

Questioning Nationalism, Globalism and the United Nations. Can It be Reformed

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Theme: [History](#)

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Imagine living through 1945. As World War II ended 75 years ago, the UN was born and two nuclear bombs were dropped on Japan. To commemorate and reflect on these pivotal events, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has created a timeline. Ever since 1945 people, their governments and civilization itself have been faced with a momentous dilemma: how to choose law and cooperation over power and domination. Check out the [WILPF timeline](#), follow the history of that momentous year, and start local discussions of the events that changed our world. For example, release of [The Franck Report](#) on June 11, 1945...

*You might not recognize the name, since the report was kept secret at the time, one of many WWII documents whose un-censored versions only became public decades later. Signed by several prominent nuclear physicists who worked on development of an atomic bomb, **the Franck Report recommended that the US not use the atomic bomb as a weapon** to prompt the surrender of Japan.*

Here are some thoughts on a related topic: Can the UN be reformed? World Order and Cultivating Community

The liberal international order is currently being challenged by populism in nations that built and long supported it. It is also being tested by rising powers, particularly China, and other states that hope to restore their prominence. Some go so far as to say the old order is fractured at the core, which makes a major conflict more likely. At the same time, the world faces a growing number of global challenges that cannot be managed effectively by national governments alone.

The United Nations is still considered by many people as the key feature of this fragile World Order, and is certainly treated as one of its major institutions. When nations don't abide by its resolutions, they are often accused of violating international norms or even law. In short, the UN is assumed to be a global democratic government. But this is at best aspirational, and, in some serious respects, misleading.

The UN Security Council certainly isn't democratic or liberal. Veto power is held by the winners of World War II; large parts of the world have no say. A handful of nations can impose sanctions, with immunity from counterclaims. And even if all other nations acted together, they could not impose sanctions on the Big Five.

So isn't calling the UN General Assembly "the most democratic and representative body" a bit misleading? Beyond the power imbalance already described, India (1.3 billion people) and Luxembourg (613,000) each have one vote! And although the General Assembly passes

all manner of resolutions, its members know there is no credible way to enforce them. Is it democratic when most of the votes are cast by representatives of authoritarian regimes, with leaders who couldn't care less what their people feel? Is it accurate to call the UN liberal when representatives of brazen human rights violators have for years led its human rights bodies?

Given all of this, do nationalists have a valid point when they charge that the UN violates national sovereignty? Shouldn't it at least be more representative? And how about all the international governance carried out by other international organizations, and through informal bodies like the G7, G8, and G20? Their decisions aren't binding on those who dissent, but at least they try to operate by consensus, Is this a more viable way to go?

The world obviously needs stronger, more effective forms of global governance. But it doesn't look ready at the moment to be governed like a liberal democracy. Instead, premature attempts to overcome nationalism have fed populism.

One of the problems may be insufficient community building. People have a basic need for recognition and respect, and these are linked to a sense of identity and community. Since the 1980s the US has tilted too far toward individualism and lost a sense of communal values. If that is part of the problem, does it also point toward a solution?

At the same time we have lost a sense of shared values we have experienced rising alienation, resurgent populism, institutional breakdown, and Donald Trump. It is not a coincidence. But perhaps we can cultivate a greater shared sense of community, even in supranational forums, and eventually extend it to their governing bodies. The trick is how to do it without creating more alienation and pushback.

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