent do questions about the nature of order and governance become. Change means the attrition of established patterns, the lessening of order, and the faltering of governance, until such time as new patterns can form and get embedded in the routines of world politics. Such is the situation today. One senses that the course of history is at a turning point, a juncture where the opportunities for movement toward peaceful cooperation, expanded human rights, and higher standards of living are hardly less conspicuous than the prospects for intensified group conflicts, deteriorating social systems, and worsening environmental conditions. Either set of arrangements – and possibly both – could evolve as leaders and publics get accustomed to the heady realization that some control over the future has been regained as a consequence of all the changes.

The goal of the collaborative project that resulted in the ensuing chapters is precisely that of seizing upon this time of change as a chance to clarify the nature of global order and the processes through which governance occurs on a worldwide scale. We do not seek to anticipate the specific forms of order and governance that are likely to emerge out of the rubble of the Cold War or the military conflict in the Persian Gulf. It may be years before the outlines of such an order evolve. But the present dynamics of change and statics of continuity are so arresting as to highlight a number of crucial questions that will surely frame our grasp of what lies ahead. What do we mean by governance on a global scale? How can it operate without government? If governance connotes a system of rule, and if it is not sustained by an organized government, who makes and implements the rules? Does the prevailing global order
depend on the nature and extensiveness of governance? Indeed, to what does global order refer? What forms can it take? Is global order a mental construct, an ideational image of how things work? Is it an implicit and largely unrecognized complex of norms that limits and shapes the conduct of international actors? Or does it consist of patterns and regularities that are empirically discernible? Can extensive, disorderly conflict be considered a form of order? Or is order founded on normative considerations that stress cooperation and preclude the notion of a conflict-ridden and chaotic order? Can there be global order during a period of rapid change? And how is order to be distinguished from stability and the interests and material conditions on which it rests?

There is no lack of attention to these questions in the international relations (IR) literature. Unlike the ensuing essays, however, most prior attempts to delineate global order have not been propelled by a world undergoing change in the fundamental arrangements through which the course of events unfolds. Our advantage is the perplexity induced by recent developments, an awe that enables us to pose questions that might not otherwise get asked and to identify alternative lines of development that might not otherwise get explored.

The questions proved easier to ask than to answer, however. We met to discuss them on five separate occasions over the course of four years and each time we found the answers elusive, partly because our collective focus on the concepts of order, governance, institutions, and polyarchy varied from meeting to meeting and partly because we encountered nuances of difference among ourselves as to the essential scope and content of these key concepts. Some of these nuances remain. A careful reading of the several chapters will reveal we preferred to allow for different emphases rather than straining to converge around a watered down consensual formulation.

But it is important not to be misled by the nuanced differences. We may differ somewhat in our use of concepts and terminology, but we are concerned about the same problems. We share a view of the central issues that confront analysts who seek to develop an understanding of the emergent structures of world politics. Most notably, we agree that in a world where authority is undergoing continuous relocation – both outward toward supranational entities and inward toward subnational

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Groups – it becomes increasingly imperative to probe how governance can occur in the absence of government.

Given both our differences and shared conceptions, the task of this introductory chapter follows. It seeks to highlight the range of meanings encompassed by our collective concerns and to indicate how the various chapters fit together into a coherent whole.

GOVERNANCE AND ORDER

To presume the presence of governance without government is to conceive of functions that have to be performed in any viable human system irrespective of whether the system has evolved organizations and institutions explicitly charged with performing them. Among the many necessary functions, for example, are the needs wherein any system has to cope with external challenges, to prevent conflicts among its members or factions from tearing it irretrievably apart, to procure resources necessary to its preservation and well-being, and to frame goals and policies designed to achieve them. Whether the systems are local or global in scope, these functional needs are ever present if a system is to persist intact through time.

Activities designed to service a system’s functional necessities are readily self-evident in the operations of governments which, normally, either evolve constitutions to regulate their conduct domestically or sign treaties to guide their performance internationally. During the present period of rapid and extensive global change, however, the constitutions of national governments and their treaties have been undermined by the demands and greater coherence of ethnic and other subgroups, the globalization of economies, the advent of broad social movements, the shrinking of political distances by microelectronic technologies, and the mushrooming of global interdependencies fostered by currency crises, environmental pollution, terrorism, the drug trade, AIDS, and a host of other transnational issues that are crowding the global agenda. These centralizing and decentralizing dynamics have undermined constitutions and treaties in the sense that they have contributed to the shifts in the loci of authority. Governments still operate and they are still sovereign in a number of ways; but, as noted above, some of their authority has been relocated toward subnational collectivities. Some of the functions of governance, in other words, are now being performed by activities that do not originate with governments.

What, then, is an appropriate way of formulating the concept of governance as it operates in world politics? Is it merely a synonym for
international institutions and regimes? Can governance be effective in
the absence of central authority? To what extent is the stability of a
global order dependent on the presence of governance?

Such questions invite a lengthy disquisition on the nature of govern-
ment and how sovereign national systems are so much more conducive
to governmental operations than international systems that are not
endowed with sovereign powers. And, indeed, the collapse of the Cold
War and the many other changes that mark our time readily justify such
disquisition. Given the profound transformations in the nature and
location of authority, legitimacy, and compliance, and given the
emergent roles and structures of the modern state, transnational organ-
izations, social movements, common markets, and political parties, the
basis for extensive re-examinations of government and governance in
an increasingly interdependent world is surely compelling. Obviously,
however, this is not the occasion to undertake this task. Here we can
only take note of possible meanings of governance in the emergent
international context and how it is linked into the prevailing order and
the prospects for change.²

As indicated by the title of this book, governance is not synonymous
with government. Both refer to purposive behavior, to goal-oriented
activities, to systems of rule; but government suggests activities that are
backed by formal authority, by police powers to insure the implemen-
tation of duly constituted policies, whereas governance refers to
activities backed by shared goals that may or may not derive from legal
and formally prescribed responsibilities and that do not necessarily rely
on police powers to overcome defiance and attain compliance. Govern-
ance, in other words, is a more encompassing phenomenon than
government. It embraces governmental institutions, but it also
subsumes informal, non-governmental mechanisms whereby those
persons and organizations within its purview move ahead, satisfy their
needs, and fulfill their wants.

Governance is thus a system of rule that is as dependent on inter-
subjective meanings as on formally sanctioned constitutions and
charters. Put more emphatically, governance is a system of rule that
works only if it is accepted by the majority (or, at least, by the most
powerful of those it affects), whereas governments can function even in
the face of widespread opposition to their policies. In this sense

² For another, more extensive and cogent inquiry into the meaning of the governance
concept, see Lawrence S. Finkelstein, “What Is International Governance?,” a paper
presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association (Vancouver:
governance is always effective in performing the functions necessary to systemic persistence, else it is not conceived to exist (since instead of referring to ineffective governance, one speaks of anarchy or chaos). Governments, on the other hand, can be quite ineffective without being regarded as non-existent (they are viewed simply as “weak”). Thus it is possible to conceive of governance without government – of regulatory mechanisms in a sphere of activity which function effectively even though they are not endowed with formal authority.

Nor is it far-fetched to derive from this line of reasoning a plausible scenario marked by government without governance. Indeed, if one ponders all the deeply divided countries whose politics are paralyzed and stalemated, it can readily be concluded that the world is populated with more than a few formal authorities who lack the regulatory mechanisms to function effectively, that is, with governments without governance. One might even argue, given all the noxious policies governments pursue, that governance without government is in some ways preferable to governments that are capable of governance. As one exasperated analyst has succinctly and tellingly observed, “Governance has been usurped by governments.”

To suggest that governance is always effective is to posit a close link between governance and order. It might even be said that governance is order plus intentionality. Global order consists of those routinized arrangements through which world politics gets from one moment in time to the next. Some of the arrangements are fundamental (such as the dispersion of power among key actors, the hierarchical differences among them, the rules which bound their interactions, and the premises they share about the role of force, diplomacy, cooperation, and conflict) and some are quite routinized (such as trade, postal, and passport procedures). But irrespective of whether they are fundamental or routinized, not all of the arrangements are the result of self-conscious efforts on the part of those who sustain them. Some of the arrangements derive, rather, from the aggregation of individual decisions that are designed to serve immediate subsystem concerns but that cumulate to system-wide orderliness. The setting of prices in a market place exemplifies a self-regulating aggregation that facilitates order: sellers are concerned with receiving the highest possible amount for their goods and buyers seek to pay the lowest possible amount, but the result of their individual bargains is normally a stable and orderly system-wide market for the commodity. Similarly, individual members of Amnesty International work on specific cases of illegal

imprisonment and torture, but the collective sum of their efforts makes a substantial contribution to that dimension of global order through which a modicum of human rights is preserved. Or consider the example of the flight of East Germans to the West in the fall of 1989: as participants in the Cold War order they previously acquiesced in the prohibition against movement across the East-West border, but that consensus unraveled with the decision of each family to flee to West Germany and, within only weeks, the cumulative impact of these decisions hastened an end to that system of governance and initiated a new one that is still very much in the process of formation.

On the other hand, some of the arrangements underlying a global order spring from activities that are self-consciously designed to maintain the order. Most markets have created rules and officials charged with monitoring and preventing unfair practices; Amnesty International has an executive committee that assigns cases to individuals and issues periodic reports on overall patterns in the human rights field; during the Cold War East Germany had officials and laws that relied on police powers to insure the continuance of the consensus that kept East Germans from emigrating, just as the subsequent breakdown of that consensus was facilitated by West German, Hungarian, and other authorities who sought to encourage the emergence of a new order. And it is here, in those dimensions of order suffused with intentionality, that its close links to governance are most readily discernible.

While examples help to clarify the concept of governance and how it is more encompassing than that of government, they obviously do not guarantee the resolution of conceptual ambiguity. The distinction between governance and government and the links between governance and order are not self-evident. In some languages (German for one), in fact, there is no readily identifiable word that signifies governance. The notion of intersubjective systems of rule not backed by legal and constitutional authority is too improbable an aspect of political processes in the cultures that employ these languages to have allowed for convergence around a simplified, single-word designation of the concept. But even those whose language includes such a designation can easily encounter difficulty in using the concept. A host of diverse (but not incompatible) nuances attach to the use of “governance” in English. As indicated above, some formulations conceive of governance in functional terms, that is, in terms of the tasks that have to be performed to sustain the routinized arrangements of the prevailing order and that may or may not be performed by governments. For other observers governance is linked to the capacity to regulate the
arrangements so that they remain routinized. For still others, governance is associated with occasions when power is exercised independently of the authority of government. Some distinguish governance as a mode of allocating values while viewing government as operating the mechanisms through which the allocation is accomplished. In some instances governance is equated with the emergence of rule-like systems and problem-solving devices.4

Notwithstanding the various shades of meaning attached to the concept, there is one dimension of governance about which all of the ensuing chapters fully agree. It is that while a focus on “governance without government” does not require the exclusion of national or subnational governments from the analysis, it does necessitate inquiry that presumes the absence of some overarching governmental authority at the international level. Put differently, the concept of governance without government is especially conducive to the study of world politics inasmuch as centralized authority is conspicuously absent from this domain of human affairs even though it is equally obvious that a modicum of order, of routinized arrangements, is normally present in the conduct of global life. Given an order that lacks a centralized authority with the capacity to enforce decisions on a global scale, it follows that a prime task of inquiry is that of probing the extent to which the functions normally associated with governance are performed in world politics without the institutions of government.

Many students of world politics are inclined to use the term “anarchy” to designate the absence of a centralized authority in world politics. For them anarchy has neither good nor bad connotations. Nor does it necessarily imply that the prevailing global order is marked by pervasive disarray and commotion. Rather, “anarchy” is employed simply as a descriptive term for the lack of a centralized authority that stands over national governments and has the capacity, including the use of force if necessary, to direct their conduct. For some analysts, however, anarchy implies a lack of patterned rule, a tendency for actors to go their own separate ways without regard for common principles, norms, rules, and procedures. Such an implication seems highly questionable. As one observer puts it, noting the authority that attached

More information
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volume, on the other hand, governance in a global order is not confined to a single sphere of endeavor. It refers to the arrangements that prevail in the lacunae between regimes and, perhaps more importantly, to the principles, norms, rules, and procedures that come into play when two or more regimes overlap, conflict, or otherwise require arrangements that facilitate accommodation among the competing interests. In the case of the Cold War, for example, governance involved according a greater priority to the arms control regime than to, say, issues involving the free movement of people, with the result that Soviet–American arms control negotiations, unlike those over trade matters, were never interrupted by questions pertaining to the emigration of Jews from the U.S.S.R.

Again, in short, the governance inherent in a global order is the more encompassing concept. As one regime theorist puts it, “International orders are broad framework arrangements governing the activities of all (or almost all) the members of international society over a wide range of specific issues,” whereas “international regimes, by contrast, are more specialized arrangements that pertain to well-defined activities, resources, or geographical areas and often involve only some subset of the members of international society. Thus, we speak of the international regimes for whaling, the conservation of polar bears, the use of the electromagnetic spectrum, and human activities in Antarctica.”

The author of this formulation posits the governance of international orders and regimes as different subcategories of international institutions. Such an additional conceptual layer, however, seems more optional than necessary. Institutions connote the presence of authoritative principles, norms, rules, and procedures, thereby running the risk of obscuring the informal, non-authoritative dimensions that are so essential to the functioning of international orders and regimes.

ANALYTIC ORDER VERSUS NORMATIVE ORDER

The dynamics of global transformations are especially conducive to clarifying the distinction between “order” as an analytic concept and “order” as a normative precept. For change fosters uncertainty, and the more dynamic the change processes, the more extensive the uncertainty as people become apprehensive over the loss of the pre-change stability and fearful that the change might result in institutions

and conditions less satisfying than those which prevailed earlier. Thus the transforming dynamics are bound to focus concern around the desirability of the emergent global arrangements vis-à-vis those they are replacing. That is, normative concerns are bound to intensify as questions about global order – about the fundamental arrangements for coping with conflicts and moving towards goals – surface in the political arena. But, clearly, there is a huge difference between empirically tracing the underlying arrangements and analyzing their potential consequences on the one hand and judging the pros and cons of the arrangements on the other. The empirically discerned order may cry out for judgment and the normative order may cry out for accurate description, and both intellectual exercises can be pervaded by difficulties as the line dividing them can be obscure and variable. Nevertheless, the line is important and international relations analysts need to be ever-mindful of when they cross it. To be insensitive to the distinctions between normative judgments and empirical observations is to run the risk of either clashing sound analysis with preferred outcomes or confounding preferred outcomes with empirically faulty recommendations. Perhaps no degree of sensitivity can prevent some confusion along these lines – as observation is in some respects a normative enterprise – but surely it is the case that confusion can be kept to a minimum if we relentlessly monitor our tendency to allow the wish to be the father of our thoughts or the empirical assertion to be the source of our judgments.10

The problem of differentiating between empirical and normative orders can be nicely illustrated by the question of whether global arrangements marked by a high degree of disorder are to be considered a form of order. If by an “empirical order” is meant the arrangements through which global affairs move through time, then obviously a vast array of diverse arrangements can qualify as forms of order. History records, for example, years of hegemonic order in which a single country dominated world politics, eras of power balances in which countries formed alliances to offset each other’s strengths, decades of bipolar rivalries in which two countries vie for world leadership, and periods of polyarchy in which many countries competed for global

10 A good case in point here is the World Order Models Project (WOMP), which is considered by some analysts to have transgressed the line between empirical and normative orders. While seeking to advance specific normative views of global order, it is argued, WOMP embeds the reasoning on behalf of order in a rationalist, scientific context that implies objectivity but that is heavily value-laden. For an indication of the WOMP approach, see the essays in Saul H. Mendlovitz, ed., On the Creation of a Just World Order (New York: Free Press, 1975).