

ELEMENTS OF A THEORY OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

DAVID HELD
Durham University
david.held@durham.ac.uk

Abstract: After the devastation of World War II, a new international community was built, organized under the newly formed United Nations which oversaw the development of a new legal and institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and security. Maintaining global peace and stability served the purpose of limiting violence, but it was also a prerequisite for accelerating “globalisation”. Even during the years of the Cold War, deep tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union facilitated, paradoxically, a deepening of interdependence and coordination among world powers. The logic of MAD (“mutually assured destruction”) determined the awareness of the shared vulnerability of the globe. From the late 1940s to the beginning of the 21st century, a densely complex and interdependent world order emerged. Global interdependence has now progressed to the point where it is beginning to undermine our ability to engage in further cooperation. The need for international cooperation has never been higher and yet effective institutionalized multilateral cooperation has stalled. It is possible to identify four reasons for this blockage, four pathways to gridlock: rising multipolarity, more difficult problems, institutional inertia and institutional fragmentation. Still, there exists a range of instances in which gridlock has not prevented effective global governance from emerging – some “pathways” out of gridlock. The following article discusses the reasons behind gridlock and the four pathways through and beyond it, in order to identify mechanisms through which effective global change can occur. This task, the search for pathways through and beyond gridlock, is a hugely significant one, if global governance is to be once again effective, responsive and fit for purpose.

Keywords: Gridlock, Pathways, Interdependence, Cooperation, Global Governance.

INTRODUCTION

World War II was calamitous, not just for Europe, but for the world at large. The scale of the destruction was almost impossible to comprehend. Alongside the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe, were the trails of brutality left by the Japanese invasions of China and Southeast Asia, and the march of Stalin’s armies through the bloodlands between Moscow and Berlin. In the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, children were playing and people were going to work – and more human beings died in a second than anyone thought imaginable.

It was against this backdrop that 45 countries met in San Francisco in 1945 to try and find a new way forward in the wake of two World Wars and a Great Depression. They met

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to ask the question, “Can we rebuild the international community or will we face a drift into an anarchical world order?”

Addressing the gathering of leaders in 1945 the then President of the United States, Harry Truman, warned that the world was at a crossroads:

You members of this conference are to be the architects of a better world. In your hands rests our future. By your labors at this conference we shall know if suffering humanity is to achieve a just and lasting peace. With ever-increasing brutality and destruction, modern warfare, if unchecked, would ultimately crush all civilization. But we still have a choice. Between on the one hand, the continuation of chaos, and on the other, the creation of a world organization for the enforcement of peace.

At the heart of the post-war security arrangements was, of course, the newly formed United Nations and along with it the development of a new legal and institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and security. Article I of the UN Charter explicitly states that the purpose of the UN is to “maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace”. Article I goes on to stress that peace would be sought and protected through principles of international law. It concludes with the position that the UN is to be “a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends”. With peace comes the prospect of stable and rising prosperity. While maintaining global peace and stability serves the obvious purpose of limiting violence, it is also a quintessential prerequisite for accelerating ‘globalisation’ across many domains of human activity: trade, finance, and communication being the most prominent among them.

In the context of the calamity of the first half of the 20th century, this was a critical moment of human aspiration: through the rule of law it may well be possible to manage and mediate the conflicting interests of states. Yet, as soon as this noble aim was enshrined in the UN Charter, it was compromised almost from the outset by the Cold War. The great ideological and geopolitical tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, shaped the next 40 to 50 years of world history. These tensions were deep, fundamental, and even existential and there came with them risk of a nuclear Armageddon. However, this standoff facilitated, somewhat paradoxically, a deepening of interdependence among world powers through the peculiar logic known as the logic of MAD: mutu-

ally assured destruction. It is difficult to imagine a more immediate form of interdependence than Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Once the world reached a point at which a small group of decision-makers could release weapons that could, literally, obliterate the rest of the world, it created a new recognition of shared vulnerability. This awareness demanded greater coordination among world powers. Thus, the nuclear standoff of the Cold War drew world powers closer together as a way to mitigate the threat and ensure that military posturing did not escalate into all-out nuclear confrontation.

It is worth highlighting that the logic of MAD (mutually assured destruction) works to some degree because neither side is willing to push the button, knowing that the 'good life', here on Earth, for each and all, would be destroyed. This held sway for a remarkably long period of time. The awareness of shared vulnerability, in turn, demanded greater coordination of the world powers, which became increasingly open to formal and informal discussions over the following decades. Despite the complexities and risks the Second World War, nuclear weapons and the threat of mutually assured destruction, perversely facilitated a new form of governed globalisation under the UN system, which contributed to the relative peace and prosperity of the post-war years. The importance of this should not be underestimated. Although there were, of course, many wars fought out in the global south by proxy powers, this arrangement created the conditions for what can now be regarded as an unprecedented period of global stability and economic growth across the world. While the economic record of the post-war years varies by country and by region, many experienced economic growth, and living standards rose rapidly across several parts of the world. By the late 1980s a variety of East Asian countries were beginning to grow at an unprecedented speed, and by the late 1990s countries such as China, India, and Brazil had gained significant economic momentum, a process that continues to this day (although Brazil is faltering now).

Fifteen years ago, the G7 had a GDP several times of that of the biggest developing countries. Today it is the same. 85% of the world's luxury goods are sold in China; you cannot cross the roads in Beijing, Shanghai and elsewhere without seeing Rolls Royces, Porsches, BMWs, Mercedes. Luxury shopping malls are everywhere, with the young, wealthy Chinese paying for more luxury goods than ever. And it is not just

the rich in China who have benefitted. 400 million people have been lifted out of poverty in 30 years. This was made possible to a significant degree because the post-war settlement worked. It sufficiently contained great power rivalry, and facilitated a period of growing interdependence between nation states.

Post-war multilateral institutions – not just the UN, but the Bretton Woods institutions as well – created conditions under which a multitude of actors could benefit from economic activity, forming corporations, investing abroad, developing global production chains, and engaging with a plethora of other social and economic processes associated with globalisation. These conditions, combined with the expansionary logic of capitalism and basic technological innovation, changed the nature of the world economy, radically increasing dependence on people and countries from every corner of the world.

This is not to say that international institutions were the only cause of the dynamic form of globalisation experienced over the last few decades. However, economic globalisation, and everything associated with it, was allowed to thrive and develop because it took place in a relatively open, relatively peaceful, relatively liberal institutionalised world order. By preventing World War Three and another Great Depression, the multilateral order arguably did just as much for interdependence as microprocessors or email (Mueller 1990; O’Neal, Russett 1997). From the late 1940s to the beginning of the 21st century, a densely complex interdependent world order emerged.

However, global interdependence has now progressed to the point where it is beginning to undermine our ability to engage in further cooperation. That is to say, economic and political shifts in large part attributable to the *successes* of the post-war multilateral order are now amongst the factors grinding that system into gridlock or deadlock. Because of the remarkable success of global cooperation in the post-war period, human interconnectedness weighs much more heavily on politics than it did in 1945. The need for international cooperation has never been higher. Yet, the ‘supply’ side of the equation, effective institutionalised multilateral cooperation, has stalled. In areas such as nuclear proliferation, the explosion of small arms sales, terrorism, failed states, global economic imbalances, financial market instability, global poverty and inequality, biodiversity losses, water deficits, and climate change, multilateral and transnational cooperation is now increasingly

ineffective or threadbare. Gridlock is not unique to one issue domain, but appears to be becoming a general feature of global governance. Why?

It is possible to identify four reasons for this blockage, four pathways to gridlock: rising multipolarity, harder problems, institutional inertia, and institutional fragmentation (Hale, Held 2013). Each pathway can be thought of as a growing trend that embodies a specific mix of causal mechanisms.

MULTIPOLARITY, COMPLEXITY, INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA, AND FRAGMENTATION

Firstly: growing multipolarity. On the one hand, it is easy to observe that the absolute numbers of states has increased by 300% in the last 70 years. More importantly, the number of states that ‘matter’ on a given issue – that is, the states without whose cooperation a global problem cannot be adequately addressed – has expanded by similar proportions. At Bretton Woods in 1945, the rules of the world economy could essentially be written by the United States with some consultation with the UK and other European allies. In the aftermath of the 2008-2009 crisis, the G-20 had become the principal forum for global economic management, not because the established powers desired to be more inclusive, but because they could not solve the problem on their own. However, a consequence of this progress is now that many more countries, representing a diverse range of interests, must agree in order for global cooperation to occur, and this is difficult.

This links to the second issue: socio-economic problems have become harder to solve. As interdependence has deepened, the types and scope of problems around which countries must cooperate has evolved. Problems are both now more extensive, crossing more countries, and intensive, penetrating deep into the domestic policy space and daily life of many countries. Consider the example of trade. For most of the post-war era, trade negotiations focused on reducing tariff levels on manufactured products traded between industrialised countries. Now, however, negotiating a trade agreement requires also discussing a host of social, environmental, and cultural subjects – GMOs, intellectual property, health and environmental standards, biodiversity, labour standards – about which countries often disagree sharply. In the area of environmental change a similar set of considerations applies (Hale,

Held 2013: chapter 3). To clean up industrial smog or address ozone depletion required fairly discrete actions from a small number of top polluters. By contrast, the threat of climate change and the efforts to mitigate it involve nearly all countries of the globe. Yet, the divergence of voice and interest within both the developed and developing worlds, along with the sheer complexity of the incentives needed to achieve a low carbon economy, have made a global deal extremely difficult to achieve. By the time we get to the Doha trade round which started some 20 years ago, there are 140 countries at the table to contend with, with a multitude of issues which have become much more difficult to resolve.

One pertinent example is the environment. Several decades ago, smog was considered a great problem, especially in industrial cities such as London. Mines were producing a particular kind of coal which generated smog when burned. Yet at the same time, there were the beginnings of the development of an alternative technology: smoke-free coal or coke. It took a small number of countries in Europe to negotiate to phase out one product, the traditional form of coal, and to phase in another, smoke-free coal (coke), in order to clean up the air once and for all. Similarly, one can look to the Montréal Protocol, which sought to tackle ozone depletion. A small number of countries were responsible for the production of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that damaged the ozone layer. Those countries soon after signed an agreement to phase out ozone damaging chemicals. This was linked to the phasing in of alternative chemicals which did not have the same negative effects. The above are examples of fraught but manageable problem-solving. Yet, climate change today is a problem of a different order of magnitude, as is achieving a low-carbon economy. Here, multipolarity and complexity collide, making it harder to arrive at an effective resolution. The collision of growing multipolarity with complexity is occurring against a background of two further issues: institutional inertia and fragmentation, as discussed in the following.

The post-war order succeeded, in part, because it incentivised great power involvement in key institutions. From the UN Security Council, to the Bretton Woods institutions, to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, key pillars of the global order explicitly grant special privileges to the countries that were wealthy and powerful at the time of their creation. This hierarchy, it could be argued, was necessary to secure the participation of the most important countries in global governance.

Today, the gain from this trade-off has shrunk while the costs have grown. The architects of the post-war order did not, in most cases, design institutions that would organically adjust to fluctuations in national power. And it is very hard to change them, for example, witness the numerous efforts to alter or reform the position of the permanent members of the Security Council which have floundered. In the post-war period, the balance of economic power has changed, spreading towards the East and South, with the centre of economic gravity moving from the mid-Atlantic in the 19th century to the present period somewhere east of Turkey, and by 2050 somewhere between India and China, if present trends continue. However, the architects of the post-1945 order could not have conceived of these power shifts, and hence did not design institutions whose representative structure would organically fluctuate with the changing distribution of power. On the contrary, they froze the power relations of 1945 within an institutional structure that is very hard to change.

These difficulties are exacerbated by the final issue of fragmentation. The institution builders of the 1940s began with, essentially, a blank slate. But efforts to cooperate internationally today occur in a dense institutional ecosystem shaped by path dependency. The exponential rise in both multilateral and transnational organisations has created a more complex multilevel and multi-actor system of global governance. Yet, within this dense web of institutions mandates can conflict, interventions are frequently uncoordinated, and all too typically scarce resources are subject to intense competition. For instance, there are many examples of aid failing to meet its targets in pressing humanitarian crises due to the fragmentation of efforts. There are also many cases in emerging global health crises where the international community has failed to coordinate its action in sufficient time to prevent the loss of life from accelerating. For example, during the great tsunami of 2004, nation-states and NGOs such as OXFAM and Médecins Sans Frontières rushed to deliver aid to the affected countries. It is now estimated that at least 80% of the aid delivered to the tsunami areas missed their target. This is true for many other humanitarian crises. The efforts of NGOs, agencies and governments are weakened by an inability to set agendas and to coordinate action, and they often get in each other's way.

While the post-war order was enormously successful for the reasons mentioned above, it has also created unintended

consequences. The unintended consequences include a shift from unipolarity and bipolarity to a much more multipolar world. That has a positive upside: development. The downside is that with increased multipolarity and conflicting interests it is harder to reach a consensus. With growing interdependence, domestic as well as transnational and global problems have become harder to resolve. This is, essentially, the beginning of a drift or deadlock in world politics.

The period today is similar to that of the early 1930s in some respects. There are weakening international and regional institutions, as well as the lingering impact of economic crisis (in this case, the financial crisis and nearly ten years of austerity). Combined, these have created a backlash of populism and the rise of nationalism which, in turn, have been linked to growing xenophobia in many parts of the world – not just in Trump’s America or in Brexit Britain or in Hungary or Turkey, but in Modi’s India and Japan. How can we reconcile a globally interdependent world which produces existential challenges like climate change on one hand, and a retreat to national political silos on the other? Although the post-war order was a huge success, it brought unintended consequences, or, in the social science language, second-order consequences of success which created multipolarity, complexity, inertia and so on.

If the story ended here, as it did with *Gridlock*, it would be quite a dark one. *Gridlock* created a theoretical framework for understanding what has happened since 1945, but in a way that dwelt on these challenges rather than on opportunities. There is a theoretical reason for this. Most political scientists and international relations in the last 40 years have asked the question, “Why do states collaborate?” and have produced a host of accounts from realist theory to neo-realism, neo-liberalism and beyond. I, with my co-author Tom Hale, wanted to ask the opposite question: “Why don’t states collaborate well?” – or, “Why don’t they collaborate well enough?”. *Gridlock* is an answer to these questions. Although the book goes a long way, it is not, by any means, the whole story. What *Gridlock* does not focus on are a series of anomalies and exceptions that are worth further investigation, if we are to have an account of the possibilities of change even in a world that is highly gridlocked at the global level.

It is important to examine these anomalies and exceptions, and to do so systematically. Examining a range of instances in which gridlock has not prevented effective global

governance from emerging, seven ‘pathways’ out of gridlock have been uncovered in detailed analysis (Held, Hale 2017). The pathways can be thought of either as routes ‘through’ gridlock, meaning more short-term adaptations, responses, or strategies for dealing with pressing needs, or roads ‘beyond’ gridlock, meaning longer-term transformations dealing with the potential to substantially reshape world politics. Routes through gridlock may, over time, evolve into more substantial changes. What this book tries to show is that there are seven distinct pathways of change that have some leverage in the world in which we live in. If we understand these pathways of change, we do not get access to a ‘silver bullet’ that allows us to change everything at the same time. There is no silver bullet. But a measured understanding of change at the global level allows us to illuminate what works and what does not work, and why in which sectors. And that already, takes one quite a long way.

Four of these pathways will be discussed here.

CIVIL SOCIETY, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, COMMON NORMS AND RULES, AND STATES

The first pathway of change is one by which civil society coalitions effectively mobilize and succeed in initiating change if, and only if, they are supported by, linked to and championed by progressive states of one kind or another which focus on significant issues. Social movements and civil society by itself are hugely powerful vehicles of protest, but they rarely yield significant policy and institutional change unless they are connected to political power one way or another. The Arab Spring is an excellent example. In 2011, the West in particular read the Arab Spring as a sea of change, championed by the rise of peoples in the Arab world. Four years later, the Middle East looks far different from what was anticipated.

Success in shifting the terms of policy or institutional change especially at the global level in the 1990s came about as a result of concerted civil society efforts linked to and championed by certain political powers. When activist groups have been able to partner with countries led by particular kinds of progressive governments, significant change has been possible, such as the land mines treaty (Mine Ban Treaty), the creation of the International Criminal Court, the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, the guiding principles of internal dis-

placement and the framework Convention on Tobacco Control. These were all hugely important initiatives that were pushed for by civil society groups and social movements, but they were only able to turn protest into policy when they were championed by particular kinds of state action and governments operating with them at the global level. These movements and initiatives were so successful in the 1990s that they began to alarm the right-wing of American politics who saw them as an infringement of the international system (of international organizations and international law) on the interests of the American political system. Under the Bush Administration, and especially after 9/11, such social movements were significantly weakened through a politically concerted attempt to disorganize the impact of the UN, to replace Kofi Annan by a much less charismatic UN Secretary and to roll back the influence of international institutions and of international law on American interests. This moment was called “The New American Century”. It did not last long, because in a globally interconnected world, you cannot go it alone. Or, if you do go it alone, you will cause mayhem.

The second pathway is that of autonomous and adaptive international institutions. Some international organizations and institutions founded by nation states are able to develop sufficient authority of a distinctive kind that act often to solve problems without recourse to their initial member states or, even in spite of their member states. The WTO dispute resolution mechanism is a good example of this, where it has been able to develop sufficient authority to generate new rules, which were not envisaged by its founding members, for dealing with new disputes.

The third pathway, in many ways, seems to be the most productive avenue of change in the current period in which we live. It is referred to as plurality and diversity of actors and agencies, acting together around common norms and rules. In essence, there are only a number of ways to change the world: You can change the world through bottom up pressure; but that rarely works without coalitions. You can change the world through lateral connections; when organizations have sufficient authority to act. In addition, you can change the world top-down through states, which I will return to in a moment. The third mechanism provides an interesting link between the plurality and diversity of actors and agencies scattered across the world, and common norms and principles, which gives this plurality and diversity coherence. *Gridlock* fo-

cused on the negative effects of fragmentation such that the resultant transaction costs undermine incentives to collaborate. However, there are ways in which fragmentation can be an effective response to the challenges of cooperation.

Why? It works this way: organizations and agencies can act together under conditions that can be efficacious when their actions are shaped by common norms and rules that give coherence to their activities which would otherwise be fragmented. Two important examples of this are human rights and climate governance. Various human rights institutions were created partly to strengthen the role of pro-law, pro-rights bodies within domestic polities across the world elevating their voice to the international level. In other words, the importance of the international regime of human rights elaborated in the 1970s and 80s particularly, is not that those covenants of rights have enforcement capacity, (because in fact, they do not have enforcement capacity, and there is no world court for human rights) – but because they enable a plurality of groups to champion and to use the regime’s framework as a lever against their own national polities. Different groups are able to act around a common platform of human rights because this common framework exists. Without it, they would be much more fragmented. This is similarly the case with climate change. For 20 years, there was an attempt to solve the problem of climate change by creating a new international treaty: a top-down treaty of states that would specify the targets that all states would have to meet in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Twenty years of international negotiations led to catastrophe in Copenhagen: a breakdown in negotiations, and an end to the top-down model of climate governance. From Copenhagen to Paris in 2015, the governance of climate change succumbed to making do with what states offered, and a quest to aggregate the disparate offers of nation states. In a nutshell, the top-down model did not work and the bottom-up model was hopeless. States would only give what they were prepared to offer. This was to change, however with the Paris Agreement. The treaty provides a mechanism whereby the pledges of states are monitored by groups across the world to ensure that they honour them. But there is also a ratchet mechanism built in: while states initially pledge to what they are prepared to meet, under pressure of international opinion and every five years, they return to renegotiate their pledge, making each one more ambitious than the previous. This pledge-and-review system, with a ratchet mechanism

attached to it, is powered by the capacity of civil society (social and political actors) to pressurize states to make sure that they meet their obligations, and that they increase them over time.

It is not yet known whether the Paris Agreement will work, but from what has been witnessed so far, there has emerged an interesting, innovative mechanism that provides a new paradigm for doing business at the global level. President Trump's announcement that the US was going to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, would have, in previous eras, been seen as a calamity in its own right. Yet, what instead followed was a movement to counter-act Trump's plans, led by the states of California and New York, who, linked to a series of private companies, wish to stay committed to the Paris Agreement irrespective of what Washington does. Several universities, and a significant number of U.S companies followed suit shortly after. This is but one instance of the remarkable achievements of coalitions and civil society groups, which are made possible under pre-existing frameworks such as the Paris Agreement of 2015.

The fourth and final avenue of change discussed here are the major powers. States can, of course, be hugely effective initiators of change, but they are typically initiators of change when their core interests are insecure or threatened. It is a core tenet of International Relations theory that when one or more great power(s) has a strong national interest in policies that could create a global public good, they are willing and often able to provide that public good. Hard versions of realist theory see this condition as the only setting in which global goods are likely to be provided. This has been advanced as a major explanation for the post-war global order by Robert Gilpin, in particular. Indeed, this can be seen to work in many settings, such as the fragile P5+1 coalition which prevented the Iranians from developing nuclear weapons. It can be seen in transgovernmental networks like the Financial Action Task Force which is focussed on the prevention of money laundering. It can be seen in efforts to stop piracy around the Horn of Africa. It can also be seen in many other security fields and in the concerted effort to tackle Ebola. Why? In 2014, Ebola broke out in West Africa. By March 2014, Médecins Sans Frontières issued a document which set off the alarm bells, reporting that Ebola was out of control in West Africa, and would lead to a significant death toll. Two months later, health experts began to predict that if nothing was done to tackle Ebola, there would be two million deaths within two

years. Still no action. Within three or four months, deaths multiplied rapidly in West Africa, with thousands of people having contracted the virus, and the fragile states unable to cope. Six months later, two American aid workers contracted Ebola and were returned to the United States. Newspapers sounded the alarm; Obama recognized the issue, promised six billion immediately in research, but he also realised that money was not enough, and that in order to contain Ebola, it is necessary to shore up the logistical capacity of the West African states. Obama therefore did something innovative. He shifted a contingent of marines and relevant equipment to West Africa in such a way which respected the sovereignty of those states. Six thousand marines entered Liberia under the formal control of the Liberian president, and logistical capacity was enhanced through coordinated, concerted action: the capacity to isolate areas with high levels of Ebola, to stop the spread of Ebola, and to begin effective research into the disease. Why was this able to happen? Because the U.S. at that moment it began to sense that its interests were at stake, began to act. Threats to major powers' core interests can therefore provoke very rapid and effective responses, but this typically happens with the onset of security threats of one kind or another, from conflict, to economic to the environment.

CONCLUSION

The pathways through and beyond gridlock listed above are an attempt to identify mechanisms through which effective global change can occur. A number of qualifications must be made: first, as with the gridlock trends, these pathways do not apply to every sector. To fully understand them, you must understand the conditions under which they apply. Secondly, it is important to note the pathways through gridlock may only be partial. There are rarely silver bullets, but a partial response is often better than no response. A late response to Ebola is definitely better than no response at all. Third, different pathways can often interact to combine different and distinct outcomes.

In the aftermath of the Second World War the institutional breakthroughs that occurred provided the momentum for decades of sustained economic growth and geopolitical stability sufficient for the transformation of the world economy, the shift from the Cold War to a multipolar order, and the

rise of new communication and network societies. However, what works then does not work as well now, as gridlock freezes problem-solving capacity in global governance. The search for pathways through and beyond gridlock is a hugely significant task – nationally and globally – if global governance is to be once again effective, responsive, and fit for purpose.

The work outlined above offers a step in trying to unravel a complex set of issues. Although there are, of course, many ways to solve these problems, I have argued here that understanding the contemporary era through the lens of gridlock – and now through the lens of pathways – yields an enormous amount of analytic clarity, which in turn helps us to think about where we are and where we might like to go.

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