The Fourth Global Institutional Reform Workshop

Introduction

The fourth Global Institutional Reform (GIR) Workshop was convened on the 6th and 7th of June, 2014 at the University of Oxford, hosted by the Department of Politics and International Relations. The workshop was originally envisaged as focusing on what appears to be waning interest in the G20 as a governance forum. The organizing partners were also interested in understanding the media's assessment of global governance institutions. This workshop was pleased to welcome both Philip Stephens and Gideon Rachman from the *Financial Times* to add their perspectives to the discussions*.*

The recent apparent return of geopolitics in the international domain, however, captured much of the workshop's discussions, be it in terms of Russia's actions in Ukraine or Syria, or China's in the South and East China Seas. The immediacy of the apparent geopolitical (re)turn served to add a dimension to the workshop's discussions rather than divert or distract them, providing another significant development within international relations to account for in assessing the current state of global governance and for assessing its likely future trajectory.

Global Governance and Geopolitics

Concerns over the apparent resurgence of strategic rivalry in contrast to multilateral interdependence and collaboration ran throughout the various panel discussions. The general view was that on security matters there was a definite shift towards geopolitical rivalry while on economic and political economy matters multilateralism remains relatively strong. There was much debate on how long this parallel condition could continue. When might the tensions in the security realm impinge upon possible cooperation in the economic realm? Would there be the spillover effects from security to economics? It was pointed out that already the parallel tracks could be interacting with one another: economic sanctions, for instance, had been leveled against Russia in an effort to counter their geopolitical moves.

What is interesting about the apparent return of great power politics is that it has so far not been marked by much violence, as noted by relatively limited violence in the resurgence of strategic competition, be it Russia's annexation of Crimea or China's naval moves in the South and East China Seas. Moreover, recent assertive actions have not been coupled with substantive revision to the current order. This suggests two possibilities: even if there was a return to geopolitics it could be of a fundamentally different character than geopolitical rivalries of the past; or, that geopolitics among today's great powers do not

matter to the extent to which it used to in international governance. Regardless of which is true, it was agreed seemingly that even if Russia and China constitute new types of powers – authoritarian and economic ones, possibly revisionist in intent – they cannot fully escape or avoid the international order constraints of the contemporary international system.

The conceptual framing of either geopolitics *or* global governance was challenged as being inappropriate. As above, the fact that geopolitical moves are being countered with economic sanctions suggests that this is a false division. Moreover, the causes of this apparent return to strategic rivalry also suggest that this is an inappropriate frame. Some suggest that it is the rapid and destabilizing economic and social change - built on the back of successful economic development - that is much to blame for these recent geopolitical problems.

The key overarching question of the workshop was whether or not global governance is possible in this current international context and, if so, what kind of governance it could be? The workshop appeared to maintain a consensus that global governance is possible - but one that is fundamentally different in character from that which has been the experience of the recent past. A new conception of global governance would have to take competing powers and their interests into account- the new order, it would appear, is not one imposed or maintained by a hegemon. We are looking at a more multilateral world of powers. As a result, governance arrangements need to be flexible, involve innovation and networking at all levels of activity, and emphasize pluralism. Furthermore, power shifts in global institutions ought not to be opposed: doing so risks the survival of those institutions. As below, while the ranking members of the institutions may change, the institutions and the values embedded in them may well endure. So far this has been the case, with the neoliberal economic order: Westphalian sovereignty remains as central a value in this international order, as it has in the past. The workshop also examined: whether there was a need to institutionalize and defuse contemporary power conflicts; and whether there was a need for global governance to acknowledge the central role of power.? The narrative of a highly inclusive global governance order may in various circumstances need to be replaced with an order that may more openly acknowledge the central role of power. Finally, the workshop examined whether global governance is most successful when it bolsters the efficacy of states rather than simply trying to supplant national authority with international governance.

Order, Rank, and Values

Four broad dimensions were highlighted as posing challenges to the liberal order: (i)new actors and new types of actors; (ii)new global problems; (iii)geostrategic rivalry at the system level; and (iv)popular pressures at the unit level. This current state of affairs was broadly summarized as being a system with classic Westphalian attributes marked by post-Westphalian risks and challenges. There is not much that is novel, however, to say about this assessment of the current state of affairs. It was proposed that what is too often

under-appreciated is the degree to which it is the *speed* of change – rather than just change itself – that is destabilizing to the international order. The rate of change may be too fast for policy makers to easily manage. It may even be too fast for markets to adapt. China was often pointed to on this point.- its naval actions, resource challenges, or environmental problems. China's current development is effectively compressing into ten years in the twenty first century what it took the US seventy years to achieve in the nineteenth century.

While there was no agreement on whether or not the Western liberal order can be said to be in secular decline, participants broadly agreed that at the very least international order is characterized by fragmentation and challenges to its assumptions. The US, it was argued, retains structural power as the system's hegemon, though it may be less willing to exercise its power. The Washington Consensus may have dissipated and its institutions weakened, yet no viable alternatives have been proposed. Moreover, it was noted that China has played a role as a responsible stakeholder within the economic system and has significant interests in preserving much of the present system. While China is likely to push for greater authority, they are likely to do so within the broadly liberal framework rather than in trying to disrupt or abandon the system. It was suggested that its recent track record showed China picking and choosing which institutions to join. Taken together, what this suggests is that the international order may be tilting towards a period of greater disorder. What is noteworthy, however, is that this is disorder remains *within* the liberal order rather than leaning toward disorder.

The workshop broadly agreed that while a strong China did not necessarily constitute a threat to global governance in and of itself, a poorly managed relationship with the US could have very negative consequences. The China-US relationship was characterized as being the most important relationship in the international order today and its management over the near-term was critical for ensuring stability over the next ten years. The workshop suggested that while much of the narrative characterizing the relationship tends to focus on their dissimilarities, the biggest problem at the moment is actually that the two are becoming increasingly similar. In terms of geopolitical strategy, these two powers are increasingly contesting the same space at least for regional dominance (East Asia) and doing so by mirroring one another. Moreover, they now both have broadly activist foreign policies and both are claiming exceptionalism in international affairs (albeit with competing brands of exceptionalism). Again, the two most pointedly assert their individual brand of "exceptionalism" in East Asia.

In terms of domestic politics, both face considerable internal challenges, the significant consequence of which is that neither may be willing, or able, to invest in resolving their international competition, even in positive-sum areas. While the past twenty years involved a good symbiosis between the two powers, this is less the case in the post-2008 context as they begin to compete for the same geopolitical position in the same way in East Asia.

The workshop observed that neither the rising powers nor the established (and possibly falling) powers seem to be interested in global governance. What is significant about this is that it is not just the 'new' major powers that are challenging (or, more accurately, are unwilling to engage in) global governance, but that even the traditional proponents of the order seem to have lost faith in it. The West is not investing in its own institutions to the same degree that it used to, nor to the degree possibly that it needs to in order to ensure their survival. Whereas it used to be the case that institutions were only bypassed in exceptional cases this is increasingly less so as energies are increasingly directed towards other multilateral arrangements with a homogenous membership composition (such as the EU) rather than universal institutions (such as the UN). As such, it is not just the rising powers that are increasingly engaging in an "archipelago" of institutions, but the established powers are as well. The workshop noted that this does not necessarily mean the demise of global governance or of the liberal order; this may be an interim step towards reenergizing the institutions. In all, what is significant is that the liberal order is possibly 'hemorrhaging' not just as a result of external threats but also because those charged with the responsibility for its maintenance have –to a degree – abandoned their caretaker roles.

Trajectories of Governance

Noting the resistance to reform of treaty-based institutions, the workshop repeatedly emphasized the proliferation of work-around and informal arrangements: be they (i)mini-lateral and coalition groups, (ii)regional and topical organizations and networks, or (iii)sub-national networks. This was not identified as a necessarily negative development; rather, it was characterized as a more heterogeneous global governance order with greater flexibility.

As concerns mini-lateral and coalition groups, the workshop focused its discussions on Gx summitry's trackrecord of success. Some participants characterized the G7/8 and G20 as being little more than talk-shops while others countered this characterization by pointing to the G8's efforts to advance the Millennium Development Goals (particularly MDGs 4 and 5) and as well the G20's Leaders Summit's ability to halt the global recession – to prevent a new great depression. As concerns the future of Gx summitry, the workshop noted that the G20 agenda had grown at times to be cumbersome.   While incremental policy continues to emerge from the standard setting institutions the tasked formal economic institutions and from ministers and the G20 working groups, the G20s success remains question mark.

The BRICS were the coalition most thoroughly discussed by the workshop. Discussions of the BRICS tended towards a more pessimistic assessment of the group. In assessing the BRICS' track record the workshop failed to find any issues in which the group had yet achieved any real progress. The BRICS bank was raised as the one idea that appeared to have promise, but had yet failed to go far. The BRICS members have competing visions for what the bank is to be, with South Africa envisaging it as a development bank for Africa while China and

India envisage it has having a broader mandate. The failure of the bank to – at least so far – get off the ground is indicative of the weakness of the group: its members have competing interests. On the economic front, they share a common identity as large emerging economies, which bring them together as a group, but by this very fact they are necessarily *competing* economies. It makes concessions to each other difficult. It is the same with political issues. Most notably, Russia and China are opposed to Brazil, India, or South Africa achieving the status of a permanent veto-holding member of the UN Security Council. The economic and political cooperation amongst the group thus makes it very difficult for the BRICS to maintain a united front on the big global governance issues, which makes it problematic for the BRICS to act as a bargaining coalition.

The workshop also observed that there was no guarantee of governments consistently being interested in participating in such coalitions, noting that the current Brazilian government seems to have little interest in both the BRICS and IBSA. It was also observed that the BRICSs have ideationally divided themselves from the larger coalitions of developing countries.

Regional and topical organizations and networks were likewise discussed in a fairly pessimistic light. While such groupings were generally held as good models for how to disaggregate large global governance challenges into manageable bits, the diversity of mandates and activities, significant gaps between commitments and capacities, and collective action problems were cited as significant problems challenging the success of these types of governance groups.

Sub-national networks were discussed throughout the workshop with the topic of "glocality" repeatedly arising. Networks of cities formed to address global challenges – most notably climate change – were identified as significant new forms of governance arrangements, but it remains unclear how such groupings will have their policy commitments implemented. On the whole, sub-national networks were characterized as being useful networks within a broader governance architecture rather than as being viable alternatives to treaty-based institutions, noting that cities are unable to play big roles in macroeconomic policy nor that state governments are prepared to accept challenges to their sovereign authority from these sub-national governments. Moreover, despite the proliferation of sub-national commitments to governance challenges (an estimated 14,000 pledges made since 1990), it was pointed out that a third of these initiatives were actually orchestrated by state and International Organizations (IOs). As such, not only are sub-national actors unable to act in certain policy domains. Even in those policy areas where they can act, the traditional governance actors appear to play the core convening role.

Issues of Governance

The workshop discussed a number of global governance topics including: migration, climate change, and humanitarian intervention. On migration, the workshop remarked that while there are 230 million migrants and 2 million

people now crossing borders annually, there is no coherent global migration regime. For refugees, there is a regime. However this regime is imperfect and incomplete. For instance environmental refugees are mostly unprotected by existing conventions. Similarly, for unskilled labor there is no robust regime; for skilled labor such labor is at best addressed bilaterally. In this regime it is migrant-receiving states that are superiorly positioned to favorably shape migration agreements. The other noteworthy dimension of the workshop's migration discussion was the view expressed that the implicit bargain between the global North and South over the protection of migrants has begun to break down. Whereas previously it was the case that protection space was available in the South with the North providing financial support, this is increasingly less the case. The North increasingly is unable and/or perhaps unwilling to pay for migrant protection and as a result the South is increasingly unwilling to extend protection space.

The environment and climate change was discussed in a number of dimensions by the workshop. China's environmental problems were pointed to as a significant threat to its order (and, consequently, to global order). It was noted that pollutions levels are threatening population health and that climate change poses significant famine risks in China, both of which are risks to the current regime's stability. The workshop suggested that the relevant question is not whether or not China would move to address these issues but rather: (i)when and how they will; and (ii)how global institutions can help to shape their response.

The second major climate change discussion targeted the lack of international consensus on how to respond to climate change. The Kyoto Accord appeared to be an ambitious protocol but failed ultimately because the Treaty outpaced what the domestic constituents of the US and others found that many of the key commitments were too significant for these interests to accept. With the collapse of Kyoto and the reticence the US to act, the workshop suggested there is now no leader positioned to put a new climate change regime in place. In fact participants questioned whether a top-down model could be reconstructed. While opinion was divided on this question, the workshop did point to networks of cities as having become the *de facto* leaders on implementing climate change policies in the absence of any actionable consensus at the international level. These participants suggested the possibility of a bottom-up approach to global climate change policy. The major caveat attached to this observation was, however, that there is no proven track record of success for such approaches to quintessentially global challenges.

Humanitarian protection and intervention was discussed in the context of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The workshop noted that there is at least a consensus on intervention – responsibility, it seems rests with the UN Security Council and the appropriateness of action is to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Inconsistency, it must be noted, is built into the fabric of the agreement, however, including when it comes to evaluating its efficacy as a governance norm. Given this, the workshop focused its discussions on the malleability of the norm, which renders it susceptible to being used by different states at different

times for different purposes. First, different key actors are interpreting the norm in different ways. China, notably, views the pillars of R2P sequentially wherein options in pillar one must be exhausted before moving to pillar two, which is distinct from how other states conceive of the relationship between pillars. Russia actually holds a very broad interpretation of the R2P, radically different from such a narrow focus. From this perspective the consensus is to be built around the four very specific crimes. In this respect Russia's position on R2P was called out as being hypocritical. African countries were noted as claiming R2P as an African concept. As a result these African countries accuse the West as having kidnapped the idea and steering it in a different trajectory than they had conceived of R2P. Meanwhile, India, it was argued, holds a very critical attitude towards R2P. It would appear that India is particularly concerned with R2P's implications for sovereignty while Brazil appears to be less concerned with sovereignty and more concerned with accountability.

The workshop took up the issue of the relationship of R2P to the actions in Syria – some suggested that Syria is a bad case for assessing R2P. It is a difficult case in part because of the interest of great powers in Syria, the existential threat to the regime, and degree to which regional actors are acting irresponsibly (most notably with the provision of weapons). Further Syria is a difficult case for the implementation of R2P because its success - and that of any norm – cannot be evaluated based on whether or not it is applied in every instance. Moreover, the UN Secretary General and others agreed that the use of force in Syria would do more harm than good, thus rendering the R2P inapplicable in this case. UN Security Council's credibility, some suggested, has already been eroded by this case, given that its resolution on Syrian humanitarian issues warned of repercussions, which have not been enforced.

The workshop appeared to suggest that the immediate future of R2P may involve a shift away from an assertive, liberal version of the norm - involving a broad set of human rights violations wherein the international community imposes order. Instead R2P might harken back towards what is actually an older liberal vision where states work together to support one another, building one another's capacities to prevent atrocities. This is congruent with one of the workshop's overall senses that global governance works seems to work best when its aims target strengthening state capacity as opposed to supplanting national capacity.

What Might Academia do?

A challenge was leveled early in the discussions to think beyond what the state of global governance is, but instead to reflect on what contributions academia can make to improving it. Such a view acknowledges the critical role – indeed, duty – of scholarship to contribute more than just passive observance. A few specific problems were identified as being particularly appropriate for study.

But cooperation for what? There was view that global governance practice and theory had drifted towards a maximalist conception. In other words governance

was necessarily *global* and that the remit of governance institutions was near-boundless. Against this, some in the workshop were concerned with identifying the limited, focused areas/topics that governance institutions should focus on: the "sweet spots" for global governance. With low levels of trust in – and alienation from – governments in many parts of the world, it was felt that the maximalist conception of governance only exacerbated trust problems. The need to garner and maintain public support for governments was seen as especially crucial for governance institutions as without it government leaders are unwilling and unable to engage in governance processes. Some in the workshop suggested that the instances in which global governance has been viewed as a success has been those instances where it has not taken power away from governments but has sought to bolster the power and efficacy of governments to solve problems. From this perspective academia might well identify what a supportive, minimalist governance agenda might well look like.

Directly related to this was a call for academics to identify what makes governance institutions effective. Along these lines, discussion centered on questions of leadership - to what extent does global governance institutions matter, under what conditions, and to what end. It was argued that policy makers need to decide how to make their organizations more effective, both in terms of finding ways to be better at what they are already doing and in terms of figuring out exactly what they do best so that they can better focus on those things. It is then possible that the identification of what a minimalist governance agenda would look like is grounded in a concern to identify institutional efficacy.

Cui bono? Repeatedly the workshop called for academics to focus on identifying the beneficiaries of global governance. Such a focus ought not only look at the results of governance policies and programs but also the agenda setting process, tracing out who is influencing governance processes and for what purposes. It was felt that there was a particular need for academics to keep their gaze on governance processes when the media's eyes have turned away, to track what interests are shaping governance agendas.

These tasks for academia were also framed with respect to the shifting geopolitical landscape, particularly as concerns over the US-China relationship. Some in the workshop suggested that international governance is in a period of transition in which positions and identities are in flux. This period is a potentially dangerous - ripe some suggested for miscalculation and misperception. A possible contribution for academia in this period is to contribute to our understanding of the politics of the international order and to suggest how to mitigate these risks and while doing so help to shape a stable and just order before positions and identities solidify at the end of this transition period – whenever that is.

In this vein, discussions of values and justice were notably absent from the majority of the workshop's discussions. As the global order shifts and as in this transition period questions of values and justice are marginalized, the role of academics in bringing questions of justice and ethics to the fore was emphasized, particularly with respect to climate change and migration. A notable observation

was that the liberal order was/is fundamentally about justice though the earlier imperial or colonial order was not. There is a gap in perception wherein more established states are concerned that notions of justice may be marginalized; while emerging and developing states are still concerned with overcoming what they perceive to be an unjust order. Scholarship, it was hoped, could contribute to spanning this evident gap.

Finally, there was also a call for renewed scholarly interest in geography as a means of understanding time and space in international relations. It was proposed that globalization's advances and challenges – be they technological leaps or climate change's threats – render existing conceptual frames for understanding time and space inappropriate. Academics, it was proposed, should devote efforts to conceptualizing time and space that accounts for the effective abolition of lag and distance.