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GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND GLOBAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:  
FROM FALSE PROMISE TO REALISTIC HOPE  
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Because of the terrible things that governments do and the terrible situations that governments neglect, friends of humanity seek improvements in the political processes that currently produce decisions with important, pervasive international consequences. This search for improvement in global governance often leads to proposals of major reforms to strengthen global institutions, i.e., multigovernmental institutions in which all, or the vast majority, of the world's governments take part. Among academics in the United States, such proposals are especially attractive to liberal theorists who are concerned with stark international inequalities of power. They think that morally urgent global needs are ill-served by current political processes in which, as Stanley Hoffmann sees it, "military and economic giants will not be pushed around by hordes of pygmies,"<sup>1</sup> a process which, in Robert Keohane's view, makes current "international organizations ... institutions of the privileged, by the privileged and all too often for the privileged"<sup>2</sup>; Richard Falk even goes so far as to warn that the "unchallengeable military preeminence" of the United States is being mobilized in "an emergent global fascism."<sup>3</sup>

The diagnosis condemns the cure, or so I will argue. Because of facts of global power that stimulate proposals for large-scale reform of global institutions, such advice is more likely than not to harm humanity, if it makes any difference. The search for an institutional fix distracts from more productive thinking about the improvement of global

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *World governance: Beyond Utopia*, 132 DAEDALUS 27, 34 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Robert O. Keohane, , *Governance in a Partially Globalized World*, 95 AM. POL. SCI. R. 1, 7 (2001).

governance -- above all, thinking about the global social movement that could help humanity at our current stage. I will conclude by describing the special promise of this non-institution and by suggesting how it might best develop.

### The Fatal Lure of the Institutional Fix

At the outset, the relevant sense of "institution" ought to be marked off from the familiar usage in which it designates any social phenomenon longer-lived than a fad -- e-mail and happy hours as well as the modern state and the Catholic Church. An institution, in this narrower sense, which could be further specified as "organized institution," is a distinctively powerful combination of four characteristics.

1. Authoritative rules. The participants jointly acknowledge the authority of a current set of rules, to which they largely conform. This recognition influences their conformity, partly because rule infraction is taken to be a reason for condemning a participant as unworthy of trust.
2. Procedures. These rules include a set of procedures for modifying, further specifying and implementing rules and identifying infractions.
3. Broad, normative scope. The rules have a fairly broad subjectmatter, within which further modification and extension, via the shared procedures, is regarded by participants as justifiable by shared norms. A failure to seek justification on the basis of these norms makes a participant liable to charges of lack of respect or integrity.
4. Enduring resources. At least in some reasonably extended period, resources for engaging in all of these processes are reliably available, on a basis that provides a reasonable expectation that the joint, rule-governed process will continue into the indefinite future. (Once this period ends, the institution is moribund or in peril.)

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3 RICHARD FALK, THE DECLINING WORLD ORDER: AMERICA'S IMPERIAL GEOPOLITICS 249 (2004).

Social processes with these four features have special power, which helps to explain their dominance of the market for proposals for improving global governance. Shared acknowledgment of rules, treated as conditions for trust, can give rise to conduct that becomes second nature, as participants pursue trustworthiness. As assets and human capital are created to cope with rule-based expectations, further self-interested endeavors come to be shaped by this new structure of resources. Institutions can respond to new circumstances while continuing to rely on the same old basis for legitimacy. They can regulate large spheres of public life on the basis of correspondingly large values. And their dedicated resources are a means of fighting the great entropic forces of fatigue and distraction: in the modern setting, this involves staffing, the funding of an organized group with a job of insuring continuity, possessing incentives and coordinative resources adequate to this task.

Given the need to coordinate interactions among strangers, who often (at least en masse) significantly affect others they never meet, institutions are indispensable in the modern world. But if the task is improvement of a current sphere of social life already regulated by institutions and if inequalities of power are a main source of harms to be mitigated, then it is an open question whether new powers for institutions linking the strong and weak are to be recommended. If the recommendations make any significant difference, the domineering influence of the top participants may make the new institutional powers further tools for domination.

This is, in fact, the fate of proposals of major reforms meant to strengthen global institutions. Global institutions currently make the diplomatic working-out of conflicts of interest more efficient; given the costs of violence and disorder, no friend of humanity

should wish that they would disappear. But further, large-scale institutional changes that would challenge the domineering influence of great powers will not be adopted. If by some fluke they were, effective diplomacy would desert these sites, a disaster for the institutions and for world peace. On the other hand, if a large-scale reform strengthening a global institution does not challenge the current power structure, it is more likely than not to be hijacked by the global elites whose dominance was supposed to be mitigated, making matters worse for humanity. More localized institutions, which do not span such great inequalities of power, and non-institutions, which are not susceptible to over-all control, are more effective means of relieving global burdens -- because of, not despite, the power of institutions to shape conduct.

#### Institutionalizing War against Injustice

One especially prominent theme of global institutional reform is the proposal to institute a more permissive rule for intervention against grave injustice while investing special authority in the United Nations. This change, advocated by Hoffmann and Falk, as well as Kofi Annan<sup>4</sup>, Antonio Cassese<sup>5</sup> and many others, is a good illustration of the dangers of the institutional fix.

At present, there is no consensus among the world's governments that the ending of foreign injustice above the abysmal threshold of genocidal massacre is a just cause of war. In the practice of diplomatic justification and condemnation, a mishmash of precepts is available, some useful in defending the sovereign rights of tyrannies, some useful in claiming that these rights have disappeared through grave abuse. The anti-interventionist formulas increase the tendency for repeated intervention by a government to incur wary

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<sup>4</sup> See KOFI ANNAN, *THE QUESTION OF INTERVENTION* (1999).

<sup>5</sup> See ANTONIO CASSESE, *HUMAN RIGHTS IN A CHANGING WORLD* (1990).

distrust, while the interventionist formulas create some reason for tyrants to worry about pushing oppression too far. The institutional reformers would clean up some of this mess by instituting a rule that intervention to end serious, systematic widespread violations of human rights, contained within a regime's borders, is a just cause of war. At the same time, a corresponding increase in the authority of the U.N. is supposed to contain the dangers of the broader explicit license to make war; but it does not, because of the powers and interests of Hoffmann's "military giants," above all, the brawniest giant.

The dangers of the broader license are very great. For one thing, a great power engaged in humanitarian military intervention will use overwhelming military superiority to reduce risks to its armed forces, even by means that greatly increase morally relevant costs over-all. Charles Maynes, when he was editor of *Foreign Policy*, reported an exemplary consequence: "CIA officials privately concede that the U.S. military may have killed from 7,000 to 10,000 Somalis during its engagement [in humanitarian intervention in Somalia.] America lost only 34 soldiers."<sup>6</sup>

Also, through selective implementation, the sole superpower would use the broader license to intervene to extend and deepen its domineering influence. In March 1999, the United States responded to brutal Serbian repression of Kosovar Albanian aspirations to autonomy, repression which had exacted a death toll in the vicinity of 2000, including both civilians and KLA insurgents, over the previous year.<sup>7</sup> The United States-initiated bombing campaign fatally damaged the regime of a defiant, Russian-oriented tyrant in the Balkans, and ended doubts about U.S. willingness to put its armed might to

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6. Charles W. Maynes, *Relearning Intervention*, 98 FOREIGN POL. 96, 98 (1995).

7. See INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON KOSOVO, THE KOSOVO REPORT 2, 82f (2000).

violent use, post-Cold-War. In Turkey, in the fifteen years prior to the bombing of Serbia, the death toll of a conflict over Kurdish autonomy, characterized by widespread government brutality and suppression of minimal expressions of Kurdish identity (including Kurdish names and cassettes with Kurdish songs, much less Kurdish-language schools), was over 20,000.<sup>8</sup> Eighty percent of the armament used by Turkish forces in their offensives against Kurdish villages was American, including their most deadly apparatus, military helicopters with integrated air-to-surface weapons.<sup>9</sup> In Afghanistan, Jimmy Carter's self-proclaimed human-rights administration initiated U.S. sponsorship of fierce militias of fanatical warlords countering repression by a Soviet-backed regime. During the same administration, about 200,000 died, the vast majority civilians, in Indonesia's invasion and subjugation of East Timor.<sup>10</sup> U.S.-supplied counterinsurgency aircraft used in forcing villagers to leave the highlands were a crucial and very lethal means of conquest, by armed forces deriving 90% of their weapons from the United

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8. In 1995, Human Rights Watch estimated that over 19,000 had been killed since 1984, singling out 2,000 killings by Turkish government death squads of suspected sympathizers with the PKK, the Kurdish insurgent party, and noting that more than 2,200 Kurdish villages had been destroyed, most burned down by Turkish security forces; see *Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Laws of War in Turkey* (1995), available at [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org). "Kurdish first names have been banned since the first decades of the republic, with just one receiving official blessing in the 1990s. ... The lifting in 1991 of the official ban on Kurdish resulted in a brief spurt in sales of Kurdish music cassettes," NICOLE POPE & HUGH POPE, *TURKEY UNVEILED* 256, 258 (1997). "Kurdish-language television remains illegal. Schools and universities are still forbidden to offer instruction in Kurdish, and academies where people may freely learn English, French, German and even Japanese may not teach Kurdish," .” STEPHEN KINZER, *CRESCENT AND STAR* 132 (2001). Nicole Pope and Kinzer were Istanbul correspondents for *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*, respectively.

9 See JONATHON RANDAL, *AFTER SUCH KNOWLEDGE, WHAT FORGIVENESS?* 269 (1997); Tamar Gabelnick, William D. Hartung & Jennifer Washburn, *Arming Repression: U.S. Arms Sales to Turkey during the Clinton Administration*, Joint Report of World Policy Institute and Federation of American Scientists (1999), available at <http://www.fas.org/asmp/library/reports/turkeyrep.htm>; AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *TURKEY: NO SECURITY WITHOUT HUMAN RIGHTS* 8 (1996), available at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/turkey/turktoc.htm>.

10 See JACOB BERCOVITCH & RICHARD JACKSON, *INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT: A CHRONOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CONFLICTS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT 1945-1995* 162f. (1997); JOHN LAFFIN, *WAR ANNUAL* 4 p. 77 (1994).

States.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. described in his memoirs how he was instructed to respond to massacres by Indonesian forces in their initial takeover, an invasion that had been reported to have already claimed 60,000 lives: "The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success."<sup>12</sup>

The tendency of selective implementation, knocking out defiant tyrants and displaying fearsome might while preserving repressive allies, is to extend the domination that liberal reformers fear, exacerbating such evils as the inequitable shaping of the framework for globalization. World peace is threatened over the long haul, as rival powers, above all China, become more deeply wary of America's use of military might to extend its global reach.

Finally, the interests of a superpower, as perceived by its dominant elites, can be expected to yield devastation far more plentifully than reconstruction in the humanitarian-intervention process as a whole. In the many cases in which it is in the interest of the United States to move on after destruction, move on it does. Norway has contributed about as much aid to Somalia as the United States.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, when the United States has a vital interest in steering the political trajectory of a country, post-intervention, this is apt to be much more disastrous than neglect. In Iraq, the humanitarian justification, always the most plausible, soon became the leading rationale

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11. See WILLIAM HARTUNG, WORLD POLICY INSTITUTE, *U.S. Arms Transfers to Indonesia 1975–1997*, available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/indoarms.html>.

12. PATRICK MOYNIHAN, *A DANGEROUS PLACE* 247 (1978).

13 Indeed, in 2001, Norway's net aid was \$20.1 million, as against \$9.9 million from the United States. In 2004, Norway gave \$33.7 million, the U.S. \$31.9 million. See WORLD BANK WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS 2003 Table 6.11 (2003); WORLD BANK, WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS 2006 Table 6.12 (2006).

pressed by defenders of the U.S.-led invasion. The reshaping of Iraq has been driven by U.S. interests in maintaining the fearsomeness of U.S. power, containing Iran's regional power, insuring U.S.-friendly auspices for Iraqi oil production, and privatizing and opening the Iraqi economy. Inevitably, an American military presence on Iraqi soil driven by these interests has prompted a fierce insurgency, divisive U.S. tactics to contain Iraqi opposition, and a terrible toll of violent disorder. In the first three years, according to a careful study applying standard epidemiological techniques, this toll included excess Iraqi deaths on the order of half a million.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the new just cause for war is supposed to be proclaimed along with further traditional requirements of proportionality and necessity, which Conferences of Catholic Bishops, U.N. High-Level Panels, and U.S. National Security Advisors endorse in very similar terms. But no one seriously thinks that the proclamation of these

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<sup>14</sup> Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy and Les Roberts, *Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq* LANCET (October 11, 2006, online) estimate the excess of deaths after the invasion over what would be expected on the basis of death rates in the three months immediately before (a baseline which itself reflected elevated death rates due to the sanctions regime.) The estimate is based on interviews with randomly selected households. Their sample is sufficiently large to entail a 95% confidence interval of between 392,979 and 942,636 excess deaths, i.e., it is 95% probable that the death tolls they report in a genuinely random sample of their size would reflect an Iraqi total in this range. The vast majority of the excess were violent deaths, steeply increasing over time. Coalition forces were the largest known cause of violent death (31%.) The interviewers asked for death certificates in response to 87% of the reports of deaths, which were presented for 92% of the reports. In the media, the most frequently cited figures concerning Iraqi deaths are not estimates but tabulations, by Iraq Body Count, of reports of violent deaths of civilians by at least two well-established sources, i.e., civilian deaths in military actions, deaths from criminal violence in excess of what would be expected from the (tiny) rate of such deaths under Saddam, and deaths from terrorist attacks. Burnham et al. note that these reports involved from 43,491 to 88,283 deaths in the period of their survey. They also note the severe incompleteness of such tabulations (which Iraq Body Count has always emphasized), which generally provide a tenth or less of the toll in well-grounded epidemiological surveys in areas of prolonged violent conflict. One other extensive study was part of the *Iraqi Living Conditions Survey 2004* (available at [www.iq.undp.org/ILCS](http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS)), a collaboration between the UN Development Program and the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, which covered the first year after the invasion, and surveyed 21,688 households with about 140,000 people. The half-page on "war-related deaths ... in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion" buried late in the report in a section on "Maternal Mortality" (v. II, p. 54) excludes soldiers living on military bases and only includes deaths in episodes of war, such as combat operations, shelling, and the setting off of explosive devices (see the survey questionnaire, [www.fafano.org/ILCS/](http://www.fafano.org/ILCS/).) Since interviewees were asked to name all victims, by representatives of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, dead insurgents were, presumably, undercounted. The ILCS estimates

irreducibly vague constraints, whose implementation is unavoidably speculative and ad hoc, is an adequate safeguard. Rather, liberal reformers think that the broader license will serve humanity if the United Nations oversees its use. But the U.N. as it is and might realistically be will not have effective authority to block the United States in violently pursuing global interests it regards as important, or in blocking other great powers in pursuit of regional interests they hold dear.

In interventionist proposals with some chance of adoption, such as the Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, assertions of a duty to defer to exclusive U.N. authority are scrupulously avoided, when U.N. authorization is favored.<sup>15</sup> Given the influence of the sole superpower, the facilities of the U.N. will, then, on balance, promote domineering and destructive use of the broader license by the United States. It is easy to forget how close the Security Council came to providing credible certification of the invasion of Iraq, easier yet to ignore the leading role of the U.N. in providing auspices and agents (such as the ubiquitous Lakhdar Brahimi) increasing the international look of negotiations, elections and accords that advance U.S. interests.

On the other hand, a reformist aspiration toward a United Nations that defies important interests of great powers and asserts exclusive authority is a prayer best left unanswered. The impotence of the defiance would shatter whatever credibility the U.N. has, while lack of adequate accommodations for the interests of great powers would lead them to take their real business elsewhere.

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24,000 deaths in episodes of war from the start of the invasion until April/May 2004, about one year later. In both Iraq Body Count tabulations and Burnham et al.'s survey, the toll has doubled each year since.

<sup>15</sup> See HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON THREATS, CHALLENGES, & CHANGE, A MORE SECURE WORLD: OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY 62–67, 106f (2004).

## The Institutional Framework of Globalization

The interventionist proposals would construct more permissive rules of international conduct. It might seem more promising to contain excesses of domination through the institution of global rules meant to constrain -- general rules, applied and modified through set procedures governed by broad norms, in the process that distinguishes institutions from mere treaties. This is Robert Keohane's project of advancing liberal values globally through "the legalization of rules."<sup>16</sup> The WTO-administered trade and property rights regime is a nice illustration of what is shaped by what when the legalization of rules, the explicit project of the WTO, meets the realities of power. Because of the interests and threat-influence of the small elite of high income countries, the reduction of even egregious anomalies of relatively little interest, such as rich-country agricultural subsidies, is nil or agonizing slow; the most important anomalies, such as borders pried open to financial services, yet closed to labor, are ignored; and explicit anomalous exceptions, such as the Multi-Fiber Accord and subsequent restrictions on Chinese imports, are imposed. Yet the prevalence of general rules and a shared general goal of trade-liberalization does have important impact. One-sided legalization of rules makes it much easier to corral uppity developing countries seeking to evade rigors of the sort of liberalization whose only clear beneficiaries are the dominant global elites and allied elites in developing countries.

The rigors of this liberalization are due to a trade regime that is distinctly unfriendly to the diverse local deviations from free trade which were part of every large national escape from poverty before the Washington Consensus instituted stronger

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<sup>16</sup> Keohane, *supra* note 2, at 11.

rules.<sup>17</sup> This might make it attractive to institute strong global enforcement of rules of one other sort: rules that are broad in scope but flexible in adjustment to the diverse needs of developing countries. But because of current realities of interpretation and enforcement, such proposals, if they are instituted, are apt to do more harm than good.

The capacity of domineering powers to manipulate flexible institutional provisions is the bane of linkages of trade rights and aid to broad labor standards. Minimum-wage standards have to be responsive both to diverse local requirements for avoiding destitution and to diverse legitimate strategies for growing trade and investment. Even the global enforcement of child labor and slave labor bans has to be sensitive to the very different capabilities of different states and their bureaucracies. The market access and aid that would provide large incentives for compliance is at the disposal of the United States, the EU and Japan and Bretton-Woods institutions steered by the U.S. There is no chance that the United States will allow these resources to be deployed beyond its control, in enforced judgments that threaten its advantages in economic exploitation or deferential alliance in such countries as Haiti, Egypt, Nicaragua, or Saudi Arabia. The role of the United States in shaping policy at the World Bank, the IMF and in the trade regime now administered by the WTO, American uses of regional free trade pacts, and American allocations of foreign aid provide plenty of reasons to suppose that minimally acceptable control of a labor-standards regime would make serious linkage of labor standards with access and aid a stick to advance U.S. power. For example, it would be a

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<sup>17</sup> See DANI RODRIK, *THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF TRADE AS IF DEVELOPMENT REALLY MATTERED* (2001) for a cogent account of these departures from free trade orthodoxy. Development strategies in the great success stories in East Asia relied on measures, such as export subsidies and strong protection of vulnerable economic sectors, that are illegal under the WTO (paralleling earlier successful development strategies of the United States, Germany and Japan.)

useful device in the deepening contest with China, home to 600 million people living below the "\$2.00 a day" poverty line.

Probably, proposals of broad institutionalized linkages will simply come to nothing. Still, in addition to costs in wasted energy and distraction from feasible goals, the interests of humanity may be ill-served by proposals whose attractiveness as live prospects depends on illusions about the tendencies of U.S. foreign policy. For example, illusions about beneficence in the use of American power can play a dangerous role in acceptance of violent American intervention, in the hope that it will be steered toward humane goals. I believe that these illusions have been extremely dangerous in Americans' responses to the invasion of Iraq and the continuing U.S. military presence.

#### Plague and Hope

Here and in other territories for global institutional reform, current prescriptions would worsen the epidemic of destructive dominance. Further description and diagnosis support a different way of improving global governance.

For the last half-century, the United States has preserved and extended its global power at the cost of vast death and devastation in developing countries. This has not been an occasional outbreak of stupidity or blinkered enthusiasm, but an enduring feature of U.S. foreign policy, under Presidents of both parties and diverse temperaments. Indeed, the most devastating intrusions have been bipartisan efforts of successive administrations.

In Afghanistan, Zbigniew Brezinski has told an interviewer, "aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul" was approved by Jimmy Carter in light of Brezinski's opinion that "this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention." "That secret operation," he boasted, "was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing

the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it?"<sup>18</sup> The death toll from that trap was over a million, mostly Afghan civilians, as the United States, in four successive administrations, funneled arms and subsidies through Pakistan to rigidly Islamicist warlords, first to torment the Soviet bear, then to contain the influence of Iran.<sup>19</sup>

In the first war against Iraq, led by the President Bush whose statesmanship is now the subject of much nostalgic celebration, precision-guided weapons destroyed the power stations on which refrigeration, water supply and sewage treatment depend and bombs destroyed the main Baghdad sewage treatment plant.<sup>20</sup> Planners of these attacks explained to a *Washington Post* reporter that they were a deliberate effort to strike "against 'all those things that allow a nation to sustain itself.', ... to let people know, 'Get rid of this guy and we'll be more than happy to assist in rebuilding.'"<sup>21</sup> The relay from a Republican to a Democratic administration was flawless. Because of vigorous defense of the sanctions by the Clinton administration, which made it impossible to restore sanitation and health care in Iraq, the sanctions ultimately led to over a hundred thousand excess deaths among Iraqi children under five.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For the whole interview, see *How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen*, COUNTERPUNCH, October 8, 2001, at [www.counterpunch.org/brzezinski/html](http://www.counterpunch.org/brzezinski/html). This interview originally appeared in LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR, Jan. 15-21, 1998, at 76, but not in the shorter edition sent to the United States. John Cooley presents some excerpts in UNHOLY WARS 19f. (2000)..

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch estimates that 1.5 million had died by 2001. See "Fueling Afghanistan's War," (December 15, 2000), available at [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org). For a detailed chronicle of U.S. involvement, see JOHN COOLEY, UNHOLY WARS (2000).

<sup>20</sup> ANDREW COCKBURN & PATRICK COCKBURN, OUT OF THE ASHES 4, 131 (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Descriptions of the objective by a senior airforce officer "who played a central role in the air campaign but declined to be named" and an unnamed "Air Force planner," reported in Barton Gellman, *Allied Air War Struck Broadly in Iraq*, WASH. POST, June 23, 1991, at A1. Gellman attributes similar characterizations of this goal of "long-term leverage," in less pithy formulations, to Colonel John A. Warden III, deputy director of strategy, doctrine and plans for the Air Force.

<sup>22</sup> The 1999 UNICEF survey of childhood mortality in Iraq concluded that if the 1980's trend of reduced under-five mortality had continued through the 1990's, there would have been 500,000 fewer deaths than

Extremely deadly, long-drawn-out destruction in bipartisan pursuit of American power has also been the fate of every other region in the developing world. This destruction reflects a strong and enduring tendency of American institutions, powers, and interests to produce conduct promoting U.S. power unconstrained by severe costs to foreigners in developing countries.

However powerfully they are affected by U.S. foreign policy, foreigners do not get to vote in American elections. They influence the opinions of only a tiny minority of those who do.

Economic elites in the United States now vitally depend on American world power for the growth and independence of their firms. They provide cadres and interpersonal networks of information and influence essential to the management of government.

The political elites of the United States are no more inclined than the political elites of any great power to accept its weakening: the strength of this power seems to be part of their own vitality, and dominates their deliberations over foreign policy. In these deliberations, the deaths of foreigners in developing countries seem to have no force in inhibiting the pursuit of this goal. In the 2899 closely printed pages of the published version of *The Pentagon Papers*, our widest window onto American foreign policy making, the detailed, deeply argued and contentious memoranda, records of deliberations,

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occurred from the start of the sanctions through 1998. See *Iraq–Under-Five Mortality* (1999), [www.unicef.org/reseval/pdfs/irqu5est/pdf](http://www.unicef.org/reseval/pdfs/irqu5est/pdf), p. 1. In a recent reanalysis, Ali, Black and Jones consider the conservative assumption that under-five mortality rates would have remained the same in the absence of the sanctions and derive a excess deaths estimate of 400,000 on this basis. See Mohamed Ali, John Blacker and Gareth Jones, *Annual Mortality Rates and Excess deaths of Children under Five in Iraq, 1991–98*, 57 *POPULATION STUDIES* 217–26 (2003). In another widely cited study, Richard Garfield defended 227,000 as the most likely estimate based on all available data, with 106,000 as the outcome of quite conservative assumptions. See RICHARD GARFIELD, *Morbidity and Mortality among Iraqi Children from 1990 through 1998* (1999), at [www.casi.org.uk](http://www.casi.org.uk)

internal policy statements and rationales, and erudite narratives of decisionmaking never once mention the deaths of Vietnamese as an independent reason to choose a less lethal option.

In the public political culture of the United States, the doctrine that what strengthens American world power is good is the common property of both political parties and the presupposition of American schooling and the mass media. This milieu reflects not just elite interests but a long cultural history and a general tendency to gain a sense of vitality from collective success in national goals long pursued.

Empires always face challenges, in the face of which the mobilization of destructive power is indispensable. The challenges currently faced by the American empire include the growth of the European Union to a point that threatens American economic prerogatives; the growth of the major developing countries, especially China, India, and Brazil, to a point that threatens American governance of the course of globalization; the movement of Europe and Japan to the innovative edge of manufacturing and information-processing; and the threat posed by declining North American and Saudi oil reserves and sky-rocketing Chinese consumption to the stable, reasonably cheap access to oil that has been the keystone of American energy policy. Since America's only qualitative superiority is now military and threats and destruction based on this power are a means of advantageous influence which help to meet these competitive challenges, deadly uses of military power are part of any rational response.

It would be good for humanity to tame the outcome of the normal interactions of elites and the electorate in response to these challenges. For vast immoral excess is to be expected. But global institutional reforms will, if anything, encourage more harmful

dominance. A familiar, "realist" view of international relations would, at this point, insist that nothing useful can be done except to advise on shrewd uses of power, avoiding pointless destruction. But the record of decisionmaking shows that this familiar outlook is blind to a reality of power: social movements outside of institutionally supported processes have helped humanity and curbed imperial excesses, above all by threatening to reduce perceived legitimacy, a vital resource for those in power.

In the Vietnam era, this was the fear that led to a much less lethal path at each of the great crossroads, beginning with the meeting of Johnson's Senior Advisory Group that set the course toward deescalation. What the so-called Wise Men feared was not military defeat, in George Ball's account, but demoralization, what he later described, in mournful retrospection, as "the poisoning of the minds of some Americans toward their own government."<sup>23</sup> In *The Pentagon Papers*, outraged public opinion ranks with the provocation of Chinese or Russian intervention as the only reasons not to kill lots more Vietnamese in pursuit of victory.<sup>24</sup>

### Improving a Social Movement

Rather than investing energy in advice on global institutional reform that will do harm if it goes anywhere, those who seek to improve global governance should join in a discussion of the best form for a social movement that reduces the harms of current institutionalized powers. Of course, there is already a movement, or rather a cluster of movements seeking to reduce these harms. Made possible by the globalization whose excesses it opposes, it comprises an international bunch of people who bash Bush, have

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<sup>23</sup> GEORGE BALL, *THE PAST HAS ANOTHER PATTERN* 433 (1982); see also p. 409.

<sup>24</sup> *In* 4 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, *THE PENTAGON PAPERS: THE SENATOR GRAVEL EDITION* [No date] see, for example, pp. 257f., 463, 479, 561, 603.

opposed the Iraq War and occupation, seek to relieve inequities and burdens of globalization, call for more action against global climate change, or are concerned that what governments do to relieve global poverty is too little or the wrong sort of thing. They have no overarching organization, indeed, rarely take an organization as the main vehicle of their aspirations. More loosely tied, they regard one another as allies, wish each others' causes well, usually invest energy in more than one cause, engage in organized activities (sometimes with striking international coordination), and share information-sources of some influence outside the movement, located in the cosmopolis of the internet.

Here are some suggestions for improving global governance by improving this movement. They presuppose the view of U.S. foreign policy that I have sketched while confronting urgent questions that it leaves open.

First, the unifying aspiration of this movement should not be a wish that the American empire end now. "The American empire" is an apt label for the network of domineering influence due to the prerogatives, threat-influence and exercise of destructive power of the United States. Although the reduction of excesses of the American empire is an urgent task of the global social movement, the disappearance of the empire now would be likely as not to inaugurate instability and violence that adds to the burdens of the poor and vulnerable. The world's poor need a stable framework for export-driven growth. The sudden disappearance of the counter-weight to China's rise would pose immediate threats in Taiwan and Southeast Asia while promoting a global hegemony that promises no advantage over the current power structure.

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Inevitably, regardless of what social movements or superpowers do, the world power structure will shift, as a result of processes, technological, economic and political, that are not affected by sound moral advice. If the shift gives rise to a more equal power structure, a new era, ripe for institutional reforms, may begin. The current significance of this future stage is not as a future kitchen for which institutional recipes should now be written, but as the object of an inspiring vision of a global civic and political life based on trust and respect, rather than fear and bullying. Meanwhile, social movements in the interest of humanity work at the margins, hemming in excesses of the American empire and promoting better versions of the inevitable shift in power.

Second, even though the end of the American empire should not be the unifying wish of the global movement, this project of hemming in the excesses of the empire should be promoted as the unifying theme, prominent in each individual cause. This is not because the American empire is uniquely evil, but because it is uniquely broad in scope and range: exercising domineering influence in every region and on every topic of urgent interest to humanity, the United States is preeminent in inhibiting progress as it responds to urgent challenges to its power. Efforts to cope with global climate change are stymied by American fears of concessions to the energy requirements of large developing countries; efforts to reduce international violence confront American use of its military force and the forces of its clients to contain challenges to American wealth and power; protests against inequities of globalization confront bullying in which the United States and its allies seek to exploit bargaining weakness in developing countries; attempts to cope with world poverty are troubled by manipulative uses of foreign aid by the United

States and by its reluctance to facilitate self-reliant escapes from poverty by trade and finance reforms that lessen U.S. power.

Third, while the decisions that ultimately give effect to this movement will, primarily, be decisions of national governments, the power of this movement will be enhanced if the felt affiliations of adherents are international. Among those living in the United States, a global attachment to the global movement is a crucial antidote to loneliness and directs attention to foreign insight as well as foreign suffering. Among people in developing countries, attachment to a global movement would help to keep local elites from using resentment against foreign domination to obscure their independent negligence and predation. In general, global attachment within the movement keeps alive the inspiring vision of global civic friendship without diverting it into the dead end of global institutional reform.

In this movement, the prospects of good work within institutions are not by any means to be dismissed. To be effective, the disorderly pressure of social movements must be recognized as a strong strategic consideration in high circles of imperial foreign-policy-making, an outcome that often depends on the advocacy of insiders. Also, short of global institutional change, new agreements on specific issues and regional institutional developments (for example, the rise and expansion of the European Union, the growing peacekeeping role of the African Union) can both offer relief from current suffering and provide models and first steps for the later stage of productive global institutional reform.

However (my final proposal), there is one way in which the global movement would be more effective if it were more subversive of normal politics than it is now. Normal politics in every developed country, including the politics of outraged protest, is

now patriotic. Still, in the United States (and, very likely, some other countries,) those who take part in the global movement in full awareness of what has been done by their government, what will be done and why will find patriotism a moral burden. They should cast it aside unless the personal cost is intolerable, and encourage others to do so on the basis of this patriotism-undermining knowledge.

By "patriotism," I mean what everyone -- except a few philosophers -- means: not just recognition of special responsibilities to compatriots, but love of country. (I recognize special responsibilities to my classes, but I do not love them.) To love someone or something is to be lovingly engrossed in what is characteristic of the beloved. One is drawn to being preoccupied with the wellbeing of the beloved. One identifies with the beloved's success in life as part of one's own success. Because one opens one's self to the beloved, a self-respecting person has to think --or, in any case, be powerfully drawn to thinking -- that the beloved is (really, if fully appreciated) worthy of love: misdeeds that betray love are departures from the beloved's true nature.

Thus, while an American patriot can certainly count deaths of foreigners as a severe cost and strong dissuasive reason, her patriotism draws her toward preoccupation with American deaths. For example, she is spontaneously drawn to great relief at the very low mortality among U.S. troops in the invasion overthrowing Saddam Hussein (138 in all, 109 in combat) and not to anxious inquiries as to the Iraqi costs (about 10,000 deaths, half civilian.)<sup>25</sup> Patriotic Americans who agree that vast immoral imperial excess has

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<sup>25</sup> See Reuters, "Table of Military Deaths in Iraq," April 7, 2004, [www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L04112132.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L04112132.htm). The civilian figure is based on Iraq Body Count's tabulation of reports in major news sources. The Associated Press Baghdad Bureau reported a "fragmentary" count of 3,240 civilian deaths in the war, based on deaths recorded in 60 of Iraq's 124 hospitals and excluding records that did not distinguish between civilian and military deaths, a precaution that they took to exclude "possibly thousands" of civilian victims. See Niko Price, "AP Tallies 3,240 Civilian Deaths in Iraq," June 11, 2003, [www.rr.com/v5/my/news/story/0,250,900\\_430693,00.html](http://www.rr.com/v5/my/news/story/0,250,900_430693,00.html).

been part of America's presence in the world still believe (or are strongly drawn to believe) that the currently most vivid imperial excesses depart from America's underlying tendencies, hijacking a basically sensible and humane disposition. An American patriot is drawn to using American political institutions, above all, electoral competition, as her basic means of restoring the moral wellbeing of the country she loves. Acknowledging the incapacity of this system to eliminate vast immoral excesses would make it hard to maintain the view that imperial excess departs from the true nature of the United States.

A love that must constantly be nursed along with amnesia, wishful thinking, and inattention to morally urgent interests is not steadfast and deep, but stultifying. In the face of an enduring foreign policy establishment who really are steadfast in pursuit of American power, amnesia, wishful thinking and inattention guarantee that opposition congeals only after great damage is done. If the view of American foreign policy that I have sketched is right, Americans who develop an informed attachment to the global movement should see this attachment, not as a mere supplement to patriotism, but as a replacement for a stultifying patriotism. A fulfilling and informed American patriotism, like global institutional reform, is right for a future stage of global power.