
The Need to Rethink Borders

World federalists hold before us the vision of a unified mankind living in peace under a just world order. . . . The heart of their program—a world under law—is realistic and attainable.

—U Thant
Former UN Secretary-General

In the first chapter we discussed the breathtaking image of the earth as seen from deep space by the Apollo astronauts, and we also allude to it on the cover of this book. Now bring yourself back to this pristine image and the serene moment experienced by the Apollo crew upon seeing the earth as a whole for the first time. Notice the obvious fact that our sphere of habitation is completely lacking in lines of political separation. Remind yourself that these so-called national borders are the creations of the human mind—they are nothing more than political artifacts that often serve to divide humanity. We have made borders into instruments of abuse and repression, and in this chapter we will envision how we can *unmake* them.

In an era where national sovereignty reigns supreme, borders may mark a country's sovereign territory but they also divide ordinary human beings from one another; they contribute to the delusion that humanity is not truly "one people." They create an "us" versus "them" mentality that can lead to

war. A border can also function to the detriment of the commerce and culture of populations on each side of it, who often have more in common with each other than they know. Borders ultimately create the illusion of national sovereignty—when in reality sovereignty belongs to the people of the world in relation to the planet as a whole.

Politicians and dictators alike have understood borders to be a proper line of defense for a country, and thus for several millennia people have raised armies to hold the line and keep invaders out. Borders permit the control of trade and especially today offer a way to control the flow of immigrants, illegal drugs, and terrorists. National borders may also define the presence of a particular culture, although this notion is barely viable in today's interconnected global society. At its worst, some countries use borders like the walls of a prison to keep their own citizens in. Throughout the last century communist regimes routinely used borders to abuse their populations. When in 1961 East Germany built the Berlin Wall, this border became a global symbol of the struggle for the right of free passage.

Borders in the era of global democratic government will become more like the borders between states or provinces. Paradoxically, a world government will empower local and national governments to handle their own problems by removing the burden of large military expenditures and providing development assistance. In other words, global problems will finally be handled at the global level based on the sovereignty of the world's people; national and local problems will be handled where *they* occur based on the principle of self-determination and subsidiarity. This “democratic new world order” will allow the free movement of world citizens, ideas, and commerce around the globe.

Borders in today's world of relative anarchy too often lead to human suffering. For example, many people die every year trying to get into the United States; whether it be Cubans and Haitians on small boats, Chinese on cargo ships, or Mexicans in trucks, the inability of people to emigrate and travel freely is a human tragedy. The US and many other countries are still living down the shame of denying admittance to millions of Jews who were fleeing the Holocaust and had to face the gas chambers instead. There are still many stateless refugees who have left their countries due to war or other threats of harm, such as the millions of Afghans who left their country during the twenty years of its civil war, or the millions of Palestinians still living without a sovereign government. With few countries willing to take in refugees, many such stateless people live in temporary camps without full rights of citizenship. In a world governed by law under the sovereignty of humankind, these people would always carry with them their constitutionally guaranteed rights as world citizens.

In a society with open borders, countries would be more engaged in the world and its problems. Our false sense of security and artificial attitude of isolation would disappear. No country can be safe if the rest of the world is in turmoil. In reality, all countries and peoples of the world are interdependent and interconnected. We are all in this together no matter what nationality we call ourselves—our fates are one.

As a global federation is formed, countries within the federation will naturally reduce or eliminate border restrictions, and this will be made possible by the increased sense of security resulting from life under the rule of law. Yes, borders will still exist as the defining lines between countries. They will mark where one government is in charge versus another and they will indicate where a particular set of laws applies in

accord with national traditions of governance. But these borders will be open, just as the borders between counties or provinces within a country are open. A global democratic government will have the power to guarantee freedom of passage around the world and regulate the resettlement of refugees according to law. It will also guarantee that all human beings have a basic right to leave their country of origin and to return to it, ensuring that no country becomes a prison for its citizens.

Migration and trade issues need a global solution

There is generally little pressure for people to migrate between countries with similar levels of political freedom and standards of living. For example, when the borders of the original EU countries were opened up, there were no major migrations. But with the recent addition to the EU of Eastern European countries, migration to the West is now occurring.

With populations increasing dramatically in the developing countries, we can expect that migration to the developed world will become a more pressing issue in the future. The US-Mexico border is a prime example of a meeting place between these two worlds. The US offers jobs, educational opportunities, and a lifestyle that act as a magnet pulling people in. The result: The US has approximately eight to nine million illegal immigrants living within its borders and receives about 500,000 illegal immigrants per year, according to US Census Bureau estimates.¹ Even with a border that has been greatly strengthened and militarized by the US through the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper, people still risk death to get from Mexico to the United States.

US policy towards Mexican immigration is a confused and contradictory assemblage of laws. The US occasionally

gives amnesty and rarely prosecutes employers of illegal workers. In reality, some of these so-called illegal aliens are needed because they do jobs Americans are not willing to do, such as farm labor.

Meanwhile, vast amounts of money are spent to defend this porous border. These resources would be better spent getting to the heart of the problem: overpopulation, poverty, and corruption in Mexico and other developing countries. The best thing the US could do to stem the tide of immigrants coming from Mexico and other developing countries would be to launch a massive campaign of foreign aid for development, political reform, and family planning assistance to Mexico and the rest of the developing world. Only by creating economic opportunities and empowering people in the developing countries will tension on the border be reduced. Putting up concrete and barbed wire doesn't help either side.

The approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by Canada, the US, and Mexico in 1994 created a freer trade policy between these three countries, and was hailed as a step toward more open borders for large corporations. Similar legislation to extend free trade policies to all countries in the Western Hemisphere, excepting Cuba, is now under negotiation. While such free trade agreements are important in creating a global society, it is crucial that provisions be included that ensure labor rights and environmental protection for the member nations. Under NAFTA, many US corporations move their operations to Mexico simply to avoid environmental regulation in the US. That represents a step backward for both peoples. A democratic world government would create uniform global laws that would regulate world trade—and especially the behavior of multinational corporations, wherever they operate.

The EU is setting the stage for more open borders

Are open borders realistic? One need only look to Europe to answer that question. Borders similar to those between states in the US still exist among EU members, but these countries have drastically reduced or eliminated border restrictions, with positive results. The EU uses a controlled process that minimizes massive population movements, beginning with easing of restrictions and economic assistance and progressing to open borders. People, money, and commerce now move more easily between countries. A citizen of the EU can now live or work anywhere in the EU. The elimination of border restrictions is a remarkable achievement on a continent that was once the worst killing field of the twentieth century.

Europe has set an example by showing that border restrictions can be eased through peaceful negotiations. But in order to open up borders worldwide to achieve international peace and prosperity, the world must first find ways to reduce tensions among nations that cause excessive migration or even infiltration by terrorists. The causes of international friction—poverty, rapid population growth, war, and political corruption and repression—must be addressed by the organized response of a global government.

In the meantime, one way to begin reducing cross-border tensions and the terrorist threat is for America—the world's richest and most influential country—to cut its military budget and expand its foreign development aid budget. The embarrassing fact is that US government foreign aid is a tiny fraction of the Pentagon's budget. The US needs to realize that having prosperous and stable neighbors is crucial in an interdependent world in which one country's problems quickly become another's. Foreign aid can spur the development of

prosperous, democratic, peace-loving societies; one need only look at what the US did to remake Japan and Europe after World War II. The Marshall Plan in Europe created a democratic Western Europe out of rubble. Japan was also rebuilt into an economic and democratic powerhouse. Sadly, the US has forgotten this lesson. It is now focused on military “defense” rather than empowering the people of the developing countries, to its own and the world’s detriment.

The world is localizing and globalizing at the same time

The redrawing of borders to create new or expanded political entities has been going on since the beginning of recorded history. National borders are still unstable in some regions, as new countries are created or existing boundaries are changed through civil war or other means. Many countries continue to suffer from ongoing border disputes, either with other countries or, more typically, with separatist groups within their own borders. As a global federation gains power, it will play a major role in settling these disputes throughout the world.

Racial, ethnic, and cultural groups all over the world crave autonomy—from Quebec to Palestine to Chechnya. No country, people, or tribe wants to be controlled by another group. This same desire for self-determination has been the force behind decolonization around the world, including the independence of America from Britain more than two centuries ago. In the decades after WWII, many colonies, such as Algeria, India, and Vietnam, just to name a few, fought for and won their independence. The Soviet Union’s recent breakup into independent nations in a relatively short period of time

was one of the most significant political events of the last fifty years.

Separatist movements can be sources of bloody conflict, as witnessed in the war in Chechnya and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. As more groups around the world demand autonomy, the inevitable disputes will require a world court with the power to enforce its decisions to keep the peace. For example, a world court could play a constructive, lifesaving role in settling the ongoing dispute over Kashmir between two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan.

A genuine world court would also provide the best solution to the most intractable and dangerous dispute of our time, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A global government could order the parties to adjudicate the conflict by bringing evidence and arguments before the finest jurists in the world, who would then impose a settlement on the basis of the legitimacy of global law. When issues like these can be settled by the rule of law rather than by the rule of force, the world will have taken a great step forward.

The often just demands of such groups for self-determination do tend to fragment sovereignty. But the desire for independence does not preclude these new entities from coming together in cooperation at a global level. The UN started with fifty countries and now has 191 members, and many of these new members are countries that were created after the founding of the UN. By the same token, Eastern European nations that recently gained independence are just as quickly joining the European Union. Even NATO has expanded greatly in the years since the breakup of the Soviet Union. (It now includes countries that used to be part of the

Soviet bloc, such as Poland, Romania, and even countries that were part of the Soviet Union, such as Estonia and Latvia.) Our world is moving toward increased local control, free trade, and more open borders, while at the same time countries are increasingly seeking international protection and improvements in the enforcement of international law, such as the Kyoto Treaty or the ICC.

Paradoxically, the world is becoming more representative of true interests at the local level, yet politics and law are “going global.” This pattern of development is leading toward a functional global government. Imagine this: The representatives to the coming world legislature will hail from hundreds of states and other jurisdictions. Their territorial integrity will be upheld or peacefully adjusted by the world government through which they create global legislation!

Even after a functioning world court under a global constitution exists—or *because* one comes into existence—some countries will be broken apart as a result of the demands of separatist movements. These people will want local control of local issues, but they will also ask for the protection of the federation of nations. A global government, if intelligently designed and implemented, could provide that protection while allowing local freedom.

As we have noted in a previous chapter, the orderly and peaceful integration of different levels of legitimate sovereignty is the genius of the idea of world federation. By lawfully settling the territorial and border disputes of the world’s nations one at a time and by creating peace between neighbors, we can build a world based on reason and law rather than on might and anarchy.

There's only one truth on this planet: that we are all one. What I'd like to do before I die is bring people closer to the same reality that John Coltrane and Bob Marley were trying to bring people to—a reality of no borders, one race, one body, where we all take responsibility that nobody starves to death tomorrow morning.

—Carlos Santana