

IRD 416: LOGIC OF WORLD ORDER

QUESTION: IS THERE A MANIFESTATION OF ORDER OR DISORDER IN THE PRESENT WORLD? ANALYSE LOGICALLY AND IN LINE WITH GLOBAL REALITIES

World order can be defined as a system controlling events in the world, especially a set of arrangements established internationally for preserving global political stability. Each epoch in world history has had a set of political, economic and social characteristics in terms of scope, norms, interests, and actors/units that distinguished one from the other. Fundamentally, order has always coexisted with disorder and the present world is not an exception. There are currently more institutional arrangements and greater collective efforts globally aimed at promoting political and socio-economic order but there are also more fragilities and vulnerabilities because of the unprecedented complexities of today's world which makes disorder, in one form or another, unavoidable.

In the present world, there is a high degree of order due to significant developments in international law and institutions which both create and promote frameworks under which the relations between and among different actors in the world are defined and regulated (to an extent). These frameworks are largely based on a set of liberal values, norms and guiding principles that formed the basis of the new world order after 1945 and particularly following the end of the Cold War. For instance, the principles of state independence and equality, firmly diplomatic practices, trade relations and respect for international agreements, reciprocity; the values of freedom, fundamental human rights, multilateralism (EU, WTO, FIFA, WHO, regionalism etc) and activities of Civil Society Organisations and International as well as local NGOs have not only helped to create a system of rules but contributed immensely to making the world relatively peaceful and stable. It was also on the basis of this established order that nation states generally relied on guidance from the WHO in responding appropriately to the Covid 19 crisis while the IMF, World Bank, EU, WTO are advising states on the right economic choices and steps to take in stabilising economies. The absence of these agencies and institutions would have had more devastating effect for the present world.

Similarly, in the present world, there is a system of reward and punishment. There are several legal instruments aimed at promoting behaviours considered appropriate and discouraging conducts considered unacceptable. States which go against the guiding principles of the order face the consequences of their action or inaction through sanctions (Russia because of its annexation of Crimea, Ukrainian, North Korea, Myanmar, Syria etc), condemnation (Russia, Myanmar over the Rohingya Muslims, Saudi Arabia over the killing of Kashoggi, Israel over Palestinian territory annexation etc), embargoes, blacklisting (Russian, Iranian companies and individuals); suspension of aid (Lebanon) and so on. Countries are also rewarded when they conduct themselves in line with International Law (Nigeria for instance secured economic aid when it agreed to the ICJ ruling over Bakassi, Iran when it agreed to the p5+1 nuclear deal and South Africa when it gave up its nuclear program etc). Some countries are also provided incentives for supporting international initiatives/regimes such as on Climate or enhancing the rights of women. By implication, if every state is allowed to do what it wishes, and given the tendency of states to dominate the other, the present world would be overwhelmingly characterised by disorder.

On the other hand, disorder also exists because there are weaknesses (lack of enforcement, resources etc) in the structure and institutions of global governance that are often exploited by powerful states. Sometimes, they do this by acting unilaterally (Iraqi invasion, 2003, US killing of Soleimani, economic war with China, Russia's activities in Syria, US sanctions against Iran, and North Korea etc) By so doing, great powers (states) exploit the anarchy in the international system to circumvent the rules of the system in pursuit of (sometimes) narrow interests. Although the UN Security Council has the institutional responsibility for world peace, the infighting and lack of unanimity of purpose among its members are particularly striking. Lack of adherence to the dictates of international law is a chief reason for instability, chaos and disorder in the present world. Disorder also persists because it is not in all cases of misbehaviour that states get punished for violating International Law especially big states (developed states). For instance, Saudi Arabia was not punished for masterminding the killing of Kashoggi which was a violation of international Diplomatic practice and the UNDHR because President Trump was not disposed to wielding the big stick on the Saudi Prince.

Also, the current distribution of power is much more decentralized than was the case in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. A multi-polar or decentralized system is theoretically more prone to instability because of competing interests of relatively equal powers. Although decentralized, the US still stands out among current powers and when such a powerful state acts disruptively, the effects can be far reaching. The US unilaterally withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear deal, ignored the UN position on the status of Jerusalem, suspended funding to the World Health Organisation, embarked on multiple trade conflicts with a number of states and by so doing, contributing more to the manifestation of disorder rather than order in the present world. Hegemonic states have enormous influence and capacity for promoting order or disorder and the US, under President Trump has chosen the latter.

In addition, the forces of globalization are also creating chaos and disorder of their own. There are myriad challenges such as refugee problems, environmental issues, internal upheavals, inequality that are exposing the risks of a greater disorder. While non-state actors such as CSOs and NGOs are contributing to a healthy and stable world through their experience and expertise, their growing number and influence is making the world more complex and complicated. Aside that, the rise of the social media and activities of non-state actors such as terrorists are fuelling intra state conflicts and tension which have become great sources of instability and threats to world peace. Another evidence of disorder in the present world is how states respond to crisis in a globalised and interdependent world. The lack of coordinated efforts among the countries of the world to confront a global health challenge, COVID19 underscores the vacuum in global leadership and the resort to national or regional approach to fighting the crisis thus contributing to disorder.

In summary, there is a manifestation of order as reflected in existing International institutions and law, norms, values and principles. On the other hand, there is a manifestation of disorder because of new complex challenges, anarchy, weakness in the application of international law and the incapacities of existing global institutions to effectively respond to these challenges. Greater order rather than disorder can be achieved if necessary legal and structural reforms are undertaken genuinely. This moral imperative will strengthen existing institutions/actors and enable them play greater roles in preventing or mitigating issues that frequently trigger conflicts and disorder.