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Global Governance and International Political Institutions: Issues of Democratic Deficit and Accountability

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ABSTRACT: In the age of digital/information revolution and the onset of new ICE (Information, Communication and Education + Entertainment) age, the depleted concept of Global Governance has resurfaced on the intellectual horizon. The concept of Global Governance encapsulates the norms setting in multiple areas of human activities to regulate and meditate the interaction of state, international/regional organizations &institutions, global/national civil societies and national/International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). In this era of accelerated globalization never witnessed before in human history, the international political institutions like United Nations Organization and various regional arrangements created after the World War II to regulate the international political and security governance have almost become infructuous. They suffer from democratic deficit and crisis of responsibility and accountability to global community.

This research paper is a humble attempt to examine the issues of democratic deficit, accountability and reforms in international political institutions which are increasingly becoming irrelevant in the light of new problems faced by the global community.

KEYWORDS: Global Governance, Globalization, Digital Revolution, INGOs, Global Community

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has been accompanied by a thickening web of multilateral agreements, global and regional institutions and regimes, trans-governmental policy networks and summits. This evolving global governance complex regulates and intervenes in virtually all aspects of global affairs. It is far from being a nascent world government, but it is much more than a system of limited intergovernmental cooperation. While in relation to the scale of global problems, the achievements of global governance appear decidedly thin, but there is no denying the fact that international institutions, multilateral regimes and agencies have become crucial sites of political struggle over globalization and the nature of world order.

The steady development of international institutions and regimes have when taken in the aggregate, led to the emergence of a web of international norms, treaties and conventions that encourage sustained cooperation among states and in so doing, generate a measure of global governance. International institutions are defined as 'persistent and connected sets of rules, formal and informal, that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity and shape expectations. Keohane (1990)

International regimes are defined as 'social institutions that consist of agreed upon principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that govern the interactions of actors in specific issues areas. Keohane (2002) There has been increasing involvement of non-state actors in creation, maintenance and functioning of regimes. Although states remain the central actors in international regimes, but in a host of functional, specialized and technical areas – endangered species, hazardous waste, climate change and ozone depletion among others – the involvement of non-state actors has been crucial and striking.

Global governance refers to more than the formal institutions and organizations through which management of international affairs is sustained. The United Nations system and national governments are surely central to the conduct of global governance but they are only part of the full picture. Global governance is conceived to include system of rule at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization – in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions. This broad view is premised on the fact that in an ever more interdependent world where what happens in one corner or at one level may have consequences for what occurs at every other corner and level.

As a consequence of globalization, there has been a shift in the nature and form of political organization. The contemporary period is signified by the emergence of 'global politics' – the increasingly extensive form of political networks and activity. Political decisions and actions in one part of the world can rapidly acquire worldwide ramifications. Sites of political action and decision-making can become linked through rapid communications into complex networks of political interaction. This stretching of politics

is also linked to a frequent intensification or deepening of global processes in such way that action at a distance permeates the social conditions and cognitive worlds of specific places or policy communities. Giddens (1990)

The idea of global politics challenges the traditional distinctions between the domestic and international, the territorial and the non-territorial. Global politics is now anchored not just in traditional geopolitical concerns but also in a large diversity of economic, social and ecological questions. There have been an increasing number of transnational policy issues which cut across territorial jurisdictions and existing political alignments which demand international cooperation for their effective resolution.

The sovereign state now lies at the intersection of a vast array of international regimes and organizations that have been established to manage whole areas of transnational activities and collective policy problems ranging from trade, financial flows, environmental degradation, and global crimes and so on. The rapid growth of transnational issues and problems has involved a spread of layers of political regulation both within and across political boundaries. It has been marked by the transformation of aspects of territorially based political decision-making, the development of regional and global organizations and institutions and the emergence of regional and global law.

National governments are now increasingly locked into an array of global, regional and multilayered systems of governance – and can barely monitor it all, let alone stay in command. Some of the most fundamental forces and processes which determine the nature of life chances within and across political communities are now beyond the reach of individual nation-states.

These new political circumstances present a unique challenge to a world-order designed in accordance with the Westphalian principle of exclusive sovereign rule over a bounded territory and its associated geopolitical mechanisms for governing world affairs.

Nature of Global Governance Complex

Globalization throws with a new thrust the question of how world affairs are, and should be, governed. The thickening institutional density, expanding jurisdiction, intensifying transnational politics and deepening impact of supra-state regulation denote a qualitative and structural shift in how global affairs and trans-boundary problems are governed. These developments represent the evolving infrastructure of a fragile system of global governance – a new complex multilateralism.Rosenau(1999)

In the absence of a world government, the concept of global governance is particularly relevant to describing the structures and processes of governing beyond the state where there exists no supreme or singular political authority. This also involves a focus on the evolving system of formal and informal political coordination across multiple levels from the local to the global, among public authorities (states and IGOs) and private agencies seeking to realize common purposes or resolve collective problems.

It is far from a unified global system underpinned by global law enforcement. It does not presuppose the idea of a central global public authority, which legislates for the common affairs of humanity rather it is defined by diverse sources of rule-making, political authority and power.

A distinct nature of the institutional architecture of global governance can be discerned. Firstly, it is multilayered. It is constituted by and through the structural enmeshment of several principal infrastructures of governance: the supra-state (such as the UN system), the regional (EU, ASEAN, APEC etc.), the transnational (civil society organizations, business networks) and sub-state (community associations and city governments).Scholte (2000) National governments are sandwiched between these layers. Secondly, it is described as polyarchic or pluralistic because there is no single locus of authority. Political authority at this level is greatly fragmented.

Thirdly, the nascent global governance institutional infrastructure has a variable geometry. The relative political significance and regulatory capacities of these infrastructures vary considerably around the globe and from issue to issue.

Fourthly, this global governance structural system is complex being composed of diverse agencies and networks with overlapping functional and spatial jurisdictions, not to mention differential power resources and competencies.

Lastly, far from national governments being sidelined in this system, they become increasingly crucial as strategic sites for bringing together these various infrastructures of governance and legitimizing regulation beyond the state.

A central characteristic of global governance is the reconfiguration of authority between the various layers or infrastructures of governance. This is visible in the expanding jurisdiction and competencies of both supra-state and sub-state institutions. For the most part, the activities of supra-state bodies reach ever more deeply into the internal life of states, from banking regulation to food standards. Global governance embodies a complex patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions, generating ambiguities about the principal location of authority and political responsibility. This leads to emergence of conflicts of legal and regulatory principles among global, regional, national or local institutions. In the context of European Union, with a developed supranational legal infrastructure, such conflicts are resolved through juridical mechanisms. At the global level, such mechanisms and procedures are largely absent, but where they exist in some form as in the case of WTO dispute machinery or World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) machinery on patents, they raise the questions of democratic accountability and legitimacy.

Role of Institutions and Multilateral Agencies in Global Governance

Contemporary global governance is characterized by a high degree of diversity and complexity. Governance arrangements can take public, private or hybrid forms. The 21st century began with a wide set of reflections on the need for more effective

international cooperation and coordination. Policy makers the world over have begun to ask what kinds of institutions are needed to manage the challenges associated with globalization.

Technical and specialized nature of these challenges have led to emergence of a new set of actors which have become particularly prominent in the new arena of global governance in the form of non-governmental organizations, often referred to as 'global civil society'. The most visible and vocal are large transnational non-governmental organizations based in industrialized countries lobbying for particular principles or issues such as debt relief, environmental protection and human rights such as Amnesty International, Worldwide Fund for Nature and Oxfam. These groups do not claim to represent countries or geographical groups, nor do they represent particular commercial interests. Their stake in the arena of global governance is more of a deliberative one. They bring principles and values to the attention of policy-makers and firms. They also play a role in monitoring global governance analyzing and keeping an eye on issues as diverse as the chemical weapons treaty, negotiations on global climate change, world trade and the actions of the IMF and World Bank.[Woods(2002)]

Another set of institutions and actors which are located at the centre of the global governance complex is the multilateral agencies. They are based on the idea of inter-governmental cooperation. In response to challenges in the aftermath of accelerated globalization, states have sought to strengthen and institutionalize cooperation among governments at the international level. The United Nations, NATO, the IMF, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the World Bank and WTO are few prominent examples of such agencies.

The philosophy behind multilateralism is that multilateral negotiations and a sharing of technical expertise will provide solutions to the new vulnerabilities created by the process of globalization and the international agencies will then be able to implement these solutions.

The belief in multilateralism proceeds from a rational-functional or institutionalist approach to international relations and institutions. This theory is based on the assumption that cooperation among states permits governments to achieve goals reflecting everyone's interests. Multilateralism emerges because governments see it as a way to share and pool resources, reducing transactions costs and enabling a concentration of the expertise and capacity necessary to achieve particular kinds of international policy. Thus, governments create international institutions to safeguard their national interests in a cooperative manner. They achieve it by delegating some power to international agencies which ensure mutual benefits are gained from globalization and that losses are compensated.[Krasner(1983)] The international multilateral agencies as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO smooth over the gaps and failures in the operation of markets to ensure a more robust and stable global economy.

To a large extent, multilateralism is a form of global governance which is both representative and accountable. Interstate institutions are representative because their governing bodies represent all member governments. They are accountable because these same bodies enable governments to control budgets, mandates and operations.

But, in its contemporary existence; the operations of these multilateral institutions pose some problems. Firstly, not all governments accept that their interests are best pursued through interstate agencies such as IMF, World Bank, UN Security Council, WTO etc. The most powerful states in the world have the potential to maneuver the working of these agencies to achieve their own ends. Secondly, the developing and emerging countries argue that they are underrepresented and often ill-served by these organizations, which often act like 'rich men's club'.[Woods(1999)]

Despite such criticisms, the all-powerful intrusive nature of international institutions is evident in the work of the IMF and the World Bank, now seeking to ensure forceful, far-reaching structural reforms in the economies of their members. Likewise, in trade, the WTO works on many issue-related to domestic policy matters and is now considering involvement in competition policy, government procurement and the environment. In the security area, the UN Security Council has become involved in mandating or undertaking interventions within the borders of sovereign states as in Somalia, Kosovo and Bosnia etc. aimed at protecting the rights of lives of sections of the population, although, this new interventionism is neither uniform nor universal.[Chesterman(2001)]

Ideally speaking, multilateralism provides opportunities for international debate and cooperation. Multilateral institutions are now the vital aspect of governance in the world. The contemporary global governance literature is focused on the creation and reform of the international institutions and the need for these agencies to consult and to include non-governmental organizations and global civil society. The structural shape of global governance is largely represented through a variety of networks, coalitions and informal arrangements which operate beyond the direct public gaze and the control of respective governments.

Global Governance and Questions of Democracy and Accountability

The institutional arrangements of governance at global scale are fluid and based on both formal and informal principles. The global governance complex contains a vast array of actors both state and non-state and is also enmeshed in the realities of power politics of the international system. Governance beyond the state raised certain concerns regarding the democratic principle and issue of accountability operating in the global governance institutional edifice.

Liberalism and democracy are now the most widely accepted forms of official justification for political rule.[Kuper(2004)] But, both these doctrines were developed largely in and for nation-states. In a globalizing world, neither the multilateral, multipolar nor unipolar models can serve the purpose as they are primarily centered on the states which can no longer serve as the central organizing

institutions around which other levels and kinds of political authority are constructed as mere supplements. As society, economy and politics are intrinsically becoming global and multilayered, and then various forms and mechanisms that regulate and enable those spheres should also follow the same. Where transnational actors from multinational corporations (MNCs) to global citizen sector organizations exercise immense power then that power should be internalized and harnessed to deepen liberal democracy and they must be responsible and accountable for the exercise of their power.

There is a growing presumption that governance at global scale lacks democratic legitimacy and accountability. The current arrangements to regulate global communications, global conflict, global ecology, global markets, global money and finance, global organizations and global production rest on a very limited explicit consent from the affected sections of the global community. There is a strong case made that democratic deficits pervade all institutional sites of governance of supra-territorial spaces. Democracy has been diluted in intergovernmental governance mechanism. For example, the G-7 is a major force of global economic management, but it gives representation to a handful of states whose collective population amounts to around 10 percent of humanity. Meanwhile, trans-governmental networks of technocrats have operated almost completely outside the public eye and democratic scrutiny. These officials have concluded countless multilateral memorandums of understanding that bypass traditional procedures of treaty ratification.

Supra-state institutions too lack democratic credentials. The BIS, NATO and the OECD, like the G-7, exclude most of the world's states from membership, even though their decisions, rulings and actions have trans-world impacts. Although WTO claims to have large representation of states, but nearly a third of them have no permanent representation in Geneva and the capacities of many other delegations are severely overstretched. The IMF and the World Bank have almost universal state membership, however, the quota regime means that the five largest shareholders states between them hold 40 percent of the vote. At the lowest extreme, 23 states of Africa together hold just over one percent of the vote. At the UN, the principle of one state – one vote in the General Assembly is hardly satisfactory as a democratic formula. The veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council also has no democratic justification.

In the backdrop of such instances of global governance democratic deficits; some see hope in the increasing role and influence of civil society organizations towards creating more democratizing spaces in global governance structures. They can contribute to more democratic global governance by giving voice to stakeholders. They can provide opportunities for concerned parties to relay information, testimonial, and analysis to governance agencies. In particular, civil society associations can open political space for social circles like the poor and women, who tend to get a limited hearing through other formalized channels. Civil society activism can empower stakeholders and indeed shift global politics toward greater participatory democratic accountability.

They can also enhance democracy in global governance through public education activities. Effective democracy depends on an informed citizenry, and these civic associations can raise pubic awareness and understanding of trans-world laws and regulatory institutions. These bodies can also fuel debate in and about global governance. Democratic rule rests on vigorous, uninhibited discussion of diverse views. Inputs from civil society can put a variety of perspectives, methodologies and proposals into the policy arena. For example, these transnational civil society associations and groups have been instrumental in generating and initiating debate about the role of the Washington consensus in global economic governance. They have also raised ecological issues, advocated qualitative assessments of poverty, advanced alternative conceptions of human rights, opposed landmines and promoted schemes of debt reduction in the South.

Their mobilization has also the potential to increase the public transparency of global governance. Pressure from these organizations can help bring regulatory frameworks and operations into the open, where they become susceptible to public scrutiny and accountability. They can also promote democracy in global governance by increasing the public accountability of the regulatory agencies concerned. They can monitor the implementation and effects of policies regarding global relations and press for corrective measures when the consequences are adverse. Through a democratic accountability function, civil society associations can push authorities in global governance to take greater public responsibility for their actions and policies. Thus, engagement between civil society groups and global regulatory mechanisms can – if they give stakeholders voice, bolster public education, promote debate, raises transparency and increase accountability – enhance the legitimacy of global governance institutions.

The question of democratic accountability is entangled with the notion of sovereignty as being practiced in a globalizing world. David Held has outlined a vision of three models of sovereignty: classical, liberal and cosmopolitan. For Held, there has been movement over the past century from classic to liberal sovereignty. In liberal conceptions of sovereignty, legitimacy is not conferred automatically by control. Indeed, institutions that limit state authority have been developed. Moving beyond liberal sovereignty, Held envisages a prospective movement to cosmopolitan law and governance. Multilevel governance, including governance at the global level, will be shaped and formed by an overarching cosmopolitan legal framework.[Held(2002)]

The realignment of global governance with democratic principles, notion of accountability and global justice must involve the development of both independent political authority and administrative capacity at regional and global levels. It seeks to entrench and develop political institutions at regional and global levels while arguing for layers of governance to address broader and more global questions. The aim is to forge an accountable and responsive politics at local and national levels alongside the establishment of representative and deliberative assemblies in the wider global order, that is, a political order of transparent and democratic cities

and nations as well as of regions and global networks within an overarching framework of global social justice. In this backdrop, the long term global governance institutional requirements include multilayered governance and diffused authority, a network of democratic forum from the local to the global, strengthening the Human Rights conventions and creating regional and global Human Rights courts, enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of leading functional IGOs, improving the transparency and accountability of non-state actors, use of diverse forms of mechanisms to access public preferences, test their coherence and inform public will formation and establishment of an effective accountable, regional and global police/military force for the last resort use of coercive power in defense of international humanitarian or cosmopolitan law. These agendas and the institutions to which it gives rise is described as cosmopolitan democracy.[Held(2006)]

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is quite evident from the above analysis that even though a global sovereign authority system or pattern is either absent or not clearly identifiable, there has emerged a myriad of public and private international arrangements, institutions, regime sand agencies which serve as building blocks of the nascent idea of global governance.

There is no hesitation in making this assertion that there is an emergence of a clear institutional infrastructure edifice of global governance regulating the diverse affairs of global human concerns which are non-beyond the control of anyone or group of sovereign political entities i.e. states.

The issues of democratic and accountability deficit of these institutional infrastructures of global governance also surfaces and assumes prominence before global community. Further, there is an urgent need for a concerted effort towards more democracy and accountability to make the process of global governance more wide-based and participative of the entire humanity. The idea and reality of global governance is incomplete without the idea and reality of a vibrant and sustained cosmopolitan democracy.

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