

15 Global Governance for Civilisational Crises

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Civilisational Crises

More than a thousand kilometres beyond the Arctic Circle in Norway, in a frozen mountain, there is a high-security zone. It is one of the world's remotest sites. Inside the frozen mountain is the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault aims to preserve all possible seeds on the planet. It is a backup for 1,700-odd gene banks in the world. As of 2022, it has more than a million samples of different crops representing 13,000 years of agricultural history. There are seeds from North Korea and Syria, along with those from the United States and Russia. The primary purpose of the seed vault is to preserve biodiversity from tragedies such as wars and flooding that destroy gene banks. For example, copies of seeds from the Philippines can replace the loss caused by floods in that country, or those of the seeds from Syria can replace the gene banks destroyed by war. However, the long-term value of the project is that it will survive nuclear wars and climate catastrophes which might destroy the human civilisation. If another civilisation rises after 10,000 years and discovers Svalbard, it will find millions of different crop seeds to begin a new life. There is a lurking thought in the minds of those who have promoted the global seed vault that the end of the present human civilisation cannot be ruled out and that something should be done to preserve its signature for a future civilisation.

There are many symbols of existential risks to our civilisation. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists established the Doomsday Clock to measure how far humanity is from Apocalypse. The organisation has over a dozen Nobel Laureate scientists on its board. It designates midnight in the Doomsday Clock as the end of human civilisation caused by a global nuclear war or climate catastrophe. In January 2022, and the earlier two years, the Bulletin set the clock at 100 seconds to midnight, the closest it has been since World War II (Mecklin 2020). In January 2023, it was brought further forward to an unprecedented 90 seconds to midnight.

In June 2019, four Nobel Peace Laureates, Jody Williams, Mohamed El Baradei, Leymah Gbowee, and Denis Mukwege, came together with social thinkers Anthony Grayling and Sundeep Waslekar at the Normandy World Peace Forum in Caen to issue the Normandy Manifesto for World Peace. They warned,

The existential question posed by the Russell-Einstein Manifesto in the midst of the Cold War is even more pressing today than it was then. Nuclear weapons are several thousand times more deadly. Over 2,500 warheads are on hair-trigger alert. Deadly pathogens may threaten life as we know it. And with major powers preparing to deploy

killer robots, we are on the edge of a black hole; the possibility of machines determining our fate is morally repugnant. Global military expenditure has doubled since the end of the Cold War. It is set to increase further with plans to modernise existing weapons and develop new systems of destruction and decimation. The risk of a war by accident, incident or intent remains a distinct possibility against the backdrop of climate crisis, growing inequality, ultra-nationalism, and the erosion of ethical values.

(El Baradei *et al.* 2019)

While the world has been facing crises, including pandemics, natural disasters and wars, every day for thousands of years, they have been limited to specific geographies. Some crises affect the entire world, but they do not threaten the survival of human civilisation. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 virus has infected more than 676 million people and killed more than 6.7 million people from 200 countries. It caused worldwide economic lockdown, the grounding of the world's airlines and the closure of many industries. It affected the entire world, but it did not pose an existential threat to human civilisation. We do not know if there will be an outbreak of more dangerous pandemics in the future, perhaps killing hundreds of millions. With progress in transport and communication, it has become easier for viruses to spread across the planet much more rapidly than ever before.

Climate change is another global crisis. It has led to heat waves, drought, floods, forest fires, and extreme weather events. The 2020s may prove to be the hottest decade in recorded history. Climate change poses the risk of the loss of biodiversity, agriculture and glaciers over the next few hundred years. It is a cause of concern for people in small island nations and coastal areas who risk losing their land due to sea level rise. Climate activists consider climate change to be an existential threat to human civilisation. It may prove to be so in a few hundred years. In the next few decades, climate crisis will erode human civilisation but not end it.

The most dangerous crisis that can end human civilisation in a global war is the shifting of the nuclear arms race to a higher gear in the 2020s to incorporate artificial intelligence, lethal autonomous weapons and hypersonic missiles. In the last week of December 2019, just as the coronavirus attacked the world, Russia was busy installing Avangard hypersonic missiles in its military. It is the world's most sophisticated hypersonic glide vehicle. It travels at 27 times the speed of sound on top of an intercontinental ballistic missile and can carry a two-megaton nuclear payload. Because it determines its own flight path, it cannot be detected by a U.S. missile shield. In the third week of March 2020, when the world was entering an economic lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States tested a hypersonic vehicle at a missile facility in Hawaii. The vehicle can travel at five times the speed of sound at a low altitude, carrying nuclear bombs. The Chinese already have a DF-17 hypersonic glide vehicle that travels at five times the speed of sound. And they have a DF-41 missile that has a range of 15,000 kilometres and can hit the United States in 30 minutes. It carries ten independently targeted nuclear warheads. India tested their own hypersonic missile in September 2020. Other countries may soon catch up. The hypersonic missile race between the United States, Russia and China proves the absence of a multilateral framework for restraining the spread of deadly weapons and the risks that this poses for future global security.

Such hypersonic missiles can destabilise the nuclear deterrence that has provided a tenuous strategic stability over the past few decades. It is difficult to predict when and how nuclear deterrence will collapse, as it almost did during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and in various accidents since then that, fortunately, were averted. Hypersonic

missiles make a nuclear attack swift, stealthy and unpredictable. Once such a missile is pressed into action, by intent or accident, nuclear deterrence is over. The subsequent developments carry the risk of the extinction of our species.

About ten thousand nuclear warheads are in readiness for the next war. More than 2,500 of them are on hair-trigger alert and can be launched in 10 to 15 minutes. Country after country is becoming battle ready. Even Japan and Australia, known for their relatively pacifist postures, want to deploy missiles. Sweden and Finland have applied for NATO membership. Azerbaijan used lethal autonomous weapons against Armenia in September 2020, taking the warfare to a level beyond human control.

The arms control regime is a relic of the past. The Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty has crashed. The United States under the Trump administration ended the Iran nuclear deal, and there is no significant progress under the Biden administration to revive it. And although President Joe Biden and President Vladimir Putin decided in February 2021 to renew the New START Treaty that places restrictions on the number of deployed nuclear warheads and missiles, U.S.-Russia strategic stability dialogue came to a standstill following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (Reif and Bugos 2021). In January 2023, the U.S. State Department accused Russia of not engaging in consultations or allowing on-the-ground inspections to resume.

Nuclear-armed countries and their allies have refused to sign the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted by the United Nations. All countries that are acquiring killer robots are refusing to negotiate any treaty to ban lethal autonomous weapons.

The absence of an effective multilateral crisis-prevention machinery increases the risk of a collision between the superpowers. The war in Ukraine is evidence of such a risk. From time to time, the media speculates about the risk of Russia using nuclear weapons in this war, prompted by Russian President Putin's announcement in February 2022 that his country was placing the nuclear arsenal on high alert. And the risk of a global war is not confined to enlargement of the war in Ukraine involving NATO. It is possible that in future, Russia might attack other sovereign countries, or China might attack Taiwan, or a future President of the United States might engage in highly provocative acts impelling its adversaries into a war. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared on August 1, 2022, while opening the NPT Review Conference, 'Humanity is one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation'. If we look ahead two or three decades, there are other risks. Germany and Japan may renounce their relatively pacifist postures and join the nuclear arms race by the 2030s or 2040s.

In the next few decades, human civilisation faces existential risks if a global nuclear war takes place, either by intent, accident or a series of incidents. In the next few centuries, human civilisation faces the risk of being eroded by climate change. And any time in the future, if a pandemic several times more dangerous than the COVID-19 pandemic breaks out, human civilisation faces the risk of being seriously disrupted. Of these civilisational risks, the possibility of a global nuclear war is the most unpredictable and perhaps immediate. The growing military application of artificial intelligence and the malignant uses of other high technologies are likely to increase such a risk many times over in the next two decades.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) represents a combination of machine learning and automation. AI has several applications for enhancing the efficiency and productivity of the economy. As with any technology, politicians can use AI for beneficial purposes to improve the lives

of citizens or for authoritarian purposes, such as social control, using it for facial recognition or military objectives. The overarching risk is that the combination of machine learning and automation embodied in AI generates extraordinary speed, thus reducing decision-making time for humans receiving such input and making them susceptible to mistakes. A direct consequence of the higher speeds is compression of timeframes available to decision-makers. The margins for de-escalation are invariably reduced, with the risk of strategic miscalculation.

The second overarching risk is that the tools and weapons produced with AI mostly operate in stealth, making them difficult to detect and leading to various scenarios, including some caused by misinterpretation of signals. AI depends on access to massive amounts of data. In the case of nuclear attacks, pattern recognition may have to be generated with computer simulation rather than credible data, and this can lead to serious error.

The interface between AI and nuclear weapons can pose accidental or deliberate risks. Accidental risks can occur due to the use of machine learning to facilitate autonomous early warning systems and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). In this case, signal misinterpretation or data poisoning can occur, which can lead in turn to errors that are not only unpredictable but also undetectable, escalating the situation to the imminent launch of missiles with nuclear payloads. Furthermore, accidents can also occur due to overreliance on AI, known as automation bias, in which the humans in charge of decision-making end up putting more credence in the machine rather than their own judgement and experience. The growing automation of tasks in analysis and decision-making could lead to a flash crash, leading to unintended consequences.

Accidental risks can also occur when certain actions involving AI in a conventional war are misinterpreted by one of the parties to the conflict, leading to the use of nuclear weapons. For example, autonomous UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) and UUV (Unmanned Underwater Vehicles) might be deployed for remote sensing operations, but an adversary might assume that they have been deployed for either conventional or nuclear attack. In a further escalation, the deployed vehicle carrying conventional arms can be mistaken for one carrying a nuclear weapon. Faced with a possible nuclear attack and thus a risk to the survival of its nuclear deterrent (second-strike capacity), the adversary may opt for a pre-emptive strike. Unmanned vehicles can also cause confusion, in which a state may assume it belongs to an adversary and, depending on the geopolitical situation and the level of mistrust, nuclear weapons might at least be put on high alert. The adversary state, not being responsible for the unmanned vehicle, could then perceive this as a provocation.

Deliberate escalation is also a likely scenario in the case of asymmetry created by AI favouring one state. To offset this relative disadvantage, the adversary might engage in brinkmanship or launch a conventional attack. In an extreme case, if a state fears the survivability of its nuclear deterrent capability, it might also opt for a pre-emptive first strike.

The pathway to deliberate risks would involve eliminating the second-strike capacity of the adversary, thus dismantling the basis of deterrence. Without a second-strike capacity, there might be temptation to launch a massive first strike. AI technologies could enable sharpened tracking and the targeting of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) enclosed in silos, as well as submarines and mobile stealth vehicles, making it possible to use conventional warfare to launch attacks on them. Such capabilities would be especially destabilising because decision-makers could threaten to employ conventional

weapons much more plausibly than any kind of nuclear attack. A conventional threat would place the adversary under enormous pressure during a crisis, which could force it to capitulate or spiral into nuclear war. Such a deliberate escalation could happen if the adversary feels the need to use its nuclear weapons before its striking capacity is obliterated or after an unsuccessful strike on its deterrent forces.

There is nothing unusual about military planners using AI technologies for destructive purposes. There are many examples in history of beneficial technological innovations being used for warfare. An aircraft is a simple example. Although it has revolutionised transport and trade and brought the world closer, militaries began using aircraft for bombing adversary targets within a decade of its invention. The Wright Brothers flew the first aeroplane in 1903, and the Italian armed forces used aircraft to bomb a Turkish base in Libya in 1911. Many other inventions, ranging from chlorine gas to the radio, which were developed for the improvement of human welfare, have been used by armed forces of different countries for killing people. Thus, it is not surprising that the evolution of AI has attracted the attention of military planners. The habit of misusing science and technology to ravage societies in the game of war has brought us to the point where a combination of AI, nuclear weapons and their delivery systems can lead to the extinction of our civilisation.

Nationalism

When the world is facing civilisational crises, including existential risks posed by a global nuclear war triggered by a human decision or AI, we need a civilisational mindset to address these crises in a collective spirit. These crises do not recognise borders. It is obvious that pathogens, greenhouse gases and nuclear radiation do not require passports and visas to cross frontiers. Even if the crises were engineered by a few nations, the consequences would be global. If carbon emissions are generated by some countries more than others, it is not only the emitters but also nations from all corners of the globe which will be affected by the heatwaves, the melting of glaciers and the sea level rise. A virus may originate in one country, but as we saw in the case of the coronavirus in 2020, it can spread in a matter of days or weeks to all countries in the world. Only nine nations may possess nuclear weapons, and perhaps a dozen more may aspire to have them, but a nuclear war in one corner of the world can bring about nuclear winter for the entire planet, devastating agriculture and causing environmental and health hazards.

Our tendency is to craft a national response to civilisational crises. When the coronavirus pandemic spread across the world, some countries were involved in a competition of national egos for the development, production and distribution of vaccines. A global vaccine alliance known as COVAX was formed which delivered more than one billion doses by early 2022, but many poor countries could not acquire the necessary quantities. Countries come together in an annual Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change and make promises, but the results are abysmal. For instance, at the Paris COP in 2015, a global agreement was finalised on creating a Green Climate Fund with annual commitments of US\$100 billion. But the fund could not collect even half of that amount cumulatively over the following seven years, despite the fact that it is estimated that the cost of transitioning to a renewable energy economy will be in the tens of trillions of dollars by 2030.

Our failure to address these civilisational crises, despite some global initiatives, can be traced to the growing force of nationalism. In the last few centuries, nationalism has been increasing in many parts of the world. Over the course of the 20th century, nationalism

played a constructive role by bridging different religions, tribes and other identities into nationalist movements that struggled for liberation from their colonial masters. However, it also resulted in violent struggles for power between nation states, leading to the two world wars that killed almost a hundred million people. Nationalism, perceived as a love for one's country, can be a constructive ideology, mobilising people of different parochial identities in a collective process of growth and development. It can also motivate affected populations and their neighbours to mobilise resources at times of natural disaster. It can even lead to the creation of new art forms.

However, if nationalism is conceived as a doctrine of superiority over others, it leads to competition which can turn violent. In an era when lethal weapons, including nuclear arms and missiles, prevail, they can threaten the existence of human civilisation.

In the last century, the two world wars were the most devastating expressions of competition driven by nationalism in the countries possessing economic and military might. Since the end of World War II, several regional wars have exploded on the basis of competitive nationalism. The turmoil in the Middle East, the arms race in South Asia, tensions over Taiwan, the dissensions within the European Union, the invasion of Ukraine—all can be attributed to waves of nationalism. When President Putin annexed Crimea, his popularity was bolstered among the Russian population. He was, therefore, emboldened to continue warfare in Donbas from 2014 and directly attack Ukraine in 2022.

There are many theories of nationalism. The concept denotes love for people on the basis of commonality of language, history, race, ethnicity, or ideology. If this is what nationalism is all about, it can be a force for good. But often, there is a tendency to assume that one's own nationalist belief system is superior to others. When such superiority is established by force, violent conflicts take place.

Nations participate in the fora of international cooperation, such as the United Nations, from a nationalist perspective. The United Nations was created with the objective of ending war for all humanity. However, nation states use it as a forum to bargain for their national interests without consideration for global interests. The same attitude prevails in the functioning of other intergovernmental organisations dealing with trade, health, aviation, and the environment. The annual meetings of the United Nations General Assembly, as well as the annual COP conferences on climate change, are theatres of diplomatic conflicts between seemingly opposing national interests.

When the national ego, sense of superiority and ambition are inflated, they fuel the arms race. At any given time, the world's most powerful countries, having resources to spend on weapons, are the ones leading the race to develop instruments of annihilation. A century ago, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany were involved in the most intensive arms race. In the 21st century, it is the United States, Russia and China which lead the race for annihilation of humanity, followed by the United Kingdom, France, India, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, North Korea, and, increasingly, Australia. Nationalism and militarism are thus interwoven.

The most significant outcome of the growth of nationalism is the weakening of multilateralism. Wise minds often provide creative solutions, but the combination of nationalism and militarism can undermine them. The League of Nations collapsed because some of its leading members, including Italy and Japan, wanted to promote their narrow nationalist agendas. The United Nations is often paralysed, particularly in its principal mandate of the maintenance of peace and security, because the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5) use the veto to serve their national interest, blocking any

movement towards common solutions. The P5 do not accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. They have created a class by themselves in the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The behaviour of the P5 has motivated other nation states to follow their example in safeguarding what they see as their own national interests.

The net outcome is that the present multilateral system is proving incapable of addressing civilisational crises. The United Nations and other organisations have delivered on some of the developmental objectives ranging from the eradication of polio to raising awareness of climate change, as well as scientific and technical cooperation in many fields. However, the failure of the present multilateral system is most evident in the area of peace and security. The result is arms race, wars and fear of nuclear Armageddon.

Reform Debate

The evident failure of the United Nations in saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, as envisaged by the founders, has generated a vibrant debate on the reform of multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations. The organisation was founded in 1945. On its 75th anniversary, on September 21, 2020, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 75/1 which committed Heads of States and Governments to abide by the UN Charter and the principles of international law. Such a commitment to the UN Charter and international law can be seen in the global reform debate as the cornerstone of the multilateral order in the future.

The main problem is the difference between words and deeds. On June 1, 2021, the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa issued a joint statement, which states,

The Ministers reiterated their commitment to multilateralism through upholding international law, including the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the UN as its indispensable cornerstone, and to the central role of the UN in an international system in which sovereign States cooperate to maintain peace and security, advance sustainable development, ensure the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all with the aim to build a brighter shared future for the international community based on mutually beneficial cooperation. They reaffirmed the principles of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States and the resolution of international disputes by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law as well as the inadmissibility of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the UN. They stressed further the imperative of refraining from any coercive measures not based on international law and the UN Charter.

It is significant to note that Russia was one of the five signatories to this statement which committed to ‘non-intervention in the internal affairs of states and the inadmissibility of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state’. And yet within a year, Russia invaded Ukraine. Russia’s violation of international law in Ukraine is a recent example of how powerful countries have little regard for global norms, but it is not the only one. In the last 20 years, the United States has attacked Iraq, Syria and Libya without compunction. In the early 1990s, Serbia attacked Bosnia and seized the city of Sarajevo for three years. If we look at the history of the last 75 years,

many such examples of intervention in other countries can be found. The debate at the official level, whether in the United Nations or in regional groupings of states, has proved to be hypocritical. The states are willing to reaffirm their faith in the UN Charter and the principles of international law again and again, but their actions violate their own words. Ukraine is the most evident illustration of such hypocrisy, but it is certainly not the only one. Syria, Yemen and Iraq are among many other examples that prove the hollowness of signatures to the declarations of faith in the principles of international law.

The discourse on multilateral reform is often aimed at restructuring the UN Security Council. The P5, comprising the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France, each with a veto, was determined towards the end of World War II. Seventy-eight years later, that structure is archaic. Delegates to the UN General Assembly have made repeated demands to include new permanent members in the Security Council to reflect changed geopolitical realities. On one hand, the inclusion of Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, Nigeria, and South Africa would restore geopolitical balance. On the other, an increase in the number of veto holders may render the body even more inefficient than it is today.

The UN Security Council is often paralysed because the competing permanent members use their veto power to suit their narrow political interests. The introduction of more veto-holding members could lead to even greater paralysis. Such a reform would make the UN Security Council appear more democratic, but it could make its decision-making process grossly dysfunctional.

The international diplomatic community has discussed adding new permanent members, but without a veto. Such an arrangement offers prestige and the opportunity to intervene, but without obstructing decision-making by the Security Council. This arrangement would create three layers of membership.

A radical departure from the present debate would be to abolish the veto system. In the last phase of World War II, the Truman administration began to formulate proposals for the United Nations. President Harry S. Truman assigned Leo Pasvolsky, a State Department official, to prepare a blueprint for such an organisation. Pasvolsky's draft proposed equal membership in the United Nations for all member states and did not include veto power for any of them. But this view was not subscribed to by many others in the U.S. government and Senate. However, Stalin's officials insisted on the veto for the five victors of the war. Thus, the UN Security Council, with veto power for all five members, which has made the world body dysfunctional, is essentially a Stalinist vision imposed on the world. At present, all five powers covet this Stalinist project and do not want to give up the veto. But we should not forget that the world came close to establishing a fair and democratic institution of global governance in early 1945. Indeed, in 1943, the idea being debated in the State Department envisaged a world legislature with the capacity to create international law binding on its members.

Augusto Lopez-Claros argues in a blog article for the Global Governance Forum on April 28, 2022,

The UN veto power has paralysed the UN at a time when the multiple global crises we confront call for an effective, problem-solving organisation that will enhance our capacity for international cooperation. If it is not abolished it will not only hamper the organisation in its effort to remain faithful to its noble founding principles, but it will ultimately corrupt its remaining moral authority without which it cannot hope to remain relevant in an interdependent world.

Hannah Ryder, Anna Baisch and Ovigwe Eguegu (2020) argue, ‘The only way forward is to acknowledge the key difference between 1945 and 2020, decolonisation, and abolish the permanent members of the Security Council altogether’, Many other scholars have expressed similar views.

These are not lonely voices. In a plenary debate of the UN General Assembly in the 73rd session on November 20, 2018, several member states called for the abolition of the veto of the permanent members. As could have been expected, the representatives of some of the permanent members opposed the calls for any change in the use of the veto.

In view of the opposition by the permanent members to abolish the veto, some efforts are being made to introduce accountability in its use. In April 2022, the UN General Assembly decided that its President shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within ten working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Council and shall hold a debate on the situation concerning which the veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation.

Further, the Assembly would invite the Council, in accordance with Article 24(3) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), to submit a special report on the use of the veto in question to the Assembly at least 72 hours before the relevant discussion is to take place. The resolution, tabled by Lichtenstein, was criticised by two permanent members.

The permanent members are bound to oppose any call for the abolition or amendment of their supreme power represented by veto. They would like to maintain the status quo. But the reformers need not be deterred by what might be politically feasible in the current political framework. It is necessary to envision a future that is desirable, though not necessarily immediately possible. If the Security Council veto system is an obstacle to the maintenance of peace and security and preventing the scourge of war, the primary objectives of the United Nations, then we must advocate its removal and mobilise global public opinion in support of such a reform. In fact, it is necessary to go beyond the proposal for veto abolition and reinvent the multilateral order with new concepts and tools.

Global Governance Grid

The focus of the UN reform debate is largely on the Security Council. However, the Security Council has several limitations. It mainly acts in response to the conflicts which are likely to surface or have already begun. It does not act on long-term civilisational crises such as the arms race in weapons of mass destruction, climate change, and pandemics. There are specialised agencies of the UN which address such issues. The Conference on Disarmament deals with arms race and the weapons of mass destruction. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change acts as the main catalyst for addressing climate change issues. The World Health Organization addresses pandemics and other health crises. These organs are essentially negotiating platforms where countries bargain to protect and promote their own national interests. They are not designed to allow civilisational concerns to override national interests.

The world needs a governance mechanism which can address civilisational crises from the perspective of humankind and not individual nations.

The Global Governance Grid would fill the vacuum created by the inability of the Security Council to address structural issues and limitations experienced by specialised bodies. It would represent and serve humankind. It would not be a bargaining forum for the nation states. It would be associated with the United Nations, with operations

independent of it. The grid would be made up of three bodies: a Leaders Panel, a World Parliamentary Assembly (WPA) and a Conflict Resolution Forum.

The Leaders Panel shall be tasked solely with protecting humanity from cataclysmic warfare, pandemics, disasters related to climate change, the misuse of AI, and other existential threats and not be bogged down with the day-to-day conduct of international affairs. The members of the Leaders Panel will be serving in their personal capacity and not as representatives of nations, which is the case with the ambassadors designated to the United Nations. Presently, even the Secretary-General of the United Nations, members of various high-level panels and the heads of multilateral organisations are nominated by nation states. Their election sometimes precedes lobbying by the home countries. The candidates are therefore obliged to their home countries. This in itself raises questions about their loyalty.

The members of the Leaders Panel of the Global Governance Grid must not be affiliated with, or be representatives of, individual governments. They will be elected by the General Assembly; their qualification for office will be based on their high moral authority, scientific expertise and intellect. The nominations for the Leaders Panel can be made by the UN Secretary-General, President of the WPA, Justices of the International Court of Justice, and Nobel Laureates. Governments of nation states will not be able to nominate candidates. Generally, the candidates will have previous leadership experience in multilateral organisations, international civil society organisations, international scientific bodies. They might also be eminent scholars, philosophers, authors, scientists, jurists, having recognition beyond their national boundaries. The candidates will not normally include individuals who have only worked in governments of nation states without multilateral experience. It would be necessary to create an acceptable methodology for the formation of such a body through worldwide deliberations.

The Leaders Panel will be responsible for delivering an annual report to the General Assembly on progress in safeguarding humanity from catastrophic risks. The resolutions by the Leaders Panel to eliminate risks to humanity's survival will be binding on nation states. It will name and shame the countries and leaders showing themselves to be obstacles to progress in safeguarding humanity from catastrophic risks and therefore responsible for the potential collapse of our civilisation. It will galvanise global public opinion to support its agenda. It will mobilise civil society groups to increase pressure on national governments to take steps to eliminate the risk to human existence from the threats mentioned earlier: pandemics, climate change, the nuclear arms race, threats from other weapons of mass destruction, conflict between superpowers, and the misuse of AI to develop lethal autonomous weapons.

The second body of the Global Governance Grid, the WPA, will link the Global Governance Grid with the peoples of the world. Lopez-Claros and Bummel (2021) have proposed such a concept with a pragmatic approach.

A swifter and more feasible option to build democratic accountability would be the establishment of a directly elected United Nations or WPA as an advisory body to the General Assembly. This WPA would help bridge the democratic legitimacy gap that arises when an organisation's actions affect people's welfare without the input of those affected. By forging a firmer linkage between the United Nations and the world population it seeks to serve, a WPA would be imbued with the credibility and legitimacy that the Security Council and the General Assembly, under the one-country-one-vote system, currently lack. Because its members would be accountable to the people who elected them, they could be expected to rise above purely national interests and to consider problems

through the lens of humanity's best interests. A WPA points in the direction of a global two-chamber system that was promoted by democratic leaders such as Vaclav Havel: an upper chamber representing member states through appointed diplomats and another one composed of citizen-elected representatives.

The two authors argue that there is considerable support for the idea of a WPA in some form in some parts of the world, including Europe, Africa and Japan.

Such an idea can evolve over the years. A beginning can be made by electing representatives to the WPA from the existing legislatures. There can be more than two representatives from each country representing both the ruling and opposition. Such a proposition is bound to encounter difficulties from the states that do not hold elections for their own national legislatures or are ruled by single parties. There are no easy answers, but a process of worldwide consultations, particularly involving the single-party states, can find a way.

It might be worth examining whether the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) can evolve into the WPA. It has parliament members from 178 out of the 193 member states of the United Nations. Its members include parliaments from Azerbaijan, China, Russia, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and other countries which are not multi-party democracies. The IPU was established in 1889 and has evolved over more than 125 years. It can evolve further in the decades to come.

A UN parliamentary body made of representatives from the existing parliaments, whether through the evolution of IPU or otherwise, can be only a beginning. In the long run, the objective must be to form the WPA with directly elected people's representatives to the United Nations who would think through a global, and not national, prism.

The third body of the Global Governance Grid, the Conflict Resolution Forum, will settle conflicts between nation states through arbitration, negotiation and dialogue. It should have the competence to take up disputes referred by the WPA or by any affected countries, including affected third parties. It will not function as a judicial body to provide a verdict on the right and wrong of a dispute but as a forum to engage parties in exploring common ground. With this wider mandate, it will differ from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to which only a state party can bring a dispute. The superpowers refuse to take their disputes to the ICJ, especially those that concern their own citizens, their perceived national pride or core national interests. At present, no forum exists to resolve conflicts between the superpowers. The UN Security Council, in theory, could provide such a forum, but its power has been paralysed by the constant use of the veto by the five permanent member states. Thus, a new Conflict Resolution Forum must be embedded in the Global Governance Grid that supersedes the Security Council.

The idea of a Global Governance Grid is not in tune with our current mental framework. It may appear utopian in the face of our vanity, greed and nationalism. It will require that nation states compromise their sovereignty and surrender their national authority. It will also require that they renounce deadly weapons in keeping with the norms and agenda determined by the Global Governance Grid. The question is whether and why the established superpowers will voluntarily give up their authority, lethal weapons and the control of global security. No ideology reigns the world forever. When people discover that nationalism causes more damage than good, they will gradually turn away from it. It may seem a difficult proposition in the 2020s. But a different political paradigm might gain acceptance in 25 to 30 years if the world does not end up in a hyper-sonic nuclear war in the meantime.

There is ample empirical evidence showing that societies can reject the values that they once held dear. In the 16th century, we saw Europe breaking away from the Roman Catholic vision. In the 20th century, we saw the German people turning their backs on fascism, the South Africans rejecting racism, the Romanians and Hungarians ending communism, and the British and the Austrians accepting the end of imperialism. Empires and ideologies are not permanent. When people are willing to look at a more enlightened architecture of global governance, we must have a soft infrastructure of ideas ready. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare now. Just as the warmongers continually prepare for global war with new types of arms, those concerned about the survival of humanity must continually prepare for global peace with new concepts of global governance.

Global Movement

It would be naïve to believe that the superpowers will allow such a Global Governance Grid to come into existence merely because there is historical evidence of successful challenges to the status quo. It would be equally naïve to believe that a new institutional framework will eliminate the malaise that has brought humanity ‘one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation’ or the erosion of our civilisation by the climate crisis or the sudden disruption brought about by a future worldwide pandemic.

It is necessary for the people of the world to understand the moral and practical imperative of a new approach to global governance. It is necessary for visionary and courageous leaders to emerge at the global level who are not blinded by nationalism and who believe in the future of human civilisation. The elements of a new humanitarian order already exist, as seen when 122 of the 193 member states of the United Nations adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. More than 150 nations incur an annual military expenditure of less than a billion dollars. Over 20 nations have renounced their armies.¹ If we analyse the data closely, we will find that most of the US\$2 trillion spent on armaments every year are accounted for by 20–25 countries. Only nine nations have nuclear weapons, and a dozen more may aspire to have them, either by producing their own arsenal or by importing or stationing the missiles and warheads of their allies. Only a dozen countries are involved in the production of killer robots. We do not have credible information on the development of killer pathogens, but it cannot be more than a handful of countries secretly involved in such an endeavour. Thus, almost two-thirds of countries in the world are not involved in a race to annihilate our civilisation with weapons of mass destruction. Our civilisation is being held ransom by some 25 to 30 powerful countries and their leaders.

The world must realise that accidents, miscalculations or deliberate decisions by a few leaders can terminate the existence of our species. Therefore, the majority of countries, which are not culprits but potential victims, should come together to launch a campaign for a civilisational approach to global governance. Similarly, civil society in the powerful countries will also need to mobilise public opinion in their societies in support of the survival of human civilisation. The nuclear disarmament movement of the 1980s and the climate change movement of the 2020s demonstrate the potential of mass mobilisation. Thought leaders need to support such campaigns with information, analyses and ideas. The movement must remind itself again and again that reformation happened in Europe, apartheid was dismantled in South Africa and climate change is accepted by the majority of the world. No empire has survived forever. The transformation of the world is possible, and we have to make it happen.

As the Normandy Manifesto for World Peace appeals,

We have a tendency to establish peace only after a prolonged devastating war. The Treaty of Westphalia, the Final Act of Vienna, the League of Nations, the UN, were all conceived after millions of young men lost their lives, families were ruined, and humanity was shamed. There will be no opportunity to negotiate a new Peace Agreement after the next world war, because there will be no negotiators, no people, no flowers and no trees.

Let us conceive and establish sustainable peace before someone initiates the next war. If we do not, we will be sleepwalking into collective suicide. If we do, we will have the possibility of achieving the apex of humanity and entering an era of *Summum Bonum*.

(El Baradei *et al.* 2019)

Note

- 1 Andorra, Costa Rica, Dominica, Grenada, Iceland, Kiribati, Lichtenstein, the Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Monaco, Nauru, Palau, Panama, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

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