

"Walker's World: Emerging global government?"

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"It takes a bold man to find any kind of silver lining in the dark clouds that have gathered over the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq and the Bush administration's faltering war on terrorism. But maybe we are all looking in the wrong place.

Amitai Etzioni is one of the most valuable of public intellectuals because he is constantly engaged in the real world of politics. He was an adviser to the Carter administration in the 1970s, and his pioneering development of the "communitarian" movement, with its stress on civic responsibilities as well as rights, was one of the few hard elements in that soft and fuzzy "Third Way" thinking that attracted both the Clinton administration and Britain's Tony Blair. It also launched the Third Way seminars that became a regular meeting ground for moderate left American and European political leaders.

Etzioni, now a professor at George Washington University, has taken his communitarian thinking to the international stage, and in a new book "From Empire to Community" stands back from the gloom in Iraq and the frustration of the hunt for Osama bin Laden and claims to see a far brighter picture.

To summarize his argument, Etzioni suggests that in the global anti-terrorism coalition, in which over 140 countries are more or less formally involved, we are seeing the emergence of a new "Global Safety Authority" in which governments are banding together to share intelligence information, to make arrests, to track terrorist finances and so on. There is already an enforcement arm, Etzioni notes, in the proliferation security initiative, through which national armed forces band together to search and seize on the high seas ships suspected of carrying nuclear contraband.

Etzioni then notes that similar transnational authorities and structures have become established in other sectors of global interchange. He cites commerce, with the World Trade Organization. He cites finance, with the Bank for International Settlements and the International Accounting Standards Committee and the Basle central bankers committee. He cites health, with the World Health Organization's new powers (a direct result of the SARS crisis) to deal directly with local health authorities rather than going through a national government. He also cites new agreements on biodiversity, on environmental pollution, on controls against intellectual piracy and Internet fraud and international agreements against the trafficking in women or in pedophilia.

Put all these together, Etzioni suggests, and "the building blocks of a new global architecture" begin to emerge. Some are fledgling and some are well established; some

are controversial or faltering, like the Kyoto Protocol on global warming or the International Criminal Court. But as a whole, a complex and multilayered structure of global governance based on governmental consent and upon common interests is growing before our eyes. Moreover, these structures of global governance are widely seen as legitimate, since they stem from decisions taken freely by elected or established governments, and so many of them are endorsed by or are developing in association with the United Nations.

Many of the Bush administration's problems in Iraq, Etzioni points out, come from the lack of a clear U.N. mandate of legitimacy. As a result, he suggests that the "new American empire lasted just six months, from March of 2003 when the war started until September" -- when it began to realize that the course might not be sustainable without allies, without legitimacy and with wavering public support both at home and in Iraq.

"I expect that in the near future, while the U.S. will not give up its role as the superpower, it will invest more of its power in multilateral and legitimate endeavors -- the war against terrorism and deproliferation -- which provide a foundation for a Global Security Authority," Etzioni writes.

More controversially, he goes on: "That authority is laying the groundwork for a global state, whose first duty -- like that of all states -- is to protect the safety of people living on its territory."

The relationship of this emerging system with the United Nations is tricky. Etzioni sees the United States as "a legitimator, a major source of soft power ... (But) we should not overlook the fact that the U.N., without the hard power of the U.S. and others is often ineffectual. By itself, the U.N. is not even the beginning of a world government. However, in conjunction with the powers that be, it can be. There is much evidence to suggest that an increased measure of global governance is not only badly needed, but also slowly evolving."

This is a genuinely interesting and original idea, however much it may alarm those in Washington and elsewhere who insist on the absolutes of national sovereignty. And the fact that many of these individual structures of global management are growing spontaneously because there is a clear need for them might ease the fears of those who suspect the United Nations and its works, and who question the very existence of some nebulous global community. Traditional conservatives who admire Adam Smith might assume that a kind of invisible hand seems to be at work, fostering the emergence of these ad hoc international agreements and various institutions in response to market demand.

The fact is that Etzioni is right. These structures are emerging, and if the trend continues, the direction does point to a system of global governance. The real question is whether any one government or agency or group of governments will be able to take the essential next step, which will be to think about co-coordinating these new structures, and codifying the wide range of institutions and mechanisms into something more coherent.

It will be at that point that the supporters and opponents of world government will start to clash.

So far, because most of these new structures have emerged to deal with an evident need, such as terrorism, or because governments have self-interest in honest accounting procedures and consensual rules on world trade and common action against health epidemics and other transnational threats, we have not yet had much of a debate about global government. Maybe it's about time we did."