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## The Decline of the States System?

It is often argued today that the states system is in decline, that it is giving place, or will give place, to some fundamentally different form of universal political organisation. What evidence is there that between now and the end of the century the states system is likely to be replaced by one or another of the alternatives discussed in the last chapter?

### **A System But Not a Society**

It is not difficult to imagine that the states system, while continuing to be an international system, might cease to be an international society. It has already been argued that while there is an element of society in the contemporary states system, it enjoys only a precarious foothold (see Chapter 2). Since the outbreak of the First World War, despite the illusion of the strengthening of international society created by the growth of the scope of international law and the multiplication of international organisations, it is likely that there has been a decline in the consensus about common interests and values within the states system. The ideological divisions following upon the Bolshevik Revolution, the revolt of non-European peoples and states against Western dominance, and the expansion of the states system beyond its originally European or Western confines, have produced an international system in which the area of consensus has shrunk by comparison with what it was in 1914. It may readily be imagined that in the next few decades such

stresses will be placed on this remaining area of consensus that it will decline drastically or even disappear altogether.

It is hardly necessary to enumerate the sources of a possible collapse and disappearance of international society. The ideological tensions between communist and anti-communist states that dominated the 1950s and 1960s have lessened, but are still substantial. The tensions between rich, industrialised states and poor agricultural states show no sign of abating, and may have yet to reach their apogee. Conflicts of interest now arising over the heightened perception of resource scarcity provide a new source of tension. It has also to be recognised that the degree of strain on common rules and institutions that emerges in the late twentieth century may be determined in large measure by factors that are 'accidental' in the sense that they are the consequence simply of breakdowns in the diplomatic management of a particular conflict; a single, large-scale nuclear war, even if it were confined to the two belligerents as regards actual employment of nuclear weapons, might suddenly transform the world political scene and bring about a rapid and general disintegration of respect for the rules and institutions of international society. Indeed, the international history of this century so far may be regarded as a prolonged attempt to cope with the drastic decline of the element of society in international relations brought about by the single, catastrophic 'accident' of the First World War.

However, while we must recognise that the disappearance of international society is 'on the cards', we may also take note of some factors making for its endurance. Given the stresses to which international society has been subjected in this century, what is most remarkable is perhaps that it has survived at all. While the area of consensus among the 140 or so states that now exist, radically divergent in ideology, culture or civilisation, wealth and power, is much less than that which prevailed among the small number of states that existed in 1914 – relatively homogeneous in ideology and predominantly European – a framework of rules and institutions has survived within which the great schisms of this century have been contained.

Thus the system of international law that derives principally from European experience has been challenged by non-European states, especially the new states of Asia and Africa, as having been built upon the special interests of European powers, and designed to serve

as an instrument of their domination. But while changes have been sought, and in some measure achieved, in relation to establishing the illegitimacy of colonial sovereignty, asserting the right of new states to sovereignty over their natural resources, the desirability of transferring wealth from rich to poor states, the limits within which new states succeed to the obligations of their predecessors, all this has taken place against the background of acceptance by the new states of the basic structure and tenets of the system.<sup>1</sup>

The mechanism of diplomatic relations among states has been shaken by the ideological struggle of communist and anti-communist states, leading during the Cold War period to the virtual disappearance of consular representation between the two blocs, and to a reduction of diplomatic representation. But even at the height of this struggle, some diplomatic relations between states in the two blocs persisted, and diplomatic forms and procedures were observed. Likewise the sudden ingress into the diplomatic society of states of the non-European members of it who are now its majority, while it has had its impact on the prevailing style and method of diplomacy, is remarkable less for this than for the evidence it provides of the willingness of the new states to conform to an established institution of the society of states.

There is no general consensus in international society, at least in explicit terms, as to the need for a balance of power or how it should be maintained, but one can say that there does exist a general balance of power, whose basis is the Soviet-American relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence, and that this balance is not wholly fortuitous but is brought about partly by Soviet and American contrivance, in which a Soviet-American sense of common interests plays some part.

The United Nations, like the League of Nations before it, has failed to provide an alternative path to world order by way of the solidarity of states in enforcing collective security. But it has succeeded in surviving as a single, universal international organisation, and thus as a symbol of a sense of common interests and values that underlies the discord of the present international system. The contraction and disappearance of the element of international society in international relations is a future development which we must regard as entirely possible and as a natural projection of some present trends, but we have no reason to assume that it is bound to occur.

## **States But Not a System**

A second conceivable alternative mentioned in the last chapter was that states might continue to exist but cease to form a global system of states, because they had become completely isolated from one another, or because, although there was contact among them, there was insufficient interaction to cause them to behave as a set of parts. Such a state of affairs would represent a return to the situation that existed before the nineteenth century when, while there were states, and indeed systems of states, and regional political conglomerations of other kinds, in various parts of the world, there was no single, global states system of which all were part.

The disappearance of the element of a system from the present pattern of universal politics could come about only as the consequence of the collapse of our present scientific, industrial and technological civilisation. Clearly, the progress of industry and technology in the last two centuries has brought with it an increase in the amount of economic, social and strategic interaction among the various parts of the globe. It is not inconceivable that these trends will be reversed: energy scarcity, the pursuit of resource self-sufficiency, the questioning of economic development as a goal of policy, the rising influence of anti-scientific philosophies, all are trends making in this direction. Such trends, however, are scarcely of the order that might cause states to cease to form a system and constitute the congeries of isolated communities of Rousseau's imagining.

It is of course possible to see a trend in contemporary world politics towards greater regionalism, both in the organisation of peace and security, and in the management of international economic affairs. It is not inconceivable that the preference for global over regional international organisations that was displayed by the victorious powers towards the close of the Second World War, when they rejected the regionalist schemes favoured by Churchill and others in favour of the United Nations and its specialised agencies, might come to be reversed. It is possible that *Peace in Parts* (to quote the title of a recent book) might come to dominate thinking about the role of international organisations in matters of peace and security; that trade, money and development assistance affairs might also be handled chiefly by regional rather than global bodies; and that the United Nations and other global

bodies might go into decline or even disappear altogether.<sup>2</sup> One vision of the near future that embodies this possibility is that of the division of the world into spheres of great power responsibility: the United States, the complex of West European states, the Soviet Union, China and Japan would each be responsible for managing the affairs of a particular region of the world, with only a loose form of co-operation among them.

This and other visions of a more regionalised world system, however, fall a long way short of a state of affairs in which there is no global states system. The essential feature of this system is not the existence of global international organisations but global interaction between states. The latter seems likely to persist whether the former do or not; no vision of the future is realistic which does not take account of the existence of social, economic, diplomatic and strategic interaction on a global scale. Catastrophic changes induced by global nuclear war that reduced all life to a low economic and technological level, the exhaustion of sources of energy and a consequent breakdown in global transport and communication, or a revolution in human values that brought about a universal return to a simpler and more localised style of life, represent the sort of conditions which alone could bring about a return to a pattern of states that does not form a states system.

### **World Government**

There is not the slightest evidence that sovereign states in this century will agree to subordinate themselves to a world government founded upon consent. The idea of a world government brought about by social contract among states has always rested on the argument that the need for it will create the conditions that make it possible; that what must be, if order is to be brought about in world politics, will be. However, the fact of modern international politics has always been that states do not recognise any such need. Governments that are not capable of agreeing with each other, even to the extent of accepting one another's right to exist and desisting from the use or threat of force in resolving their disputes, can scarcely be thought capable of agreeing to entrust their security and other vital interests to a world authority. If this has been true in the past, how much more so is it true of the present and the

foreseeable future, when the area of consensus among the chief groups of states is evidently small in comparison with some past periods, and many states are revelling in the independence they have won from colonial authorities? The idea that world government may come about as the result of some catastrophe such as a global nuclear war or a world economic or ecological breakdown – Kant's idea that states will be led by adversity to the course that they would have adopted in the first place, had they been willing to act rationally – presumes that in such a post-catastrophic situation international behaviour will be more 'rational', but we have no means of knowing whether it would be more so or less.

The idea of world government by contract involves a dilemma. The case for world government, as it is made out by Kant and others, begins with the proposition that sovereign states are in a Hobbesian state of nature, from which they need to escape by subordinating themselves to a common government. But if states are indeed in a Hobbesian state of nature, the contract by means of which they are to emerge from it cannot take place. For if covenants without the sword are but words, this will be true of covenants directed towards the establishment of universal government, just as it will hold true of agreements on other subjects. The difficulty with the Kantian prescription is that the description it contains of the actual condition of international relations, and the prescription it provides for its improvement, are inconsistent with one another. Action within the context of continuing international anarchy is held to be of no avail; but at the same time it is in the international anarchy that the grand solution of the international social contract is held to take place. The advocate of world government can show his scheme to be feasible as well as desirable only by admitting that international relations do not resemble a Hobbesian state of nature; that in it covenants without the sword are more than words, and the materials may be found with which to bring about collaboration between sovereign governments. But to make this admission is to weaken the case for bringing the international state of nature to an end.

World government by conquest has in the past seemed a much more likely possibility than world government by agreement. It was, after all, by conquest – as the outcome of a 'knock-out tournament solution' – that particular princes first made themselves supreme in the oldest of modern nation-states. It was conquest that led to the

establishment of previous universal empires. The modern states system has several times come close to being transformed by conquest into a universal empire with a single supreme government.

In the late twentieth century, however, the prospects that world government will be established by conquest appear slight. Three factors militate against it. The first is the nuclear stalemate, which greatly augments the stability of the central or Soviet-American balance, and is coming to affect other great power balances in the same way. Any power with a secure nuclear retaliatory force has a trump card with which to deter attempts to overthrow it, no matter what the state of the military balance in relation to its adversaries may be, when measured by other indices. The second is the growth in the 1970s of a complex or multilateral balance of power, which also increases the stability of the general balance of power; given the military self-sufficiency which the United States, the Soviet Union, China and perhaps Japan and a combination of Western European states may have later in the century, it does not seem likely that any one great power will be able to achieve a position so preponderant as to make the others acquiesce in the establishment of an imperial system. The third factor is the political activation of the peoples of the world, especially, although not exclusively, as it is expressed in nationalism. Opposition to the ascendancy of a single nation or race can so readily be mobilised that it is difficult to conceive that an imperial or hierarchical system could be established, or if established, could be other than short-lived, as was Hitler's New Order in Europe. Ours is an age of the disintegration of empires, and the prospects for universal monarchy have never seemed more bleak.

### **A New Mediaevalism**

Is there any evidence that the states system may be giving place to a secular reincarnation of the system of overlapping or segmented authority that characterised mediaeval Christendom?

It is obvious that sovereign states are not the only important actors or agents in world politics. The mere existence in world politics of actors other than the state, however, does not provide any indication of a trend towards a new mediaevalism. The crucial question is whether the inroads being made by these 'other

associations' (to use the mediaevalists' expression) on the sovereignty or supremacy of the state over its territory and citizens is such as to make that supremacy unreal, and to deprive the concept of sovereignty of its utility and viability. There are five features of contemporary world politics which provide *prima facie* evidence of such a trend.

(i) *The Regional Integration of States*

The first is the tendency of some states to seek to integrate themselves in larger units. The member states of the European Economic Community have not ceased to claim or to possess territorial sovereignty, but they have gone some distance in a process of integration which is seen, at least by some, as leading eventually to the loss of their sovereignty. No other regional association can match the record of the E.E.C. in measures of economic integration actually accomplished, but associations such as Comecon, the Organisation of African Unity, the Organisation of American States, the Central American Common Market and the Association of South East Asian Nations have been affected by its example.

The rhetoric of the 'European' movement has always included the claim that European integration would have novel and beneficial effects on international order, both because it would lead to a 'security-community' or zone of peace within Europe itself, and because it would demonstrate to the world at large the ability of a group of states voluntarily to submerge their sovereignty.<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty in this view is that if the process of integration of European states were to lead to the creation of a single European state (and if similar processes, sparked off by this example, were to have the same result in other regions), the upshot would be to reduce the number of sovereign states but to leave the institution of the sovereign state precisely where it was before.

It may be argued that a European state that arose in this way, while it would still be a sovereign state, would at least not be a nation-state, and that being free of the nationalist drives and ambitions that have brought nation-states into conflict with each other in the past, it could be expected at least to be more restrained and law-abiding than the states which had surrendered their sovereignty to it; it would be a sovereign state whose tendency to



engage in 'power politics' (in the sense of the pursuit of power as an end and not merely as a means) had been emasculated.

Such a view ignores the fact that the movement for European integration reflects not only the ambition of some Europeans to 'transcend power politics', but also the ambition of others to create a unit that, in a world dominated by states of continental dimensions such as the United States, the Soviet Union and China, Europeans can engage in 'power politics' more effectively. It neglects the connection to which European federalists rightly draw attention, between the development of a European federal state, and the development, as a prior condition of it, of a sense of European personality or identity asserted in relation to other peoples, a 'new fatherland' which Frenchmen, Germans and others can discover as their own nation becomes a less exclusive focus of their loyalties. At a deeper level, the view that a state which is not a nation-state can be expected to abstain from 'power politics' overlooks the fact that the period of nation-states is itself only a particular historical phase of the states system, and that the place that can be occupied by 'power-politics' in the relations of states that are not nation-states is amply illustrated by the history of the states system in its dynastic or absolutist phase.

If we are looking for evidence that European integration is bringing a qualitative change in the states system, it is more profitable to look not to the imagined end-product of this process, a European super-state which is simply a nation-state writ large, but at the process in an intermediate stage. It is possible that the process of integration might arrive at the stage where, while one could not speak of a European state, there was real doubt both in theory and in reality as to whether sovereignty lay with the national governments or with the organs of the 'community'. A crucial test might be the question whether national governments within the 'community' had the right, and, in terms of the force and the human loyalties at their command, the capacity, to secede. From a situation of protracted uncertainty about the locus of sovereignty, it might be a small step to the situation of a 'new mediaevalism', in which the concept of sovereignty is recognised to be irrelevant. But such a state of affairs, if it existed in Europe, would not mean that the global states system had been eclipsed, only that in this particular area (as, in the early centuries of the states system, in

Germany), there was a hybrid entity which did not conform to the prevailing norms.

(ii) *The Disintegration of States*

Alongside the efforts of some states to integrate in regional units, we may set another tendency, which in the 1960s and 1970s has been more impressive, the tendency of existing states to show signs of disintegration. It is not merely that 'new' states, whose governments are engaged in promoting a sense of national identity and cohesion where previously this has not existed or has existed only in a precarious form, have been shaken and in one case (Pakistan) broken by secessionist movements; disintegrative tendencies have also marked the recent history of an older 'new' state, Yugoslavia, and of such long-established nation-states as Britain, France, Spain, Belgium and Canada.

It is possible to imagine that out of the demands of the Welsh, the Basques, the Quebecois, the Flemish and others, there may arise qualitative changes in the states system. It is true that within the ranks of these dissident groups there are some who hope only for local autonomy and do not wish to challenge the sovereignty of the state in which they find themselves. Moreover, there are others who wish to bring about the break-up of the state which they believe oppresses them, but only in order to set up another sovereign state of their own. If the upshot of these disintegrative tendencies were simply that Nagaland, Biafra, Eritrea, Wales, Quebec and Croatia were to take their places as sovereign states (as Bangladesh has done), then the number of sovereign states in the world would have increased, but the institution of the sovereign state would be no more affected than by the creation of a United States of Europe.

As in the case of the integration of states, the disintegration of states would be theoretically important only if it were to remain transfixed in an intermediate state. If these new units were to advance far enough towards sovereign statehood both in terms of accepted doctrine and in terms of their command of force and human loyalties, to cast doubt upon the sovereignty of existing states, and yet at the same time were to stop short of claiming that same sovereignty for themselves, the situation might arise in which the institution of sovereignty itself might go into decline.

We cannot ignore this possibility, any more than we can dismiss the possibility that sovereignty will be undermined by regional supranational institutions. The political realist who dismisses such possibilities impatiently is too facile. One reason why European integrationists and such groups as the Quebecois and the Basques (let us call them 'disintegrationists') are drawn towards solutions which would result simply in the creation of new sovereign states is the tyranny of existing concepts and practices. The momentum of the states system sets up a circle (vicious or virtuous according to the point of view) within which movements for the creation of new political communities tend to be confined. Perhaps the time is ripe for the enunciation of new concepts of universal political organisation which would show how Wales, the United Kingdom and the European Community could each have some world political status while none laid claim to exclusive sovereignty. But, meanwhile, secessionist movements, like those that have given rise to the break-up of European empires, only confirm the institution of the sovereign state and do not bring it into question.

### (iii) *The Restoration of Private International Violence*

Another development which may be interpreted as a sign of the decline of the states system and its transformation into a secular reincarnation of the mediaeval order is the resort to violence on an international scale by groups other than the state, and the assertion by them of a right to commit such violence.

We have already noted that one of the basic features of the modern states system has been that in it sovereign states have sought to monopolise the right to use force in international politics (see Chapter 8). In the modern states system, by contrast with the experience of mediaeval Christendom, it has been held that legitimate violence can be committed only by a public authority, and that the only public authority entitled to use it is a sovereign state.

The state's monopoly of legitimate international violence, it could be argued, has been infringed by international organisations such as the United Nations, for example during the Korean War and the Congo crisis, which has claimed the right to exercise force on an international scale; but in these cases the international organisation concerned can be regarded simply as the agent of a group of states

co-operating in the exercise of their established right to resort to force. A more important infringement of the state's traditional monopoly is the practice of resort to violence by political groups which are not sovereign states, and which are only doubtfully public authorities at all, yet which – like the Palestinian guerrillas based in Arab countries – attack the territory of a foreign state, and its personnel and property in third countries, or seize the citizens of third countries as hostages; or which – like the Tupamaros in Uruguay and comparable revolutionary organisations in many countries – use violence not only against the government they are seeking to overthrow, but kidnap the diplomats or private citizens of third countries in order to bring pressure to bear on the government with which they are in conflict.

What is more impressive than the fact that international violence is resorted to by these non-state groups is the fact that their claim of the right to do so is accepted as legitimate by a substantial proportion of international society. The society of states has not been able to muster, against this challenge to its monopoly of legitimate violence by groups that are politically motivated, the kind of solidarity it has displayed against the privately motivated international violence of classical piracy. Attempts to curb the hijacking of aircraft and the kidnapping of diplomats by international action have foundered on this lack of solidarity. In 1972 the United Nations General Assembly was not able to endorse a U.S.-sponsored convention against 'international terrorism'.<sup>4</sup> Most Socialist and Third World states, so far from seeking to condemn resort to international violence by non-state groups, have sought to extend to them the protection of the laws of war, at all events in cases where these groups are engaged in armed struggle for self-determination, against colonial rule, alien occupation or 'racist' governments.<sup>5</sup>

If these trends were to be taken further, it would be possible to see in the growth of private international violence evidence that the state is losing its monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, and that a restoration is taking place of the mediaeval situation in which violence can legitimately be exercised by public authorities of many kinds if not also by private persons. However, private international violence of this kind is not new or unprecedented; all that is clearly new is the global scale on which it takes place. The violence of anti-governmental groups has often spilled across frontiers. The seizure

of foreign aircraft and their passengers by revolutionary organisations had its precedents in the seizure of ships by such groups; in 1877, for example, the iron-clad *Huascar* was seized by Peruvian insurgents, who put to sea and stopped two British ships, from which they abducted Peruvian officials. The kidnapping by rebel groups of citizens of a third country has an important precedent in the kidnapping of two American citizens in Tangier in 1904 by the Moroccan brigand El Raisuli, who was able to bring pressure to bear on his local enemy, the Sultan of Morocco, by having the United States and other governments bring pressure to bear on him.<sup>6</sup> The idea that only states are entitled to use force in world politics has been the prevailing legal doctrine, but it has never been an exact reflection of reality.

We have also to take into account that the non-state groups which at present assert the right to engage in international violence appear in every case to aim to establish new states, or to gain control of existing ones – and that the sympathy that exists for them, within a large section of the society of states, is sympathy for these aims, not any desire to undermine the privileged position of states in relation to other groups within the world political system.

#### (iv) *Transnational Organisations*

The non-governmental group engaging in violence across boundaries in pursuit of its aims may be seen as a special case of a larger phenomenon threatening the survival of the states system: the transnational organisation. This is the organisation which operates across international boundaries, sometimes on a global scale, which seeks as far as possible to disregard these boundaries, and which serves to establish links between different national societies, or sections of these societies. It includes multinational corporations such as General Motors or Unilever; political movements such as the Communist Party or the Tricontinental Solidarity Organisation; international non-governmental associations, such as scientific or professional bodies; religious associations such as the Roman Catholic Church; and inter-governmental agencies that operate across frontiers, such as the World Bank.<sup>7</sup>

It is helpful to take account of Huntingdon's distinction between the control of these organisations, the national composition of the personnel operating them, and the geographical scope of their

operations. Thus, as he says, most of the largest multinational corporations are under national control (they mainly have headquarters in the United States with American top management); they are multinational in their staff; and they are transnational in their scope of operations – that is, they carry on ‘significant centrally-directed operations in the territory of two or more states’.<sup>8</sup> On Huntingdon’s definition, organisations are transnational if the scope of their operations is transnational. Thus the U.S. Air Force, which is national in control and in personnel, qualifies as a transnational organisation, as does the World Bank, which is international in control and multinational in personnel.

It is often argued that these transnational organisations, or some of them, because they bypass the states system and contribute directly to the knitting together of the global society or the global economy, are bringing about the states system’s demise. It is said, more particularly of the role of multinational corporations, that their proliferation, their increasing size and their increasing share of the world’s gross product represents the inevitable triumph of ‘geocentric technology’ over ‘ethnocentric politics’.

The multinational corporation is not a new phenomenon in world politics, and no present-day corporation has yet had an impact comparable with that of the English East India Company, which employed its own armed forces and controlled territory. Multinational corporations have impressed themselves on the world recently because of the huge scale of their operations (they frequently have more capital than the state on whose territory they operate), the global nature of their enterprise, which seeks to ignore boundaries, and their ability within limits to evade control by sovereign states. Their growth in the 1950s and 1960s has led to claims by George Ball and others that they are a great, new constructive force in world politics, symbols of the geocentric technology that will and should prevail over ethnocentric politics, but also to denunciation of them by nationalists (especially by Latin Americans and Canadians, but also by J.-J. Servan-Schreiber in *Le Défi Américain*) who see them as instruments of American imperialism, or in some cases as instruments of a wider imperialism of the advanced capitalist countries.<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear, however, that transnational organisations are undermining the states system. In the first place, sovereign states have displayed a considerable ability to stand up to multinational

corporations: to deny them access altogether for their operations (as, until recently, all communist countries have virtually excluded multinational corporations); or to impose restrictions on their activities (as is increasingly the tendency both in Third World countries and in advanced capitalist countries such as Australia, Canada and the countries of Western Europe). Suggestions that the sovereign states of Western Europe and the Third World are impotent in face of the demands or the attractions of multinational corporations are the product of the first decade of the inroads made by these organisations. As awareness of the economic impact of the multinational corporation has grown, and international debate about it has proceeded, a reaction has set in that is demonstrating the capacity of sovereign states, able as they are in most cases to command the predominant loyalties of their citizens, to lay down their own terms as to whether or not or on what basis multinational corporations will be given access to national territory. As Robert Gilpin has pointed out, in a conflict between 'geocentric' or any other technology, and 'ethnocentric' or any other politics, there is no reason to assume that it is politics that has to give way.<sup>10</sup>

In the second place, in cases where transnational organisations do achieve access to national territory, it is not clear that this necessarily results in a diminution of the power or a setback to the objectives of the state concerned. Huntingdon argues that predictions of the demise of the nation-state are

based on a zero-sum assumption about power and sovereignty: that a growth in the power of transnational organisations must be accompanied by a decrease in the power of nation-states. This, however, need not be the case . . . an increase in the number, functions and scope of transnational organisations will increase the demand for access to national territories and hence also increase the value of the one resource almost exclusively under the control of national governments.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, the agreements into which states enter with multinational corporations may be viewed as an exercise of their sovereignty and not as an impairment of it. If many countries prefer to provide multinational corporations with access to their territory because of the advantages they believe it brings them in providing capital, employment or an infusion of technology, this is

because they choose to do so and not because they are impotent in the face of 'geocentric technology'.

Third, multinational corporations are able to operate only in conditions in which a modicum of peace and security has been provided by the action of states. It is sovereign states which command most of the armed force in the world, which are the objects of the most powerful human loyalties, and whose conflict and co-operation determine the political structure of the world. The multinational corporation does not even remotely provide a challenge to the state in the exercise of these functions. Its scope of operations and even its survival is in this sense conditional upon the decisions taken by states.

(v) *The Technological Unification of the World*

It is sometimes contended that the demise of the states system is taking place as a consequence of the technological unification of the world – of which the multinational corporations and the non-state groups which conduct international violence are only particular expressions, and which is bound to lead to the politics of 'spaceship earth' or of the 'global village' in which the states system is only part.

But it is also clear that 'the shrinking of the globe', while it has brought societies to a degree of mutual awareness and interaction that they have not had before, does not in itself create a unity of outlook and has not in fact done so. The point is well put by Brzezinski:

The paradox of our time is that humanity is becoming simultaneously more unified and more fragmented. . . . Humanity is becoming more integral and intimate even as the differences in the conditions of separate societies are widening. Under these circumstances proximity, instead of promoting unity, gives rise to tensions prompted by a new sense of global congestion.<sup>12</sup>

Brzezinski goes on to argue that McLuhan's idea of the 'global village' overlooks the personal stability, interpersonal intimacy and shared values and traditions that are ingredients in the life of the primitive village, and that a more helpful image is von Laue's one of the 'global city' – 'a nervous, agitated, tense and fragmented web of interdependent relations better characterised by interaction than by intimacy'.<sup>13</sup>



Not only does 'the shrinking of the globe' create new sources of tension between societies that are of different ideological persuasions, different sizes, different cultures or civilisations, and different stages of economic development; it is doubtful whether the growth of communications as such does anything to promote global rather than regional or national perspectives and institutions. Technological advances in the means of moving goods, persons and ideas around the earth's surface facilitate global integration, but they facilitate regional, national and local integration also. It is well known, for example, that in this century the value of foreign trade of the industrial powers has declined as a proportion of their gross domestic products.<sup>14</sup> The growth of communications has increased their range of options for international trade, but it has increased their options for domestic trade as well, and it is the latter they have exploited the more. If trade, migration, travel and exchange of ideas are growing possibilities for the world as a whole, so are they within the narrower focus of the Western world, or of Europe, or Latin America or the Andean Group. Australia is often considered to be the classic victim of 'the tyranny of distance', and it may be thought to have benefited uniquely from 'the technological unification of the globe', but it is not clear whether the more important effect of the growth of communications in the last hundred years has been the integration of Australia with the rest of the world, or the integration of the different parts of Australia with each other.<sup>15</sup> What determines whether it is the global, the regional, the national or the sub-national options created by the progress of technology that are taken up is not technology itself but political and economic criteria of various kinds.

The regional integration of states, their tendency to disintegration, the growth of private international violence, the role of transnational organisations, and the opportunities for regional and global integration provided by the technological unification of the world, are awkward facts for the classical theory of world politics as simply the relations between states. That theory, however, has always had to contend with the existence of anomalies and irregularities: the German Empire up to 1871 – a group of states whose sovereignty was theoretically limited; the Vatican till 1929 – a state without territory; pirates – men without the protection of a state, whom all states were committed to treat as

*hostes humani generis*; the British Commonwealth between 1919 and 1939 – a group of states which denied that the principles of sovereignty operated *inter se*; transnational bonds of religion or secular religion, ethnicity or nationality, class or political allegiance – which cut across the conventional division between municipal and international affairs; the East India Companies – corporations exercising rights of war and conquest; the Barbary Corsairs – as awkward for the theory as are the Palestinian guerrillas today.

The classical theory has held sway not because it can account by itself for all the complexity of universal politics, but because it has provided a truer guide to it than alternative visions such as that of an imperial system or a cosmopolitan society. A time may come when the anomalies and irregularities are so glaring that an alternative theory, better able to take account of these realities, will come to dominate the field. If some of the trends towards a ‘new mediaevalism’ that have been reviewed here were to go much further, such a situation might come about, but it would be going beyond the evidence to conclude that ‘groups other than the state’ have made such inroads on the sovereignty of states that the states system is now giving way to this alternative.

The question with which this chapter began we must answer by saying that there is no clear evidence that in the next few decades the states system is likely to give place to any of the alternatives to it that have been nominated. It may be objected that this conclusion, stated thus baldly, has a self-fulfilling quality, and derives from the drawing of too sharp a distinction between description of existing trends and prescription. We have recognised, after all, that there are certain trends – particularly in relation to the possible emergence of a ‘new mediaeval’ form of universal order – which do make against the survival of the states system, and which, if they went a great deal further, might threaten its survival. Might it not assist the further development of these trends to proclaim their potential for creating an alternative to the states system? We have noted that one reason for the continuing vitality of the states system is the tyranny of the concepts and normative principles associated with it: regional integrationists in search of new supranational forms, ‘disintegrationist’ separatists in search of new forms of autonomy for minority communities, revolutionary movements engaged in international violence – are alike intellectually imprisoned by the theory of the

states system, and are in most cases as committed to it as the agents of sovereign states. Is there not a need to liberate thought and action from these confines by proclaiming new concepts and normative principles that would give shape and direction to the trends making against the existing system, as Grotius and others gave intellectual coherence and purpose to the trends making against an earlier political order? This is the perspective that underlies Richard A. Falk's view that the form of universal political organisation that has prevailed since the Peace of Westphalia is undergoing drastic modification in the direction of 'increased central guidance' and 'increased roles for non-territorial actors', re-establishing some of the features of the mediaeval period. An essential part of Professor Falk's view is that students of the subject can play an active role in accelerating this modification, which he takes to be beneficial.<sup>16</sup> It appears to me, on the contrary, that there is greater danger in the confusion of description and prescription in the study of world order than in drawing too sharp a distinction between them. Trends making against the states system may be strengthened by being recognised and dramatised, but only so far; there are certain realities which will persist whatever attitude we take up towards them. We have also to avoid begging the questions whether a trend towards 'increased central guidance' actually exists; and whether, if it did, this would make for a viable world order rather than against it.

### **The World Political System**

If our analysis has led us to reject the view that the states system is in decline, it should also lead us to notice one of the cardinal features of its present phase. This is that there is now a wider world political system of which the states system is only part.

By the world political system we understand the world-wide network of interaction that embraces not only states but also other political actors, both 'above' the state and 'below' it. A view of world politics which took account only of the states system might recognise that each state had relations with international organisations to which it belonged, and with political groups within its jurisdiction which helped to shape its own policy. International organisations, on this view, are an expression of the policies of

states, and groups within the state are part of the causation of each state's policy.

But the reality is more complex than this. Political groups within a state do not simply affect world politics through the influence they may have on their own state's foreign policy. First, they may enter into relations (whether of combination or of opposition) with political groups in other states; business enterprises, trade unions, political parties, professional associations, churches, all have their being partly within the transnational nexus that bypasses the level of state-to-state relations. Second, they may enter into relations with foreign states, as when a multinational corporation enters into an agreement with a host government, political groups engage in a protest outside a foreign embassy, or revolutionary groups in one country assist their co-ideologists in another to overthrow the government. Third, they may enter into direct relations with an international organisation, as when non-state groups achieve representation at a United Nations specialised agency, or become the spokesmen or antagonists in their own country of the United Nations, the E.E.C. or the Organisation of African Unity.

Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane take relationships of this kind to exemplify 'transnational interactions', which they define as 'the movement of tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or an inter-governmental organisation'.<sup>17</sup> They contend that the orthodox study of international relations has been in the grip of a 'states-centric' paradigm in which the existence of transnational phenomena has been admitted but treated simply as part of the background of the subject, but that this should now be replaced by a 'world politics' paradigm that would bring these phenomena into the foreground, along with the relations of states. In so far as what they are arguing is that transnational relationships have in the past escaped systematic study and that this should now be corrected, there is much to be said for their point of view. The study of world politics should be concerned with the global political process as a whole, and this cannot be understood simply in terms of interstate politics in the strict sense. The 'world politics' perspective also has the advantage that it transcends the distinction between the study of international relations and the study of domestic politics by focusing upon the global political system of which the states system and national political systems are both part.

But if we should embrace the 'world politics' paradigm, we need also to disavow certain views with which it is sometimes associated.<sup>18</sup> First, it would be absurd to maintain that the existence of a political system involving other actors as well as states is in any sense a new or recent development. The states system has always been part of a wider system of interaction in which groups other than the state are related to each other, to foreign states and to international or supranational bodies, as well as to the state in which they are located. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, indeed, the relations of Catholic and Protestant groups across state boundaries to one another, to foreign powers and to supranational organisations such as the Papacy and the Empire was so prominent in relation to that of the relations of the Christian powers that the theory of European politics as the politics of the states system was still struggling to be born. All that is in any sense new or recent in the world political system of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is its global or world-wide character; and, of course, it is only in this recent period that the states system itself has been world-wide.

Second, it is doubtful whether it can be shown that transnational relationships (using this term in the sense defined by Nye and Keohane) at present play a more important role, relatively to the relationships of states, than in earlier phases of the wider political system in which they both figure.

Raymond Aron has written in the following way of the 'transnational society' that existed in 1914, and which came to be 'totally ruptured' in the Cold War period 1946–53:

Before 1914 economic exchanges throughout Europe enjoyed a freedom that the gold standard and monetary convertibility safeguarded even better than legislation. Labour parties were grouped into an International. The Greek tradition of the Olympic Games had been revived. Despite the plurality of the Christian Churches, religious, moral and even political beliefs were fundamentally analogous on either side of the frontiers. Without many obstacles a Frenchman could choose Germany as his place of residence, just as a German could decide to live in France. This example, like the similar one of Hellenic society in the fifth century, illustrates the relative autonomy of the inter-state order – in peace and in war – in relation to the context of

transnational society. It is not enough for individuals to visit and know each other, to exchange merchandise and ideas, for peace to reign among the sovereign units.<sup>19</sup>

Nye and Keohane argue that interstate relations today do not possess the autonomy which Aron attributes to them, and that they are more affected by 'transnational society' than they were in 1914. It is true that since that time state intervention has grown in economic and social life and in the sphere of private political or religious belief, and that, as a consequence of this, state-to-state relations have a much larger economic, social and ideological content than they had in 1914. But is this a sign of the increased importance in world politics of actors other than the state, or is it rather an indication that the states system has extended its tentacles over world politics to deprive business corporations and bankers, labour organisations, sporting teams, churches and intending migrants of the standing as autonomous actors that they once enjoyed?

Whether we judge the role of non-state actors in world politics today to be greater or less than in 1914, it is very unlikely that their role is as great as it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when residual mediaeval transnational relations played a central role. As Nye and Keohane contend, the role of transnational relations has not yet been systematically studied. The studies that are now under way, however, are concerned with the contemporary world, and this may lead us to lose sight of the fact that it is the place of transnational relations in earlier phases of the states system that has been more seriously neglected by students.

Third, the factors consolidating the world political system do not in themselves assure the emergence of an integrated world society. By a world society we understand not merely a degree of interaction linking all parts of the human community to one another, but a sense of common interest and common values, on the basis of which common rules and institutions may be built. The concept of a world society, in this sense, stands to the totality of global social interaction as our concept of international society stands to the concept of the international system.

There is no doubt of the existence of one important and novel factor affecting transnational relations today: the development of global communications creating an unprecedented degree of mutual

awareness among different parts of the human community, both through the relaying of messages and pictures and through opportunities created for travel and direct contact. However, it has to be noted that this has not by any means led to a situation of 'perfect' mutual awareness of all societies by one another. Many governments use their authority to exclude foreign radio or television contacts, and to deny freedom of travel to their citizens. All governments have opportunities to control and distort mutual awareness and contact, and even where the conditions for awareness of other societies are most favourable, what one society knows about another is always selective and partial. Moreover, awareness of other societies, even where it is 'perfect', does not merely help to remove imagined conflicts of interest or ideology that do not exist; it also reveals conflicts of interest or ideology that do exist.

There is also no doubt that there exists among all societies today a high degree of interdependence or mutual sensitivity in the pursuit of basic human goals. However, we have also to recognise that the term 'interdependence' has become a cant word that serves to rationalise relations between a dominant power and its dependencies, in which the sensitivity is more one-sided than it is mutual. Appeals to interdependence (among allies in NATO, among rich countries in the O.E.C.D., between producers and consumers of resources) have a strong political content, and frequently reflect fears that the interdependence of one society's decisions and another's will not be recognised, or demands that they should be recognised, rather than the belief that decisions are in fact interdependent.

Moreover, the interdependence of one society's decisions and another's, even where it genuinely exists and there is awareness of it, does not in itself generate a sense of common interest, let alone of common values. The fact of the mutual sensitivity of states and other actors to one another's strategic, economic or ecological decisions can be exploited by each actor for its own purposes and does not in itself determine whether there will be co-operation or conflict.

Fourth, we have to note that where in the contemporary world political system transnational relationships appear to have made significant inroads upon the states system, this has occurred in an uneven fashion. There are cases where transnational relationships assume an important place in the politics of a particular region, as

in the E.E.C. through the role of the Community's institutions, in the Socialist Commonwealth through the part played by Comecon and the Communist Parties, or in the Arab states because of the factor of a common Arab nationalism. But if links of this kind have led or promise to lead to transnational social integration, this is of a purely regional kind, and does not necessarily assist global social integration.

On the other hand, some transnational relationships are of global and not merely regional importance, but their effect is to promote not the integration of world society as a whole, but rather the integration of a dominant culture, which as it draws closer together at the same time draws farther apart from those social elements that are left outside. It is familiar that the effect of the multinational corporations, the great foundations and the scientific and professional associations, whose centres lie in the advanced capitalist countries, and especially in the United States, is to promote a kind of integration that links together the societies of those advanced countries and elite groups within the poor countries, but whose effect is also to widen the social or cultural distance between advanced societies and poor societies, and between modernised elite groups and the ordinary people within the latter.<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to find evidence of transnational relationships whose effect is to promote an evenly distributed social integration throughout the world as a whole.

Fifth, the world political system of whose existence we have taken note in no way implies the demise of the states system. The states system has always operated within a wider system of political interaction, and within the world-wide political system of today the primacy of the states system is for the time being assured.