

ON COPENHAGEN

In the evening of December 18, 2009, an increasingly shaky world order came to the end of the road. Seventeen years of climate negotiations - via Kyoto - had collapsed. The photographs documented the leaders' despair, tormented by both their will and their inability to deliver the deal they know the world needs.



In my view, the Copenhagen process had no chance of success. If historian Barbara Tuchman were alive today she would have added another chapter to her book, "The March of Folly," on humanity's capacity for collective follies throughout history.

Copenhagen provides yet more evidence that the current constitutional regimes cannot govern the problems of our globalized reality. The financial crisis showed this. As does the inability to reach a free trade agreement, to overcome poverty, terrorism, energy, migration ...

The world today works in tightly interwoven, interactive and trans-boundary systems: finance, economics, production, logistics, information... But power is still organized piecemeal and parceled out in individual nations, emerging through historical accidents and political developments. The

world is badly governed as a result of the continual struggle of nations to assert their own interests. No nation, no institution possesses the legitimacy to govern the whole.

We presume that conflicts are to be resolved in negotiations, which are ultimately based on sovereignty postulates. It was the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that gave birth to the order built on the principle of national sovereignty. But history teaches us that no world order lasts forever. Its legitimacy lasts only as long as it delivers a balance of power, growth, and is good at solving problems. The current regime, formulated after World War II, has proved ineffective as globalization moved some of the prerequisites for solutions to the supranational level.

In no other area is this clearer than on the environment and climate change. The biosphere is itself a planetary, adaptive, interactive, constantly changing and self-regulating system. It is an indivisible whole. Nature does not logically divide into nations. You cannot fix the seas alone, the forests on their own or the environment the atmospheric CO₂ balance, or the interaction between biodiversity and ecosystem productivity on their own.

The negotiating process on climate issue, shaped by the UNFCCC, had the impossible task of reconciling the solution of an extremely complex geophysical problem with the solution of a political problem: to get 192 nations to agree, based on everyone's own national interests, goals, means and allocation of responsibilities for actions to be taken for years to come. The negotiation process was designed based on the notion that the ecological problem could be resolved through political compromises between national geopolitical, hegemonic, economic and social interests.

But if 192 nations would have agreed on the "perfect agreement," the agreement would have lacked the financial supervisory authority, police and military powers that could correct those nations which, for various reasons, may not meet the commitments and goals.

The negotiations tried to solve the wrong problem: to reach the political compromises which would primarily secure the hegemonic interests of the major powers. The real problem to solve was to re-stabilize the biosphere. Actions must be taken based on the ecological system conditions, not by the relative bargaining power of nations and power politics.

All of the UN environmental conferences and conventions demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the current system of governance of global systemic problems. Kyoto became a paper tiger, torn apart by an anarchistic lack of mutual solidarity among nations. Of some 500 international agreements only a handful are followed to the letter. A nearby example for Sweden is the Baltic Sea.

For a couple of centuries, science and learning have been characterized by a reductionist method. Man has sought to know more about more and more fragmented phenomenon. That's why we say

that the devil is in the details. But the financial crisis and environmental crisis revealed that the real devil is in the system. Most important is to understand the whole picture, how things are linked. It is only then that we can shape or repair the system for safety and resilience.

It is also an absurdity that national leaders should have their very own scientific advisers. Ecosystems are not national, but a large part of the research is. The IPCC was a promising initiative. But its scientific credibility is questioned along with its political neutrality. The IPCC cringes under the criticism.

Globalization's reality of mutual global dependencies has outmoded current constitutional maps. The world does not have the mechanisms needed to solve today's major challenges. Therein lies the growing danger for conflicts and war.

In the field of economics, the financial crisis showed that current institutions and regulatory frameworks were not sufficient to predict or manage the financial risks that the densification of global dependencies had created. In the 1970s the G5 became the G8, which became the G20. But the G20 is an informal grouping, not rooted in democratic foundations. The G20 does not have close contact with an electorate or local opinion. The G20 also sees the problem only from one, but of course, very important point of view.

Boundaries set limits for political solidarity. If the world were a single country, it could never operate politically with the gaps, inequalities, exploitation of man and nature which are today's reality. The international system's imperfection in relation to today's reality is at the heart of tomorrow's conflicts. This came to the surface in Copenhagen.

President Roosevelt convened his closest confidants the week after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. He asked them to begin thinking immediately about how the world should be structured for peaceful coexistence in the peace to come. He took - pre-actively - responsibility for the future.

Therefore, the debacle in Copenhagen should be taken for what it actually is, the collapse of already bygone institutions and mechanisms to reach agreement. The world now needs new configurations that secure economic growth, social stability and ecological re-stabilization in an ongoing, globalizing world. The task is enormous. And one that no nation can do alone

The important question to ask is not what went wrong in Copenhagen, but how a democratically grounded order will be formed in this new world.

It is time for answers to the question: How on earth can we live together - we are humans and we are with nature?

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