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## **Old States - New World**

### **From power politics to the formation of the international community**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find ourselves confronted with many global challenges, such as security threats, natural disasters, environmental pollution, financial crises, civil wars, and human rights violations. However, there is one essential problem: nation states are no longer able to live up to these challenges and the “world state” does not yet exist. Many problems have adopted a new, international dimension, but the only instrument available to solve them is still the same old nation state. International relations are increasingly focused on the welfare of the people, but traditional power politics do still exist.

#### **1. A divided world: power politics and the welfare state in international relations**

When one looks at international relations at the beginning of the 21st century, the world seems divided: while some states pursue traditional foreign policies based on power politics, other countries consider the advancement of their citizens' personal welfare the primary goal of foreign policy actions. For hundreds of years, foreign policy was the politics of power. Its goal was to maintain the sovereignty and power of the state. Being “great” from a historical point of view meant to conquer territory and expand one's sphere of influence. The means to this end were Realpolitik and war; therefore, soldiers and diplomats often collaborated.

By way of contrast, welfare considerations have taken on an important role by shaping international relations for many countries. Their foreign policy goals focus on the well-being of their citizens by ensuring a high standard of living and fighting poverty, hunger, and AIDS. World population growth and the global food supply are important topics on the agenda; international conferences often address issues such as development aid, the protection of the environment, human rights, the emancipation of women, and the well-being of children. International organizations and major conferences represent the new tools to implement this new kind of foreign

policy; NGOs, the media, and multinational firms are the new key players. Many international efforts today are moving in the direction of extending the model of the welfare state to an increasing number of states all over the world. As a result, the advancement of personal welfare is also becoming an important legitimation principle in international relations. Waging war in pursuit of narrow national interests has become an inconceivable notion for Western welfare states.

After the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), inter-European relations were based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The states were not subject to any outside form of authority. National self-interest was the highest *leitmotiv*. The use of violence in pursuit of these interests was considered entirely legitimate, and foreign policy strategies were to be aligned exclusively with the interests of one's own country.

In practice, the approach of *Realpolitik* has led to peace treaties that arbitrarily divided up territories and caused a lot of suffering and hardship for the people concerned. A balance of power was supposed to be the basis of the struggle for glory on the part of the sovereigns. Their political theory, which put national interests at the centre of international relations, was coined by the use of mass armies and the citizens' willingness to die for one's fatherland on the "field of honour."

Nowadays, the USA are the only Western nation to take this traditional approach to foreign policy, fighting wars and making peace (almost) at will. Somalia and Ethiopia are also sovereign states in a similar sense; they too can declare war whenever they please because they are not part of the "community of states." All other countries must more or less abide by the current rules set up by the international community of states. In Europe, Canada, and Australia, foreign policy has mainly focused on "social welfare policies," yielding important results which have changed people's attitudes in a number of different ways: when Americans speak of security, be it John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, or Barack Obama, they refer to military security. In contrast, when Europeans speak of security, they mean social safety and their retirement pensions. When Americans engage in warfare, they still do it in the name of defending their national interests. Europeans, in contrast, carry out their military operations as "international peace missions" with the

purpose of defending common values. In Europe, soldiers no longer serve to promote their own foreign policy interests. In America, the winner of an election is usually somebody who is able to make the country feel protected and strong, whereas in Austria and other European countries elections are won by whoever promotes the benefits of the welfare state.

According to the principles of the United Nations, peace and security are ensured by respecting the sovereignty and the independence of the member states; the promotion of common values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law has become the basis of international peacemaking efforts. In this sense, even the concepts of a “responsibility to protect” and the “right to intervene” were developed in contrast to the principles of state sovereignty in order to ensure peace and security.

In Europe, a new type of international organization came into being in the form of the Council of Europe, which is committed to bringing about unity through common values. In particular, citizens of the Council’s member states have been granted the right to file lawsuits in the supranational European Court for Human Rights. The citizens’ quest for personal welfare has thus clearly pushed the state’s pursuit of power into the background.

## **2. The dialectics of globalization**

On the one hand, globalization certainly is a uniting force: the principles of a free market economy have been accepted almost all over the world; modern technologies facilitate the exchange of information and communication, and liberal values have become almost universally appealing.

At the same time, however, the process of globalization is also causing divisions: it can also result in strengthening nationalism, regionalism, and fundamentalism.

Since the collapse of communism, liberal values and the principles of a free market economy have spread all over the world: they proved to be more successful and to promote people’s welfare much more efficiently than dictatorships and planned economies. Democracy, the privatization of enterprises, and the deregulation of the economy have become commonly accepted principles in many countries. Even though

the democratic system has not been successfully implemented in all the countries of the world, the democratic spirit in the form of democratic reforms or protests has spread all over the world; in some places this process was successful, in others less so. New technologies, ranging from the computer to the cell phone and the iPod, have further contributed to more openness and a new form of universal connectedness. They have brought the world closer together as the markets and the media have developed their own dynamics.

In spite of its positive forces, globalization has also strengthened some adverse developments: by being included in the global economic process, countries like China, India, Russia, and Brazil have become more powerful and more nationalistic. We are thus moving towards a multipolar world, in which international political decisions and their implementation must be based on a much broader approach.

Certain basic developments illustrate this trend: while the United States produced 60 % of the world economic output in the post-war era after 1945, nowadays all the Western nations taken together yield the same number; the West's entire share of the world's economic output will shrink to 38 % by 2025; and while Europe and North America accounted for 33 % of the world's total population 100 years ago, those regions of the world currently only make up 17% of the global population.

But globalization can also trigger divisive ideas and ideologies in some individuals. In the face of Western ideological imports, some people might develop the urge to go back to their roots and seek protection in a traditional, ideological or religious environment.

Consequently, even in the era of globalization, nationalism and in particular fundamentalism have gained impetus since some people reject Western values and follow a more reactionary path. Attitudes we have long adopted in Europe, such as the separation of church and state, might meet with rejection in Islamic fundamentalist circles, as they still view religion as the basis for conducting their everyday life.

### **3. What is the international community?**

Whenever a disaster strikes, human rights are violated or the need arises to restore peace in some corner of the world, much is said about the **international community**. The concept of the international community is a blend between an occasional reflection of reality and wishful thinking. In this context, three problems arise:

- it is not clear exactly who constitutes the international community
- the international organizations that were created after World War II are outdated; and
- the United States as the leading nation of the international community often does its own thing (f.e. on matters relating to the protection of the environment or the International Criminal Court (ICC)).

The international community offers assistance whenever a disaster strikes, be it the fight against hunger or AIDS, a crisis in Haiti, or a tsunami in Asia. The community of values has become more visible in some instances: states are making an effort to bring wrong-doers before the International Court or a Special Court for genocide and war crimes that were committed in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. However, many actions are often not only the result of certain values, but rather the result of self-interest.

In some cases, the international community has taken steps to protect peace and security from dictators, to stop civilian suffering, or to terminate civil wars. New standards have been introduced, albeit not always in a coherent way. Peace-keeping, peace-making, peace-building, and nation-building have become endeavors pursued by the international community, but there is still a significant discrepancy between theory and practice.

What can be done to overcome the fact that national institutions are still the key players when it comes to solve global problems?

- The system of international organizations must be updated: since the Spanish War of Succession (Utrecht, 1713), a new international order was established after every world conflict. This was not the case after the Cold War, however; the International Organizations established

after the Second World War cannot live up to the new challenges anymore.

- We need new, global political guidelines to tame the economic forces of globalization: as the welfare state has successfully used the dynamics of Manchester capitalism in order to promote the welfare of the majority of people, global governance is necessary to align the dynamics of global capitalism with the overall wellbeing of the citizens.
- We have to say farewell to long-cherished notions, such as the national economy, national security, and national interests. They no longer exist. After all, even our national soccer teams now take a multinational approach.

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