

# FP Note

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## THE DISORDER OF THE PREVAILING INTERNATIONAL ORDER<sup>1</sup>



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The collapse of the Cold War and the Soviet Union led to an explosion of literature as analysts grasped to comprehend the newly emerging global structures. Most of this literature predicted the consolidation of authority in the world; a spate of books focused on “empire” as the basic mode of consolidation,<sup>2</sup> while a few analysts reached for the even broader entity, “civilization”.<sup>3</sup> That such a consolidation might not emerge, that authority might proliferate and disaggregate instead, was---and is---not widely considered plausible.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is derived from a longer paper first published in A. Clunan and H. Trinkunas (eds.), *Ungoverned Spaces? Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty*, (forthcoming). Miles Townes assisted in preparing this version.

<sup>2</sup>The more recent ones include Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (London: Penguin Books, 2002); J.N. Pieterse, *Globalization or Empire?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Amitai Etzioni, *From Empire to Community: A New Approach to International Relations* (Palgrave, 2004); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004); and Atilio A. Boron, *Empire and Imperialism: A Critical Reading of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri* (London: Zed Books, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, M.C. Bateson, "Beyond Sovereignty: An Emerging Global Civilization," in R.B.J. Walker and S.H. Mendlovitz (eds.) *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community* (Lynne Reinner, 1990), 145-58; M. Tehranian, "Where is the New World Order: At the End of History or Clash of Civilizations?" *Journal of International Communications*, 1 (1994), 71-99; S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon and Schuster, 1996); H.R. Alker, T. Amin, T. Biersteker, T. Inoguchi, "How Should We Theorize Contemporary Macro-Encounters: In Terms of Superstates, World Orders, or Civilizations?" (unpublished paper 1998); M. Malitze, "Ten Thousand Cultures, A Single Civilization," *International Political Science Review*, 21 (January 2000), 75-89; W.T. Anderson, *All Connected Now: Life in the First Global Civilization* (Westview Press, 2001); and M. Mozaffari (ed.), *Globalization and Civilizations* (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>Among the few observers who allow for the proliferation and decentralization of nodes of authority, what is often referred to as a "neomedieval" structure, are Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 238, and Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War World* (New York: Random House, 2000).

Empires are sustained by centralized power, but this is not true of the present and future international order. Despite the homogenizing trends of globalization, the countries of the world remain distinctly separate from each other, with overlaps among them that are not nearly as conspicuous as the differences. Indeed, these differences can foster tension, even violence.<sup>5</sup>

Such is the prevailing international order, in the broadest sense of the phrase. Two trends of recent decades have become central sources of this order;<sup>6</sup> they are equally dynamic---but more than that, they are interactive, with each affecting one another. Taken together, they have rendered the world and the order that sustains it extremely complex. One trend I call the skill revolution, the tendency for people everywhere to acquire new skills not possessed by, say, their grandparents. A second no less crucial source is what I call the organizational explosion, the fact that everywhere in the world, at every level of community and in every field of endeavor, new organizations are being formed and established.

### **Networked Individuals**

Individuals have become ever more able to cope with challenges and decide what they believe and what they oppose. This powerful dynamic constitutes a revolution in skills, and in consequence we now live in the age of the individual or---more accurately, the networked individual.<sup>7</sup>

As newfound skills and tools shrink the world and intensify the interactions among people, communities, and countries, so do new networks of individuals emerge and proliferate. Whatever might bring them together, networks consist of people and groups who have a common interest in interacting with each other and differentiating themselves from those outside their network. Their interactions may vary, but are always founded on rules that stipulate how the network members should relate to each other. To violate the rules is to risk terminating the interactions and that is an outcome that members of the network seek to avoid. For whatever of a variety of reasons, they need the network and thus do not jeopardize its continuity by negating its rules.

In a networked world there are no individuals. People with personalities and private histories, yes---but people apart from others, no. Instead, the world is populated by “networked individuals,” by people whose identities are sustained by their networks. To refer to people apart from their networks is to speak of purposeless entities. We are what our networks enable, encourage, or allow us to be. People can be members of numerous networks, depending on their orientations, professions, and activities. They are not likely to be confounded by their multiple memberships, however, as each network is considered to serve a specific purpose in their life, thus requiring their members to employ different skills, attitudes, and actions as their focus moves from one network to another.

### **Networks and Organizations**

Networks vary greatly in their extent and form of governance. Some have formal institutions that issue rules and regulations to which their members adhere;

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<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of eight of the sources, see James N. Rosenau, *The Study of World Politics*, Vol. 2 (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), Chap. 8.

<sup>7</sup>For a lengthy discussion of the skill revolution and the organizational exploration, see James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 55-62 and Chap. 10.

others are more informal and depend on voluntary compliance from their members. The latter are, in effect, leaderless, while the former are hierarchically structures and led by one or more persons who may or may not be elected. In any case, a network maintains a modicum of order among its members, lest they defect and the network disintegrate. The explicitness of its rules and commitment of its members largely determine the coherence and effectiveness of a network. Of course, many networks are unable to maintain order and eventually collapse, but many others adapt and persist.

The responsibilities of a network member can range from few to many, depending on its governance structure. Hierarchical networks are likely to assign specific responsibilities to members, but whatever the degree of hierarchy, compliance is largely due to the fact that networks are essentially voluntary organizations. People join them of their own volition and self-interest, so the likelihood that they will live up to their responsibilities is considerable. Many networks are in fact voluntary organizations, with a formal, recognizable presence. As individuals are increasingly networked, so also are their networks increasingly formalized, so that the world is witnessing an explosive increase in organizations. So powerful is the organizational explosion that it is difficult to get reliable data on its scope. There is as yet no easy means of monitoring the emergence of new organizations, nor of tracking those that split into multiple entities.

### **Authority and Foreign Policy**

The organizational explosion and the skill revolution are driving the disaggregation of authority all over the world. Today nodes of authority are located wherever organizations are operative, with a consequential transformation in the loyalties to all-encompassing entities such as the state. The state is still important, but it is no longer predominant in world politics, which in turn presents vexing questions for both practitioners and analysts of foreign policy. As decision-makers find their task increasingly subject to influence from sub- and super-state nodes of authority, does this mean that foreign policy is no longer solely a question of interstate relations? If non-state nodes of authority can be the objects of foreign policy, can these non-states also formulate their own foreign policies? In a world where state boundaries are no longer the most salient divisions, what does the word "foreign" mean?

Many analysts prefer to focus on the stable, unchanging dimensions of the system---namely, state to state interactions---but this is a misguided orientation. A perspective that treats change and transformation as the central tendency at work in the world is bound to generate more reliable insights than one that presumes stability and constancy. Such a perspective requires that students and scholars of foreign policy grapple with the emergence and proliferation of novel nodes of authority in the world. It demands that we reconsider our accepted notions as to who and what are the relevant actors in world politics. This is not to say that foreign policy analysis is no longer relevant in the face of disaggregated authority. Rather, as these trends pose unprecedented challenges for the policy-maker, so do they also pose challenges for the policy-analyst.

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