

Transnationalism and the Politics and Governance of a Sustainable Society

by John Steinbruner

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"All of history and most of human nature are against you; what have you got going for you?"

A U.S. senator said that to me recently, after I had tried to explain to him that the problems we face—population growth, the probability of a serious energy shock, the short-sightedness of current decision making, among many others—demand more effective international coordination and a new pattern of international politics.

Obviously the senator didn't buy it.

There's a temptation to say that problems of such magnitude require a radical answer, that we must design new politicians, and new electorates to vote for them. But admitting that's unlikely in the short run, let me explore some answers that might connect with the senator's perspective—a perspective that basically says, "Why should I pay attention? Why should I disturb myself about this? What's going to force me to do so?"

One answer is fairly obvious—it's going on all around us—and that is spontaneous change. Even the most hard-bitten politicians have recognized that since 1989 there's something different about the world. There's a breakdown of the old order going on spontaneously, and it's plausible to believe that a new one is forming, even if it's hard to see. We are unequivocally seeing a breakdown of the confrontation of alliances that has traditionally constituted organized international security. We are unequivocally seeing a breakdown of the economic barriers that once separated the centrally planned economies and the market economies and that thereby structured a lot of world politics. Finally, we are seeing the standard conceptions of

sovereignty being qualified extensively, as an agenda of human rights and of international concerns extends itself into what was considered to be, with a few exceptions, protected sovereign territory.

Even the politicians most dedicated to preserving tradition and most skeptical of change, recognize that they are in the presence of extremely powerful events based upon widely diverse political attitudes, that they were being driven by forces they don't fully comprehend. All of them have that instinct, and I think it's correct. So that's part of the answer: like it or not, it's happening.

Part of the answer as well is that there is more design implied in what is happening than we have yet fully fathomed or recognized. The political changes, the revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that were so striking from 1989 onward, were not entirely spontaneous. They were in part triggered by changes in policy, particularly in the Soviet Union, that enabled them to happen—that unlocked them, if you will. For quite some time, Soviet decision makers had been struggling to escape the burdens of a confrontation they couldn't sustain, and to overcome their own self-imposed economic isolation. They had been designing the content of their policy as best they could—always imperfectly—to adapt and reinforce what they saw as the more constructive elements in Western policy. We see in retrospect, going well back into the 1970s, substantial arms-control initiatives, changes in their military doctrine, and remarkable changes in their



economic policy. All of these changes were in some sense deliberately initiated, even if the Soviets didn't foresee how rapid the consequences would be for life as they knew it. They were picking up themes in Western policy they thought they could live with and build upon. Let me try to pull out from those themes what I think the implicit design of the new order is, a design that will provide a different basis for international order.

One theme is represented by the principle of cooperation we used in dealing with the Germans and Japanese after World War II, when we had the authority of an occupying power. That principle offers a different way for military establishments to deal with one another—the opportunity for a complete shift in the principles of security that have structured international politics for decades now. Today we are not only seeing the dissolution of confrontation, we are also seeing the initial stages of its replacement by this very different principle. I've been calling it cooperative security, or you could call it cooperative engagement.

We need to develop that principle, in dealing with our erstwhile enemy and with other military establishments that we haven't as yet had a whole lot to do with. The idea is not to confront them with counterpoised military power, but to engage in mutual regulation for mutual benefit. There are several features to this. One is to be much more preventive in dealing with security issues than we have been in the past. The traditional idea of collective security—which grows out of a confrontation of alliances—is that you wait for some international crime to happen, an aggression, and then you gang up on the aggressor. That's what we did in the recent Persian Gulf affair. We did not disturb ourselves much until Iraq attacked Kuwait, and then we organized a coalition to beat them.

Cooperative security, on the other hand, imagines that military power would be generally regulated—comprehensively regulated—by agreement in advance, such that it would be extremely difficult to get an offensive force into position to successfully invade another country. An arrangement of this sort would, by mutual consent, set rules for the allowed size of force deployments, their geographic location, their operational practices, their investment practices and modernization rates—by mutual agreement. It would enforce these understandings by rules of transparency, which would make everyone keep everyone else informed. It would include all elements of military power and all major countries, and would thereby build a comprehensive

arrangement designed to regulate military power. That is the implicit idea, imperfectly formed, but you can see in it the emerging elements of a new, very different order.

A second idea is that of economic integration. This idea has also been propelled by changes in Soviet policy. The Soviet Union recognized some time ago that it was in serious trouble, trying to conduct a completely separate economic system isolated from the main industrial economies, and that it had to connect in some way with the outside world. I doubt if the Soviet leaders fully realized the implications of that, but they certainly understood that much. I think that imperative goes for everyone else, as well.

We are in the midst of a tremendous revolution in information technology, which is likely to have profound implications in the way economic activities are conducted. National barriers are being irretrievably broken down. National governments talk about national competitiveness, and in pursuit of advantage they attempt to set up special trade zones. I think the underlying reality is that they've lost control of this process in national terms. We are seeing the creation of a truly international economy that will have its own new set of rules whether we like it or not.

In order to cope, we will have to organize market access on equitable terms, because it will be essentially impossible to deny anyone. Much more than we currently do, we will have to organize the extension of capital investment to areas where economic depression is simply intolerable. At the moment, we have an extremely serious situation in the center of Europe, where we have two very different standards of living between which all the barriers to movement and access have been broken down. It is hard to see how we are going to deal with that situation without creating political pressures for migration, which will be extremely difficult to manage.

The only answer is that there will have to be some leveling of living standards and, for that to occur, there's going to have to be a much more robust organization of capital investment to absorb risk and provide physical connections. Markets will not do this by themselves. It is a major demand on international policy, and it will transform the way we do economic policy.

And finally, as these issues drive us more deeply into the question of how entire societies are conducted, there will inevitably be a difficult sorting out of the legitimate claims of sovereignty and the legitimate standards of international human rights—questions to which we as yet have no answers. Clearly, there must be given some scope for diversity—for different cultures to

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The last of the Soviet Union's SS-23 shorter-range nuclear missiles await destruction at a Kazakhstan base in October 1989. While these were scrapped in accordance with the treaty banning medium-range missiles, others that remain since the disintegration of the Soviet Union present a new security problem.

organize their political processes as they wish them to be. At the same time, there are very serious constraints on what we can tolerate by way of their treatment of people, particularly their own citizens who don't necessarily meet local standards of ethnicity.

We cannot avoid these issues of forming cooperative security arrangements, of revising economic policy to accommodate an increasingly internationalized economy, of dealing with the limits of sovereignty. Whether we like it or not, we are being propelled into a different concept of international organization. That's part of my answer to the senator: look around you—there's an implicit design for a new order, much further along than you recognize.

But the answers most likely to be heard in Washington have to do with the motives for accepting these new imperatives, and even for designing them, so I will quickly run through some of the short- and medium-term pressures that I think are significant enough to force the United States to change its mind about transnational governance and the desirability and necessity of it—pressures that will drive even the most hard-headed politicians into a much more coherent form of international organization than we have had in the last 40 years.

The first of these is simply a transformation of the standard security threat. We have been concerned for forty years about the possibility of Soviet aggression on the ground or with long-range nuclear weapons, and we've been prepared to deter and contain such threats. It's not only that those problems have receded in significance.

It's that they've been entirely replaced by a very different kind of problem. The problem now is the threatened disintegration of a Soviet military establishment still possessing large numbers of very destructive weapons. We cannot handle that with confrontation, even mild forms of it. Deterrence and containment are essentially irrelevant—indeed, largely counterproductive. We must worry about the Soviet military establishment maintaining enough integrity to handle nuclear-weapons deployments responsibly. We must involve ourselves directly, and we're only just beginning to realize that fact. That's an entirely new security problem just beginning to capture attention in Washington.

A derivative of that problem is the broader fact that as long as nuclear weapons are maintained—and it will be very difficult to get rid of them in short order—they have to be operated safely. At the moment the underlying volatility of the interaction between the U.S. and Soviet military establishments is a problem that must be dealt with. Both establishments are designed to react so rapidly to a perceived threat, and the warning systems that mediate this reaction are so fragile, that when the world comes to understand this situation it will demand a much higher standard of safety. That is what it gradually did with regard to nuclear reactors, whose meltdown would be a disaster of much less consequence than an accidental nuclear exchange. This safety issue is likely to affect politicians in the course of this decade and to force very different conceptions of international organization.

Similarly, the technical diffusion endemic to an international economy means that we have a problem of weapons proliferation much greater and more sophisticated than what we've been used to seeing. We will have to come up with a much more organized and integrated response, or we will be in serious trouble. At the moment, the United States has the only power-projection machine capable of global operations. We don't have any competitor in that regard. This is a problem for most of the rest of the world. We think it's a great idea, but not everyone else is so clear about that. There are technologies available that would not so much match the U.S. capability—a massive investment would be required for that—as negate and counteract it with technologies that are widely available. And if we drive competitive development the way we usually do, we're going to be in trouble 10 or 15 years from now. So we have tremendous incentive to protect ourselves from the inevitable reaction of worried competitors, and to form a larger, more cooperative security arrangement. Again, Washington is

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in the process of discovering this particular imperative. We've got to integrate the various mechanisms for controlling weapons proliferation, and we've got to have everyone on board. Otherwise, we ourselves are going to be in trouble.

I want to underscore the implications of the information revolution. The transmission and processing of information have gone through the most radical transformation of any commodity in economic history by a large factor. We don't, I think, yet know what the full implications will be, but it's very clear that they will be substantial. The revolution will restructure a lot of microeconomic activity and will change the character of macroeconomic management. A lot of good things can come out of this, but tremendous dislocation is possible, and to politicians that means trouble. Therefore, we're facing a tremendous agenda of coping with this technical transformation of information technology, and its economic consequences.

It's clear that major improvements in international management can be derived from this technology, in particular in the management of security arrangements. Cooperative security, systematically implemented, would enable us to save on the order of \$500 billion in a \$2.6 trillion defense bill in the course of a decade and on the order of \$100 billion a year thereafter. Those are significant sums. That possibility will capture attention as people begin to look at the increasing fiscal pressures in the United States.

Finally, the threat of spontaneous civil vio-

lence that we see emerging in Yugoslavia, and that potentially could occur throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, is something that cannot be dealt with in terms of our traditional mechanisms of collective security. If we are going to do anything about it at all, we'll need much more robust forms of cooperation than we have now. The threat is serious enough to cause practical politicians to change their attitudes about international governance.

Let me summarize by saying that the imperative of events is, I believe, powerful enough to change even the reluctant minds of U.S. senators and the people who elect them. In the course of a decade, we are likely to see immense changes along these lines, and if you project beyond a decade, I think we are headed, for reasons we can't avoid, toward a security order that is all-inclusive—a single global alliance, if you will, to which everyone is required to belong by incentives they cannot ignore. We will live, furthermore, in a single integrated economy that we'll have to learn how to operate, with rules of equity yet to be defined. Moreover, in the context of a single security order and an integrated international economy, there is likely to be a radical decentralization of political power, brought about because it is becoming possible to do many more functions at more local levels, with much more interaction between localities. This will be a very different pattern, and we are already substantially into it. I believe that on the whole it's a much better pattern; it is certainly feasible. We should attempt to shape it, to bring it about more rapidly than it might otherwise occur.

The alternatives are not very good. □

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