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Response to Galtung

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Response

Arif Jamal

I. Introduction

The first two sections of Dr. Galtung's paper discuss the background of global governance and global democracy, the situation in which the idea of global governance was born, and the problems that global democracy faces. Dr. Galtung then goes on to deal with the mandate and the building blocs of democratic global governance. His point of departure is the United Nations, and he identifies four world citizens: Intergovernmental Organizations, Transnational Corporations, Interpeople Organizations as the world version of Civil Society, and, last, the People themselves. His paper suggests the necessity of adding some more chambers to the already existing United Nations General Assembly before a real democratic world governance can come into being, but, prior to that, he elaborates on the conditions and criteria for participation in a new world governance.

II. Shortcomings

Dr. Galtung's paper takes the United Nations as a beginning point even though the world body has come to be seen as a partisan forum. I feel that he assigns too big a role to the Intergovernmental Organizations, Transnational Corporations, and Interpeople Organizations in the global governance. The People themselves are not the pivot of the global governance, and his expectations that the media play a mediative role are too high. In addition, I believe Dr. Galtung's paper ignores the historical cleavages between the East and West, or, roughly, between the Muslim and the Christian worlds, and how to overcome those traditional cleavages. Although the Crusades are part of long-gone history, the hatred that spawned them still simmers while an aftertaste of their actions continues to cause pain. Similarly, he leaves out the historical gulf between black and white people and how to overcome that.

In the following pages, I will briefly describe the post–Cold War order and suggest how this planet can be made more amenable to human civilization. The post–Cold War world is different from the pre–Cold War international political system in only two major respects. First, the United States has emerged as the supreme military power. Second, the remaining components of the international political system are becoming more aligned with the new international arrangements.

III. The Unipolar Military Order

The most visible component of the post–Cold War world order is the emergence of the United States as the sole military power with uncontested ambitions and capabilities across the globe. Although there are other aspiring and/or potential military powers (such as the Germany-led European Union, Japan, China, etc.), the United States is likely to remain the world’s most powerful state in the foreseeable future. Moreover, all of the possible competitors, with the exception of China, have a close and collaborative rather than antagonistic relationship with the U.S.

While this new development in contemporary history underscores the end of nuclear confrontation between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the acute probabilities of wars between the West and the Third World and among the Third World countries themselves remain real. In certain parts of the world, the end of the Cold War has, in fact, enhanced the sense of insecurity. The United States’ military power is perceived as a great threat to the security of small nations. This has been particularly true in the Muslim World—which constitutes one-fourth of humankind—since the U.S. invasion and destruction of Iraq in 1991. Notwithstanding the explanations given by the West for the Second Gulf War, many in the Muslim World believe that it was a show of military force by the United States in the Third World. This event is taken as a message from the U.S. that its interests around the globe are unassailable, even if the consequence is a horrendous war. For many, then, the war was imposed on Iraq even though American interests could have been achieved through diplomacy.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq has widened the historic East-West gulf that began with the Medieval Crusades. The thinking of the pro-American rulers in the Muslim world notwithstanding, it is widely believed among the Muslim peoples that the ultimate objective of the war was the destruction of an emerging Islamic military power—one that could challenge Israel and U.S. ambitions in the Arab world. Moreover, it is assumed by many that the West cannot tolerate an Islamic state acquiring nuclear capability and that Iraq was punished for trying to do so. Although Saddam Hussein and his clique are despised as a bunch of brutal dictators, they temporarily became heroes in the eyes of many in the Muslim world during the Second Gulf War. Saddam Hussein was perceived as a Third World leader who could challenge U.S. military power in the region. In my own country, Pakistan, fear has been expressed that we will face a similar fate if we do not conform to U.S. nuclear policies and strategic interests.

IV. Single Global Market

The globalization processes of economic life, which started with the colonization of many zones of the planet by European powers in the sixteenth century, is nearing its apogee at the onset of the twenty-first century. Although the international actors have changed, the system remains the same as it continues to gather momentum; that is, the monopoly on world resources and markets by a handful of countries who command capital and technology. The prices of the goods manufactured for the world market are still determined in the developed world. The role of the colonial states has been largely assumed by the transnational corporations in the new world order, ready to be defended by their states when that becomes necessary. The interest of General Motors is still the interest of the United States.

Although force was needed to keep peace in the colonies, the peacekeeping role has been assigned to these countries' rulers, who are highly dependent upon the West to remain in power. Any serious show of independent thinking and autonomy on the part of these rulers is costly. Such manipulation is conducted by supporting the national rivals (e.g., armies or political parties) or by direct intervention. Consequently, the essential rela-

tionship remains unchanged and the Third World continues to serve the egotistical designs and, increasingly, consumerist appetite of the dominant forces of globalization.

V. The Unipolar Information Order

Another field in which the West, particularly the United States, has established a sort of monopoly is the media. The world media have come to be nothing more than the Western media. Honorable few and obscure exceptions notwithstanding, the Western, particularly American, media follow closely the interests of their respective states as well as prop the ethos of the prevalent international system. This is particularly obvious in the case of the American media, which very often seem an adjunct of the State Department and the Pentagon. This point was brought home during the Second Gulf War. Hence, the American media, under the tight directives of the Pentagon, deprived its readers and viewers of the brutalities committed by the U.S. in Iraq. Covering the war in Iraq from Saudi Arabia and under the watchful eyes of the military is an extraordinary example of capitulation. Moreover, Iraq, like Afghanistan, has been abandoned by the Western media, although the situation in both countries is as newsworthy as it was at the height of Western fixation.

During the Cold War, the Western media — like the Western states — saw the world as black and white: the “free world” vs. the “evil empire.” Everything associated with communism was bad and everything associated with the “free” world good. While the Polish dissidents became folk heroes in the 1980s, the repression in my country — as in most of the American client states — by an American-supported military ruler was hardly news in the Western media. Those were the days when the U.S. supported more than fifty military dictatorships around the world, but the American media paid scant attention.

Although lack of democracy in the communist world was a frequently and widely discussed subject in the Western media, the American people were not informed of the savagery during the U.S.-supported Shah’s rule in Iran. However, exaggerated stories about repression under the Islamic order were on the lips of everyone in the West. Iran is now consistently condemned for

trying to export “Islam,” but the United States is praised for exporting “democracy.” Iran is portrayed as the enemy of the West and of the United States in the Western media, but the readers in the West are never informed about the historical circumstances that caused the poisoning of the relationship. The CIA-inspired overthrow of the nationalist and democratic government of Prime Minister Mussadegh, the return of the Shah and subsequent institutionalization of repression, American support of the Shah, and American efforts to undermine the post-Shah governments in Iran are a sort of taboo in the American press.

Third World countries are dependent upon the Western media for world news, but all they get is the Western perspective. Billions of dollars have recently been invested in occupying the air waves around the globe. Dozens of channels beamed from satellites have crowded out any possibilities of competition from non-Western media. Third World media have not developed to the point of playing a global role because there is little investment forthcoming, and repressive regimes crush them brutally.

VI. The United Nations and Global Governance

For the majority of the peoples living in the Third World, the United Nations is dead. The late world body is buried in Sarajevo, the bleeding capitol of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The UN received the first of a series of fatal blows when it authorized the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 1991. Since then, in the minds of peoples throughout the Third World, the UN has come to be associated with the U.S. administration, the State Department, and the Pentagon. The world body did perform some of its tasks very well earlier, but it seems unable to handle the new pressures. The vicissitudes of the post-Cold War world have finally reduced the UN to what it has been always—a noble idea often vitiated and soiled by imperialist ambitions and acts.

I could not agree more with Dr. Galtung that democracies are better than nondemocracies and that they do not necessarily behave in a democratic manner when it comes to their foreign policies. I could not disagree with him on the thesis that without global democracy, peacefulness and other benefits would not

accrue to the world at large. However, I would argue that global governance, whose main constituents are not the people(s) of the world, would not be democratic. The national or international political systems, such as those that have existed in recorded modern world history and whose primary constituents are not citizens of legitimate polities, only make the lives of human beings more painful. Experience shows us that states have their own interests, which they pursue and for which they employ almost every arm of the state to achieve; however, those who succeed are usually those with better firepower. This factor has been most significant in the failure of the United Nations.

Transnational Corporations (TNCs) pursue only their economic interests at the global level. As some of these corporations have grown larger than most states, they have emerged as rival entities on the world scene. At the national level, chambers of commerce and industry play the same role. Other economic actors, national or international, play similar roles. For that reason, they cannot be given a major role in governing the world if governance means "soft government."

The role of the Nongovernment Organizations (NGOs) has not been transparent either. Many Third World experiences show that NGOs are divided into two categories. First are those which have been playing a role in the development of their nations. These were established long before the idea became a fad accompanying the spread of free market theories. Second are those NGOs which mushroomed with the commencement of direct aid by the developed world to NGOs. Some of these are simply corrupt organizations while others serve the interests of the donor countries in their respective areas of influence.

The world media, at this juncture, also fail to pass the criteria of participation in global governance. Given the fact that the media are a necessary estate in a democratic community, they must evolve to play their role as the world becomes more democratic. This will require a sense of universality that distances the major networks and press from the present subservience to capital and nation. This is a tall order.

If, according to Dr. Galtung, only the People(s) can play the major role in establishing a "soft" governance, there are few models that can serve as points of departure. The incipient European Union (EU) is perhaps one experiment. Early evidence

shows that the participation of the People(s) via direct election of their members to the European Parliament has led to further democratization in the Western European societies as well as to the reduction of the threat of war among the member countries. On the other hand, the EU has not been able to overcome its nondemocratic behavior toward the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. A major illustration is the treatment of people from Asia, Africa, and Latin America who live in the territory of the EU. Neo-Nazism and racism against "foreigners," some of them born in these countries, are on the rise and remain a source of great worry.

All of this shows that democratic relationships between nations and individuals can exist only among equals. Hence, a great deal of work has to be done in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in order to move toward the vision set by Dr. Galtung. Regional organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and others could play a major role in shaping the future world order if they helped create a democratic and powerful region equal with, for example, the EU. In the end, however, that can be achieved only by the struggle of the peoples in these countries to make their governments more accountable and economies more productive and just.

Finally, the story of some of the better democracies such as Switzerland and the Nordic countries can also serve as guiding examples to make a better world order. In Switzerland, for instance, the people participate in decision-making more directly than in other country, while the politics of the Nordic countries exude accountability and tolerance.

The deep and historic cleavages between the East and West, or Christian and non-Christian (particularly Muslim), worlds will not be easy to overcome. However, a parity of economic and political power, accompanied by mutual civilizational respect and adherence to the founding principles of the UN, should equip us to fashion a drastically different world order than we have been accustomed to. The road to global democratic governance is long and shot with pitfalls; nevertheless, Dr. Galtung's reflections and specific suggestions are daring and in the right direction.