

Comments on Global Governance and the South

Speaker: Gelson Fonseca Jr

Let me begin by thanking the Development and Peace Foundation (SEF) for the invitation to participate in this year's Summer Dialogue. I must say that I was not acquainted with the work carried out by the Foundation. And, I was really impressed by the high quality of its contribution to the debate on global governance. An array of papers and seminars sponsored by the SEF have opened up new paths for reflecting on a central question, perhaps the central question, when we try to understand the ways of the world today.

The introduction of this part of the seminar proposes a clearly relevant question whether there are "competing notions of global governance, originated in the developing world?"

It is not an easy question and I think that, to set it in context, a few preliminary observations could be suggested.

Firstly, which are the actors in the developing world that have the capacity to propose those competing notions? Are there actors that already have global influence? Should we talk about emerging countries, about groups of countries, such as the BRICS, or are we still thinking about the established institutions of the South? Does the G77 or the NAM have a role to play in the process of shaping globalization? My answer is that, to a certain extent, they are all part of the game, and the issue is how to sort out what their specific contributions are. I am not going to scrutinize the individual behaviour of each one of those actors. Suffice it to remember that, from different perspectives, they all share a critical stand with regard to the world order. They strive for change, for a sense of fairness in international relations, and for more participation in international decision-making, as has been the tradition of the so-called Global South, since the 1960s.

A second preliminary observation has to do with the notion of global governance and the South. In its theoretical conception, the notion articulates an analytical tool that broadens our understanding of how the world hangs together. It somehow tries to deal with the complexity of contemporary international relations, where States, multilateral institutions, NGOs, transnational movements, and so on, interact and establish the foundation for a "governance without government," to use Rosenau's expression.

What are the political implications of these new realities? There are many but I will only mention a few, beginning with a transformation in the decision-making process in foreign policy, especially in democracies. The governments are no longer alone, exerting a sort of monopoly in foreign policy formulation. If you allow me, I should like to illustrate referring the Brazilian experience in the preparation of the instructions of our delegations to the global summits in the 1990s. At that time, democracy had been recently restored in Brazil, and NGOs were flourishing. By end of the 90s, we had more than five thousand nongovernmental organizations, with significantly diversified

agendas (human rights, indigenous people, women, environment, homeless, agrarian reform, etc.). They rapidly became a factor in the political process, and the government was compelled to incorporate their leaders and representatives in formulating the national positions to be presented at the summits. Mixed commissions of government officials and NGOs representatives were formed to articulate our positions for the Rio Conference in 1992 and the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 93. Later, there was another step forward, and those representatives were incorporated as members in our delegations. What were the consequences of this? The NGOs (I refer not only Brazilian NGOs but also the Brazilian chapters of Amnesty, Greenpeace, etc.) had a view of the “global problems” that was intended to be founded on a conception of “universal values.” Consequently, the government had to combine two legitimacy approaches, a national and a universal, in order to articulate positions that could be supported domestically. The process was not always smooth, there were clashes, but it somehow shaped new links between society and the diplomatic establishment. I do not know whether the Brazilian experience could be carried over to other countries. It depended on a combination of democratic institutions and strong social movements. Once established, there were no backward movements.

Simultaneously, during the summits, a new questioning began: what is the “right” concept of universal values? This is the core political problem when discussing global governance. In the beginning, even the idea of global governance was criticized by the South, especially when some proposals, such as the idea of “good governance”, were identified with an instrument of the West to impose certain views (the Washington Consensus was a good example of that attitude). The West resisted the criticism as if universal values had a sort of automatic identity with Western values (and the same is valid for the management of economic policies). The South was criticized for interpreting the new challenges, based upon an outdated conception of sovereignty. In my view, this is a simplification of the developing worldview. The discrepancies between the West and the South were natural, derived from the differences arising from their positions in the international system. (The level of differences varies and, in the case of Brazil, we do not see any incompatibility between our Western values and the defence of Southern positions). Today we have to accept that no one has the monopoly over what the universal values are. Universal values ought to originate from the acceptance of diversities to be legitimate for all States. This is a formidable challenge!

This leads to my third preliminary observation. The complexity of global governance does not diminish the role of the State. I am not dismissing the decisive influence of NGOs in setting the agenda (it would be impossible to think about developments in Human Rights if we did not consider the work of Amnesty, HR Watch, or, in the field of sustainable development, Greenpeace, to mention but a few), promoting negotiations (the landmine agreement), or in alleviating human suffering (as the Medicins sans Frontieres, etc.). But, the ultimate responsibility in disentangling the Gordian knots that characterize the contemporary malaise with the international state of affairs lies essentially within the States. It is for States to find an agreed solution to deal with climate change, to sort out the impasses on Doha Round, to promote disarmament, to alleviate the conditions of extreme poverty and economic inequality, and, most conspicuously, to ensure that the mechanisms of collective security of the Security Council work effectively and promptly.

The lasting absence of progress in crucial international negotiations is at the origin of this “global malaise” of sorts, as in the case of the Syrian situation. But why the inertia? The instruments to improve the quality of governance exist, ideas are not lacking for reforming and strengthening multilateral institutions, so why is the political will to move forward so weak? Is there a general reason

to explain the inertia? Why is such a repeated and apparently obvious truth—globalization requires more multilateralism, stronger cooperation between states—is so far from becoming an effective tool to guide government actions?

In a first instance, the question about the “competing notions” of global governance presupposes the notion that the “powerful” states have failed to solve the problems that we face or their views are insufficient or unrealistic. Regardless of the theoretical perspective we adopt, in diplomatic negotiations the powerful are somehow “more” responsible for the success or failure of negotiations.

An immediate reason for this is the weakening of the legitimacy of the powerful countries, especially the U.S. The point is broadly accepted, but, to make it clearer, let me compare the present situation with what happened during the Cold War. The ideological (and strategic) dispute generated two mobilizing plans for global governance (forgive me for the anachronism) that commanded a significant degree of legitimacy, especially because those plans offered solutions to fundamental questions regarding international order. If, on the one hand, universally victorious socialism would create, with State planning, a kingdom of abundance (to each, according to their needs) and peace (socialist countries do not have conflicts with partners); and on the other if victorious liberal democracies would be able to guarantee individual freedoms, a necessary basis for wealth creation and peace, considering that democratic countries are intrinsically peaceful. This is obviously an over simplification, a caricature, but it serves to underline that: (i) it was plausible to propose global solutions, with a strong capacity for mobilization (parties and alliances), to the fundamental problems of the international order, peace and development; (ii) the plans had a clear ethical dimension as the Super Powers pretended to embody moral virtues; (iii) the plans provide also a model for economic and social transformations for the national States. I do not need to recall the violations of international law, nor speak of crimes committed in the name of promoting ideology. The point I want to make is that part of the strength of the ideologies had to do with the encompassing proposal they embodied. Rightly or wrongly, power was identified with global solutions.

The counter current was represented by the developing countries, which also had a global plan with a different ethical foundation. A combination of the ideals of the G77, the New International Economic Order, and the proposals of the NAM, especially a general and complete nuclear disarmament, would create the necessary conditions for development and peace. And, in both proposals, the Third World had the ethical upper hand. Inequality was a consequence of an unjust capitalist system that blocked the development of the Third World countries; non-reciprocal negotiations would correct the flaws of the international system and, recognizing the rights of the poor, criteria of justice should prevail over market impositions. Nuclear arsenals were in and of themselves proof of the irrationality of the powerful countries, there is no argument to justify arsenals that could destroy life on earth. Wealth, acquired by colonialism and other forms of domination, was a dubious virtue; power guided by the strategic need of nuclear arms, a denial of any sense of justice. For the developing countries, power meant irresponsibility and injustice. The South did not have power, but had instead majorities in international institutions and legitimate arguments. In other words: the South did not have “material” power, but the legitimacy of ethical arguments. Why they have failed is another story, too long to be recalled here.

It is evident today that no universal key could, with a single movement, turn to building an international order that is peaceful, fair, and equitable, able to offer economic and social models for nations. The reasons are well known. Firstly, powerful countries are still out there and perhaps

the U.S. is the last of a species of countries whose policies necessarily had a systemic effect. Nevertheless, the U.S. lacks the capacity (perhaps even the will), not to mention the tools, to be broadly accepted as a legitimate global leader. The U.S. influences every item on the international agenda, but it is seldom alone in shaping the results of negotiations (even in strategic arenas, as we see today in Iraq). At times, the European Union seems to be out to perform such role, but not consistently. China is another candidate, but it is difficult to foretell which role it will play in the future. As a matter of fact, the ethical dimension of the last hegemon's leadership is broadly questioned, as is its capacity to convince and ultimately produce solutions that would mobilize the international community. The U.S. has overwhelming power in strategic and military terms. But, this power is not transferable to the arenas in which the demands of global governance are more immediate, such as the environment, trade, human rights, peace sponsored by the UN, etc. The logic of building hegemony in those areas has to do with soft power, persuasion, tolerance, and having strategic patience. The meaning of leadership has changed and this is also valid for the US.

We do not need to be reminded that national models of economic or social organizations with a universal following no longer exist. Obviously, democracy and open economies are the pillars of contemporary legitimacy, but, especially in the economic field, they admit variations and autonomous solutions. No state is a "perfect model" to be followed without qualifications.

There are other factors that explain the inertia. A clear one is the fragmentation of the international agenda. Excepting the security agenda, in which hard power is still prominent (but not always legitimately or successfully), most of governance questions are channelled through multilateral fora. In trade, the environment, human rights, drug trafficking, and the like rules are established through broad negotiations; the weakening of the Big Powers and along with the emergence of new players have consequences. The first one is the growing number of effective players in international fora: a graphic example is in the area of trade negotiations, from the Green Room with four players (the so called QUAD) to the extenuating processes of WTO, where a group of small countries could block even an agreement between big players.

The scenario gains in complexity because there have been some attempts by the emerging countries to achieve autonomous solutions for specific problems. To mention only one example in the area of financing of infra-structure. In a few days, the BRICS summit will probably approve the establishment of a Bank for financing development with capital to the value of US\$ 50 billion and a contingency facility for dealing with crises. This is a significant step in consolidating the group, defining its role. As Professor Andrew Cooper said in a recent paper, "One critical test of whether the BRICS can make the transition from a critic of the Western-led system of global economic governance to a leader-cum-manager alternative system of, by and for developing countries will be whether the idea of a BRICS development bank (or South-South development fund), floated for study at the New Delhi summit, is successfully implemented."

Fragmentation is compounded by the intrinsic complexity of the new themes, partly because the limits of a classic negotiations no longer prevail. Very often, negotiations go beyond borders, requiring concessions that involve changing the pattern of economic competitiveness, delicate balance between short-term losses and uncertain future gains (climate change), acceptance of limitations on the exercise of sovereignty (responsibility to protect), or even the reconfiguration of institutional authority (reform of the UN Security Council). A successful negotiation must be supported by a combination of a global legitimacy claim (it must be plausible to argue that it is the one that best

serves the interest of humanity), it must pay tribute to cultural differences (for instance, the diverse interpretation of the universality of human rights must be integrated) and, last but not least, it has to protect the interests of specific domestic groups that, for one reason or another, have a say in the decision-making process in foreign policy (in trade negotiations, the problem is quite evident).

The difficulties are outstanding but they have not prevented the international community from acting, from responding to the need to improve the quality of global governance. In recent years, we have made a few achievements: the creation of the Council on Human Rights and the International Criminal Court, modest but meaningful advances in the Doha Round, a few peacekeeping operations that have achieved good results, some conceptual innovation with the acceptance of the notion of responsibility to protect, the creation of the G20, a yet unimplemented reform of the IMF, the influence of IPCC, and so on and so forth. These are modest gains, especially if we take into consideration the great expectations generated by the end of the Cold War and the global conferences of the 1990s.

We are far from the broad reforms needed to make real improvements in global governance. These achievements reveal that a sort incremental progress is possible. At the end of the Cold War, there was nothing like the Congress of Vienna or San Francisco, implying that the institutions we had, especially the UN, were adequate and sufficient to face the challenges of the new realities. Unfortunately, this hypothesis was partially wrong. The UN could still play its role; one of its historical virtues is the capacity to adapt to new agenda. But, it was impossible to predict the challenges and complexity of the new themes, and, especially the fact that globalization does not automatically bring about peace and prosperity. Sometimes, globalization generates diversity, inequality, and even new arenas of conflict.

Let me go back to the question about the competing views on global governance. My focus is on the multilateral fora, because, as I stated, it is the space where progress in global governance can be measured more clearly and effectively. The developing world is not a closed entity, with common views and alternatives to those proposed by the developed countries. The Third World is highly diverse and consequently the diplomatic behaviour of developing countries is also diverse, despite being generally inspired by a common sense of fairness. Under certain circumstances, the proposals of some of its members coincide with the views of some developed countries. A good example was the Coalition for a New Agenda in the issues of disarmament. In the reform of the Security Council, Germany and Japan form with Brazil and India a group that promotes the creation of new permanent seats; and the G20 is another clear example of areas of convergence between the developed and developing countries. A consequence of all of this is the variety of the group arrangements in specific negotiations. Coalitions change depending on the issue on the negotiating table. A group united on the debate on climate change will hardly be united on disarmament or human values.

Among the developing countries—and perhaps this is the novelty—some countries have gained a more prominent position in certain negotiations and, today, it is impossible to imagine solutions for trade, environment, and the like without an active participation of Brazil or India. Therefore, an overall conclusion is that the emerging countries add complexity to the already complex process of multilateral decision-making. And this is not bad. We are not “spoilers,” as some pundits say, we broaden the repertoire of solutions, and we force the integration of the diverging standpoints on the negotiation table. Those positions are as legitimate as those of the U.S. and the European

Union. And the progress in global governance will be more consistent and more permanent if they effectively reflect the diversity of the world. Thus, the developing world offers different views on how to improve the conditions of global governance, some of which coincide with views of some developed countries.

One specific difference in the developing countries positions is the appeal for urgency. More than the powerful countries, the South needs a new and equitable pattern of global governance. We have to break the cycle of postponement that appears to be established in crucial themes. Every country could benefit from better governance, but, for the old powerful countries, there benefits could be postponed or action is undertaken only to overcome specific crises.

To sum up my comments:

- a) Views on global governance are not a privileged domain of the developed world;
- b) The developing world is no longer a unity, but, from diverse stances, offer alternative views at the arenas where the ordering of globalization is being discussed;
- c) These views are not necessarily in contradiction with those of the developed world;
- d) They broaden the scope of the specific debates on issues related to improving the quality of global governance; they introduce a multipolar dimension in the multilateral decision-making process, reflecting the diversity of international realities and the intrinsic complexity of the issues;
- e) To take into account inequality, the contrast between rich and poor, is a necessary condition for fairness in global governance;
- f) To achieve global governance a necessary condition is a real and effective integration of this diversity.

Gelson Fonseca Jr*

Porto, junho de 2014.

* I am a career diplomat, but will not speak in my official capacity and, in this presentation, I will express my personal views.