

Essay Outline:

1. What is Global Governance?
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What is Global Governance?

On a daily basis, many cross-border activities take place in the world: mail is delivered from one country to another; people travel back and forth across borders; goods and services are exchanged from one end of the globe to the other. If there is no world government, how can these actions be carried out with relative ease? In other words, how is the world governed even in the absence of a world government? What accounts for the formal and informal standards, codes of conduct, regulations, rules, etc.?

Domestic governance is familiar to most of us because it is provided by actual governments that create and enforce rules. The traditional meaning of governments refers to these sorts of

ruling arrangements. A Congressman can pass laws, a policeman can arrest people for breaking them, and a judge can assign punishment because they are agents of a government that has authority over the territory.

International governance, however, is less clear. No international government exists to enforce laws, but throughout history there have often been efforts by different countries to agree on standards and practices in order to bring more predictability, stability, and order into the world.

Often, international governance has just been a matter of leaders agreeing that a certain practice is simply the best way to do things. For example, after the devastating Sixty Years' War, the European leaders that signed the Peace of Westphalia agreed that, in order to avoid another war, countries must not interfere in the domestic affairs of another country. This concept is called **sovereignty**. In more recent times, international organizations such as the United Nations have passed laws and regulations that look like domestic laws but can only be enforced through international cooperation.

The modern international order: Organizations, processes, and norms.

European history has been marked by warfare and occasional attempts to build some sort of international system for peace and security. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church often tried to impose a level of control over the kings of Europe and, although the Pope often played politics and went to war himself, the church also acted as a peacemaker between rival countries. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the leaders of Europe's major powers tried to prevent another major war by creating the modern idea of a sovereign state. The Geneva Convention of 1864, one of the first examples of genuine international law, was intended to make humanitarian rules for warfare. The League of Nations and the United Nations, the most influential international governing institutions, were originally designed to stop another world war from happening.

As the West – usually meaning Europe and countries like the United States that trace their roots to Europe – grew in power and influence in the modern era, European standards for government and international governance became global standards. Accepting European standards like **humanitarianism** (ending suffering and promoting the well-being of the entire human race) and, later, **democracy** (a government that represents the will of the people) and **free trade** (unrestricted trade between countries) was a way for countries to show that they were a legitimate nation ready to be accepted into the international community.

You can recognize those European ideals in modern international governance organizations. For example, the World Trade Organization (WTO), with 159 members from every continent except Antarctica, promotes free international trade. Almost every country in the world is a member of the United Nations, which often works to promote ideals such as **human rights** (a right that belongs to every human being, regardless of nationality) and democracy. Even international **NGOs** (non-governmental organizations, or organizations that are not run by a government) like Transparency International and Freedom House, which promote democracy,

human rights, and open government, are widely seen as legitimate representatives of the international order.

Generally, these organizations are only legitimate for the same reason that governments are legitimate: Because enough people agree that they are. Especially when the Soviet Union began to decline at the end of the Cold War, most of the world's countries agreed that the Western way of doing things was the correct way, and that judging countries based on how close they are to the Western style is a good measure of how well they are doing in general. However, we may soon see the dawn of a post-Western world.

Western vs. post-Western world

In many ways, the Cold War was a familiar geopolitical conflict between two great powers. However, it was also an ideological conflict between two standards of governance. The United States upheld the Western order – democracy, human rights, and a free market – as the international standard for legitimate governance, and the Soviet Union promoted their version of **communism**, in which the government had tight control over the economy and over society in general with the eventual goal of eliminating inequality, as their own competing standard.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the superiority of one system over the other seemed obvious: The Soviet system had led to the country's downfall, and the Western system had turned the United States into one of the wealthiest and most powerful countries in history. As political and economic reforms spread across the former Soviet bloc, the Western way of doing things became the international standard.

The “victory” of the Western system had obvious effects on the international order. Democracy, universal human rights, and free trade are promoted by influential organizations like the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHCR), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the WTO. There are no corresponding organizations that promote communism – the Western system was widely accepted as the correct way to do things, and the United States was seen as the country to copy.

However, the collapse of the Soviet Union also caused many countries to put less emphasis on the international **balance of power**, which refers to countries making alliances based on deterring security threats, counterbalancing strong countries, and preventing international war. Instead, modern international governance focuses on **globalization** (breaking down the barriers against the exchange of ideas, products, and culture), growing concern over the environment, and cooperation for dealing with health, human rights, and poverty in the developing world.

The rise of the **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries also changed the international order. The global recession and political gridlock in the United States have made some world leaders wonder if the Western system doesn't actually have all of the answers. Meanwhile, the increasing strength of Russia and the rapid growth of China's economy seem to suggest that there may be alternatives to a world order based on free markets and open and democratic political system.

For now, the world is still mostly **unipolar**, which means that there is one dominant, or hegemonic, country. The BRICS countries are diverse and don't have very many common interests except for the desire to create a **multipolar** world with a number of different centers. Brazil, India, and South Africa want to be recognized as dominant regional powers, but Russia and China are competing with the United States to rework international standards of governance.

Russia and China propose **sovereignty rights** as an alternative to human rights. Sovereignty rights, which will be familiar to us from the Peace of Westphalia, mean that no government has a right to interfere with another government's domestic affairs, whether it is criticizing that government for human rights abuses or offering relief aid to another country's citizens after a natural disaster without that government's permission. This style of international governance is very attractive to corrupt and undemocratic governments, who probably get tired of Western countries attaching demands for reform to their foreign aid packages.

Russia in particular has been trying hard to promote an international standard of sovereignty rights instead of one based on democracy and human rights. It has used sovereignty as a reason to veto UN intervention in Syria, block demands for reform in some African countries, and ban international organizations in Russia. However, sovereignty is just as important to China, which would prefer not to see their own stability upset by Western-supported democracy movements.

Alternative systems of international governance are still being developed. New rules have to be negotiated for new issues like internet governance. Additionally, some countries want to reevaluate existing standards and institutions like the International Monetary Fund, which is based on an American standard of **neoliberal economics**, which means having very little government control over the economy. Competing standards of international government have played a major role in Central Asia, where Russia, China, and the United States fight for influence among the region's former Soviet republics.

Central Asia: Old Rules in a New Game.

Central Asia is an ancient region that includes the modern-day countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Once the home of nomadic tribes and wealthy Silk Road cities, Central Asia was essentially a backwater by the time the Russian Empire started to expand into the area in the 19th century. After the Russian Revolution, the Soviet government divided the territory into autonomous republics along the region's present-day borders. The Central Asian republics were among the last Soviet republics to declare independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

China, Russia, and the United States have interests in the region today. China needs oil and gas to fuel its growing economy, which are major products of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan is a major market for China, and merchants from throughout Central Asia and Russia buy cheap consumer goods there and sell them elsewhere. China also looks for security

cooperation from bordering Central Asian states in dealing with **separatists** (people who want more self-government or even total independence) in its western Xinjiang region.

Russia is interested in Central Asia for oil and gas, too, and the main launch facility for Russia's space agency is Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Additionally, because of its historical control of the region, influence in Central Asia is a point of pride for Russia. Projecting its influence through regional organizations devoted to security and economic cooperation like the Commonwealth of Independent States (talked about below) justifies Russia's own self-image as a great power in a multipolar world.

The United States' concerns in Central Asia are almost entirely related to the war on terror. The United States had military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan until recently that supported the mission in Afghanistan, and it looked for cooperation from the host governments on anti-terror issues. The bases also became part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) when it was created. The shortest supply route for US forces in Afghanistan is through Pakistan, but that route is unreliable. The NDN is an alternate set of routes that bring supplies through Central Asia instead. Neither Russia nor China is happy about having a major US military presence so close to their borders.

None of the major powers want exactly the same thing from the countries of Central Asia, so they are not in direct competition. Still, it would be in their best interest to have more influence than their competitors. A number of international governance organizations exist that help major powers extend control over the region. The Commonwealth of Independent States is a loose union of former Soviet States that includes Russia and most of the Central Asian countries. The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Eurasian Union are current and future alliances designed to extend Russia's influence over former Soviet States.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization includes Russia, China, and all five Central Asian countries and intends to create a united front against the United States and the Western style of international governance in general.

So far, however, the countries of Central Asia have been able to play China, Russia, and the United States off of each other. The **Great Game** of the 19th century has been turned on its head.

Historically, the Great Game refers to the struggle between the Russian Empire and the British Empire for control of Central Asia. The two great powers could expand their influence



Central Asia. circa 1848. Source: Wikicommons

by dominating local rulers. However, modern Central Asian leaders have been able to play China, Russia, and the United States against each other. Instead of forcing Central Asia to adopt international governance standards, the Central Asian powers have managed to force their partners to adopt Central Asian governance standards in the region.

For example, for years the United States has been able to put pressure on its partner countries to adopt the international standards of human rights, democracy, and transparency. When the US government first built its military base in Uzbekistan, it tried to do the same thing there. Uzbekistan was undergoing civil unrest in 2005, and it resulted in the Andijan Massacre in which government troops opened fire on protesters, killing somewhere between 187 and 1500 people. The United States couldn't ignore this event, and it started putting pressure on the government of Uzbekistan.

However, Russia and China don't make those kinds of human rights demands from their partners, and instead promote an alternate style of international governance. This style dismisses ideas like humanitarianism and international intervention over human rights abuses, which have their roots in Western tradition. As a result, Uzbekistan had other options besides complying with U.S. human rights standards. Instead of backing down, they closed the United States' Karshi-Khanabad military base.

China and Russia have to play by Central Asian rules, too. In Central Asia, the **elites** (the most powerful people in society, who often control large parts of the economy, the government, or the military) act as gatekeepers. Any deal has to be made through the right group of elites, and it usually results in big rewards for the gatekeeper and little or no reward for his people. However, there is no other way to do it. If China complains about corruption in Kyrgyzstan, for example, then Kyrgyzstan will just negotiate with Russia and the United States.

Central Asia could be a testing ground not just for the Western international order but for global governance as a concept. Some things, like peace and trade, are universally desired. But will the West be able to promote the ideals of democracy, human rights, and open government, especially when China and Russia are promoting alternative systems that don't require them, or will the future international standard of governance be about sovereignty and governments minding their own business? Will we return to a multipolar world with a system of international governance based on the balance of power, or have globalization and international cooperation?