

The Rise of Technology and Political Change

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The world is changing, and every single human being on this planet in one way or another is beginning to feel it. As we move into a more networked world the very nature of the way that states, businesses, and individuals interact is constantly being redefined. We are moving into an age where information can be accessed by anyone anywhere and readily distributed within a moment's time. As international affairs become more transparent around the globe governments are being forced to react to situations in real time, no longer have time to prepare calculated and well thought out public responses for their people. Newly emerging social networks are being utilized as a people's catalyst for revolutions around the world. This accelerated rate of interconnection between states and people economically and politically is beginning to beg the question 'what is sovereignty' and does it exist in the same way that was once understood. It seems that as technological veins spread out into even the most remote villages of the world eventually all human beings will become digitally connected shattering all previous notions of separation.

After the cold war the era of the American unipolar age emerged, where the United States was the one and only dominant international superpower. For the first time in the modern era one driving force, the United States held the majority of political power in the world. Initially the US was welcomed a 'producer of world order' as no other country was in a position to put the pieces back together themselves (Ikenberry, 2004). Much of the world was still in shambles as a result of WWII and the fall of the Soviet Union. Competition was fierce during the cold war between the US and the Soviet Union and so was the drive for innovation. This time in history marked the rise of the industrial military complex and the advent of large

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scale military spending. Ultimately it was this competitive atmosphere that gave birth to the field of digital computing which is revolutionizing the world as we know it.

Today the world is beginning to think more about what it means to live in an age of unipolarity. The US has been a dominant force for a long time now, and many of the reasons that once prompted countries to acquiesce to an American dominated international order are quickly fading. The state of the world has changed, and for many it seems that in light of recent American actions the US no longer has the right to dominate the international political arena. “The most fundamental questions about the nature of global politics – who commands and who benefits – are now the subject of conversation among long-time allies and adversaries alike. To acquire the capacity to dominate is not to gain the right to rule (Ikenberry, 2004, p.609).”

From the beginning of America’s international dominant position cooperation from other states was easily accomplished because of US liberal acts and supposed intentions. According to Ikenberry the world has recently undergone a transformation parallel to that of the Treaty of Westphalia. We are currently living in the longest period of time without war between the world’s leading superpowers. This power disparity between the US and that of the rest of the world is so great that at this point it is impossible for other states to oppose. The benefit is that the great powers of the world no longer have a need to worry about major wars as they are all so interconnected and interdependent that participation in war would be bad for everyone involved, thus there is not threat. The only major threat that now exists is that of terrorism. US success up to this point has been the result of a combination of liberalism and power. Aside from a few questionable American actions in Latin America and the Middle East,

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the US has generally approached relations with other states in a mutually agreeable fashion (Ikenberry, 2004).

The recent actions by the Bush administration in the Middle East have caused some to refer to the US as an empire. Although the US has not made its aim to conquer new territories, it has established a large inventory of military bases distributed throughout the world, Ikenberry refers this as 'an empire of bases'. One concern here is that the US is abusing the power that it has taken years to gain and is damaging its legitimate character by acting through force and not consent (Ikenberry, 2004).

The path of total domination would be too costly for even the world's largest superpower to maintain over a long period of time. So in context of feasibility, it seems that liberal multilateralism will endure. There are three major incentives for America to continue on the path of liberal multilateralism; first a growing dependence between economies, second the need for preservation of a stable legitimate international rule, and third is the American ideology, that rule based law is the true source of legitimacy (Ikenberry, 2004). This continuation of American based liberal multilateral rule further supports the notion that we are entering into an era of decreased sovereignty between nations and the onslaught of technology and networked communities will continue to reinforce this trend.

Within the last fifty years an international human rights regime has been created. There has been a steep rise in the number of non-governmental organizations (NOG's), those of particular interest are human rights NGO's. As people have become more interconnected on an international level they also become increasingly aware of the conditions in which each other

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exists. The main focus of rights NGO's are generally economical and political. This focus makes them an incredibly attractive target for powerful organizations to exert their influence. By using the guise of an NGO to exert their goals it appears to the world as if the NGO was responsible for the change and the organization that provided the funding is left out of the limelight. The money that flows through NGO's is generally provided by governments, multinational corporations (MNC's), and religious organizations. On average human rights NGO's receive between six and eight billion dollars from donors every year (Berkovitch, 2008).

Berkovitch's study on NGO's in Israel revealed a number of interesting correlations. She found that donors tend to choose NGO's based off of their own agenda. Donors also tend to be influenced by the state in which they originate from, so donor states are influencing the recipient states. The recipient state, the public opinion and government policy of the donor state appear to be influenced as well. The use of directing large scale funding to rights NGO's can be seen as a means of impacting issues that would otherwise be out of the realm of influence from an outside state (Berkovitch, 2008).

One thing to note here is that the control that funding has over the agendas of rights NGO's determines the very definition of what human rights means to the world. This strategic targeting of NGO's undermines many of the goals that would otherwise be accomplished if funding was more equally and fairly distributed. Many of the most impoverished and violence stricken communities around the world suffer because money is not donated in context of the gravity of human rights violations, it is provided as a result of a hidden agenda. The flow of money and ideas between states, donors, and NGO's is another example of how the

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sovereignty of states is in decline as a result of an increasingly networked world (Berkovitch, 2008).

The actualization of the European Union began in the 1950's when Robert Schuman proposed that his country, France, and Germany begin to pool the production of coal and steel. The idea was to intertwine the two countries economically in order to prevent war and promote political unity. This relationship eventually turned into a 'customs union' which allowed for free trade between nations. As democracy spread across Europe after the fall of communism this idea of free trade was embraced by all. Throughout the eighties and nineties European nations attempted to remove as many barriers as possible, thus promoting interconnection and strengthening Europe as a united force. This movement eventually led to the introduction of a unified monetary system, the euro. The benefits of such a system were obvious; it would allow people to travel freely without having to exchange money, uncertainties for importers would disappear, European unity would become strengthened, trade would increase, and overall large scale economic gains were expected. The most obvious downside to the euro was economic flexibility for individual states. In this system states would have to sacrifice their ability to adjust the worth of their currency. As the European Union is not fiscally integrated like the United States, the risk associated with giving up this type of control was very high, German taxpayers would not be expected to have to pick up the tab for Irish bank bailouts. Although these concerns were brought to the attention of the elites, "political leaders throughout Europe were caught up in the romance of the project, to such an extent that anyone who expressed skepticism was considered outside the mainstream (Krugman, 2011,

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p.6).” The formation of the European Union and the integration of the Euro is yet another example of how we are moving into a more globalized world, and sovereignty is being stripped away.

After WWII the world experienced an unprecedented amount of economic growth as would be expected after such a downfall. Living standards rose for many people around the world. But in the seventies and eighties things began to slow down, and mass unemployment hit Europe, the US and Japan. Also occurring at the same time was a restructuring of the industrial production system and the advent of the microchip. The revolution of communications technologies redefined the structure of the way that power in business and politics was distributed. The interesting thing to note here is that in light of recessions and hardship around the world, the instability of currency markets, and regulation of international economic activity, somehow world trade has been able to increase year after year for the past thirty years. Brown suggests the reasons for this increase are; the rise of multinational corporations (MNC's) and global financial markets, the growth of international regimes, and the spread of hegemonic and liberalistic ideas. MNC's strip states of their power to control the world economy. States have allowed international regimes to come into being as they are a benefit in terms of the gains to be attained within an open economy. The spread of hegemonic and liberalistic ideals are beneficial for MNC's and states because they allow for the preservation of a more stable 'world-system' (Brown, 2001).

MNC's are different than traditional businesses as they operate across national boundaries and investment comes from foreign capital. This type of institution has never

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existed before and brings the concept of sovereignty into question. MNC's existing on a plane above the norm don't have to abide by any of the rules and regulations that traditional state based businesses do. As these MNC's are not traditionally regulated they are in a position that allows for quite a bit of manipulation within the world system. The most common types of MNC's are include; the extraction of raw materials, manufacturing and the global manipulation of symbols and holding companies. There are many more MNC's existing today than there were in the sixties and seventies, and most MNC's originate from the advanced industrial world. MNC's, the most powerful business of today existing outside of state of have the ability to impact world order, but the question is what would be the driving force? Historically countries have leveraged economic relationships as a means for balancing power, states are willing to sacrifice in order to gain in another area. But what drives an MNC that is above making a gain on the state level, and how do these decisions impact the sovereignty of states themselves (Brown, 2001)?

Intra-firm trade within MNC's is a major concern for people today. This is a type of trade that occurs between different branches of the same corporation most times occurring between branches that are located in different countries. As taxes and monetary values are different in most states one can very quickly begin to see the benefit that MNC's would have in conducting some forms of business in particular areas. These actions can have extremely negative effects on the regulation of international trade in terms of taxes and tariffs. Between a quarter and third of all trade conducted by advanced and industrial countries is intra-firm trade. The rise of global financial markets is another incidence fueled by the accelerated

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adaptation of technologies that allows for the trade of one currency for another. Once the restrictions for holding ones money in foreign banks was lifted there was an explosion of currency trade around the world which is occurring at maximum capacity today and was responsible for the destabilization of management in exchange rates. Sovereignty once again is called into question as the distinction between national and international capital markets is beginning to blur (Brown, 2001).

In order for states to maintain their competitive edge in today's world they must ensure that they hold the largest market share possible. This need requires states to create an atmosphere amenable to MNC's as it is their market share that will provide the state a value. States will negotiate with firms by providing them benefits in; terms and conditions, tax concessions, location and employment. MNC's will negotiate with states by requesting; co-production opportunities, the pooling of research and development, franchising and possibilities of co-ownership. The ability of a state to maintain so called sovereignty today is highly dependent on its ability to attract and secure long lasting relationships with the most powerful MNC's in the world (Brown, 2001).

One of the defining characteristics of the interconnection between states today is the international trade regime. Human populations have grown faster over the last fifty years than any other time throughout history and along with this rapid expansion of life, our technology has accelerated the advent of a preeminent international trade system. The World Trade Organization (WTO) commonly seen as the symbol of globalization is intended to 'supervise and liberalize international trade'. Principles of international trade as defined by Brown are that,

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“trade is good, free trade is better than controlled trade, and free trade promotes peace (Brown, 2001, p.177).” These ideas are so embedded within the psyche of the people in industrialized nations that the question of sovereignty generally does not come up. Nations historically were able to produce what they required to survive. But as technologies have been adapted over time and resources especially in the form of employees have fluctuated in value, the diversity of industry per nation state slowly began to diminish. Most states today especially those of the industrialized nations are no longer capable of surviving on their own. If all nations in the world chose to stop trade between each other every economy on the planet would crash, leaving humanity in a state of chaos. This interdependence on goods, resources, and services between states exemplifies the fragility of our current system when considering the idea of sovereignty. If a state is to be completely or even mostly sovereign it must not depend on the actions of other states outside of it. It seems that in light of the current state of the world, and direction in which technology is driving us, moving forward we have no choice but to continue on this path of more and more interdependence which will ultimately result in a world system without borders between people, states, cultures, and religions (Brown, 2001).

As this more networked world comes to fruition the onset of terrorism seems to be the only real threat. States, MNC's, NGO's and International Governmental Organizations (IGO's) are the dominant players in today's international political arena. But there are some that are resisting this change. The terrorist organizations of today promote the resistance of globalization and unification between nations. Interestingly they tend to self promote their organizations by utilizing technological mediums that exist as a result of a more unified world.

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The adaptation of technology around the world is a catalyst for its evolution. Power in the sense that we are generally no longer fighting wars over land is held in ideas and the power to influence. Valeri, in *Securing Internet Society: Toward an International Regime for Information Assurance* would argue that the world needs to establish an information security regime in order to prevent threats from terrorist organizations and others (Valeri, 2010).

The world is very quickly approaching a time where all forms of business will be done digitally. Security should be a primary focus for all who participate in a networked environment. Threats from hackers, terrorists, and rogue states need to be considered (Valeri, 2010). According to Valeri, a security regime for digital information can only be constructed with the cooperation of national governments, and international businesses. As can be seen today the interconnection of networks and a diverse array of available applications can pose security risks if hierarchical agreements are not made about preventative measures. Security in this type of system can only be implemented if all major participating parties agree on the rules and regulations of that implementation. If one major player objects or falters on this implementation the entire structure will collapse and the end goal will have been done for nothing. The internet is the most symbolic representation of the growing interconnection between nations. It is this information producing communication machine that is allowing not only major players to form more internationally interconnected relationships but individuals as well. Relationships established on the internet over time, especially in the realm of business are also aiding the synthesis of a singular dominant world system. It has become more and more common for small businesses and individuals to seek out services from those in other

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countries because the cost of work is cheaper. One can see that over time this trend will eventually result in a completely networked world where goods, services, and information will be purchased by those who can provide them at the lowest cost. This will cause world economies to become more unified, and money will also become more equally distributed.

If the world is to be unified in this manner it must also be prepared to deal with the digital attacks that await our future. The US in the dominant position must also begin to think about governing the world along with the cooperation of other nations with the mentality of existing as a single world state. The wars of the future will not be fought with traditional armies; they will be fought through ideas, “altering the way people think and what they decide to fight for (Cronin, 2006, p.7).” Audrey Cronin compares today’s political landscape and cyber revolution with that of the French revolution, where new technologies changed the way that wars were fought. It was ‘education and ideology’ that were the catalyst for Napoleons’ war machine, the people themselves made up the engine and they volunteered to be a part of it because they believed. It was the utilization of the new technology of the time in journals, newspapers, pamphlets, and books that allowed for these ideologies to be mass marketed to the people (Cronin, 2006). The internet of today puts the power in the hands of the individual. The combination of intelligence, money, marketing, technological savvy and charisma can be a dangerous combination in today’s world. This is most exemplified in Al Qaeda’s utilization of the media to win over the hearts and minds around the world.

Al Qaeda has proven to be a lot smarter and more resourceful than the US may have expected. Their use of the media as a platform to spread their ideas around the world has had

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an incredibly high success rate. “The repetition of their platform themes and use of “message projection opportunities” demonstrate a great understanding of human nature, marketing strategy, global media, and world politics (Viovacco, 2009, p.853).” AL Qaeda has a media sector called al-sahab that is dedicated to the promotion of their cause, and they declared war on American as this was in their eyes the first step to defeating their “near enemy” in the Middle East.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s deputy said, “We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media (Ciovacco, 2009, p.855).” Out of the 64 media releases Al Qaeda messages were found to be targeted toward Muslims 57 times, Americans 14 times and Europeans 6 times. They consistently used things like anniversaries as projection opportunities to draw more attention to their messaging. Historical religious references from the Koran are embedded in their messaging in an attempt to appear more religious than any other Muslim organizations. The most prominent themes appearing in their media releases were; call to jihad (53), clash of civilizations (51), apostate Muslim leaders are betraying Islam (42), the US-Israel connection (38), Muslim unity (32), US is weakening (29), US is stealing Muslim oil (20). Al Qaeda’s messaging seemed to attempt to influence American foreign policy as well. They would release messages targeted directly toward American people as an attempt to win over the majority as a means to affect the political outcome regarding American foreign policy (Ciovacco, 2009). Ciovacco observed many other strategic correlations in Al Qaeda’s media campaigns, and support the notion that as our world becomes more connected we are as a unified human population more easily ideologically engaged. Because

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most of the world is connected the same network, the information you can access is generally no longer restricted to the state in which you reside. This access can be both a benefit and a detriment when considering the possible rapid spread of ideologies. Here a terrorist group can possibly affect the sovereignty of nations as a result of its influence of ideas on mass populations that could in turn change the course of history.

It seems that as we become more interconnected the less sovereign we become. With the rise of things like the internet, the WTO and the international financial system the balance of power is shifting so quickly that it is hard to tell anymore who really is in power as there are too many variables to be considered in the equation. A month, a week or even a day goes by and everything that once was has changed. Ultimately states will have to come to the realization that in order to maintain the rhythm of what has been initiated in the international political arena the old tradition of sovereignty will need to be let go, and a new wave of thinking must emerge.

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