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Jean-Marc Coicaud

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contact@ciglob.org

Santiago - Chile



Does it Make Sense to Try Reconciling the National Interest and Global Justice Agendas?

Jean-Marc Coicaud¹

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Abstract

The article will address this question and will attempt to give it sound answers. In order to do so, the article will tackle the following issues: What are national interest and global justice, and what have been their relations so far? What are the challenges concerning their reconciliation, in general and today? In the current situation, what are the benefits that could be generated by such a reconciliation? How could it happen and what the chances for this to happen?

Keywords National interest · Justice · International justice · Global justice · Interdependence · Future · Status quo · International distribution of power · Reconciliation

In the context of modern history and, more specifically in the context of modern history as influenced by the power of the West, national interest has been part of global politics since the nation-state has become one of the pillars of the international system and international law. It may have been tamed a bit in the context of international and regional organizations that are oriented toward international cooperation, such as the United Nations or the European Union, but even in this context it continues to play a role and indeed often a decisive one. This is largely due to the fact that the international system and the international law that expresses and serves it are structured around a national bent. They are built around the state, in the process putting the national interest front and center. This is one of the legacies of the Westphalia system, a system that has somewhat changed in the past decades with the impact of human rights, which makes individuals international right holders, but continues to dominate the international landscape. As such, far from receding in recent years, the logic of the national interest remains extremely important, and in fact, over the past several years it seems even to have gained in significance. The

✉ Jean-Marc Coicaud
jeanmarc.coicaud@rutgers.edu

¹ Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA

insistence of the new President of the United States, Donald Trump, in making the US national interest the sole focus of his foreign policy is a case in point.

Against this background, the evolution of the international system and the challenges it is facing currently manifest two opposite trends. On the one hand, given the growing interdependence of countries (globalization) and the global nature of a number of problems (e.g., climate change), now perhaps more than ever it would seem required for countries to work together and take seriously the demands of justice at the global level. On the other hand, states are increasingly tempted to focus first and foremost on their national interest and the formulation of policies essentially shaped by it. As just one example of this latter trend, the USA and China appear presently to be increasingly locked into a tense relationship of strategic competition at the heart of which is the pursuit of their respective national interests.

Hence, the following questions: Does it make sense to try reconciling the national interest and global justice agendas? Is such reconciliation possible and is it even a desirable path? And if so, how could this happen? This article explores these issues.

In order to address these questions, the article is organized into five sections: First, it offers a clarification of the meaning of the notions of national interest and global justice. Second, it describes how traditionally the relationship between national interest and global justice has been more a matter of tension than of alignment. Third, the article reviews some of the factors that call for maintaining the traditional gap between national interest and global justice and those that militate for a rapprochement. Fourth, based on the current features of the international system and the position nation-states occupy in it, it argues that rather than viewing the demands of national interest and global justice as antagonistic, or even deepening the gap between them, there is much to gain in attempting a rapprochement between the two. In the process, the article explores the methodology that could be used to achieve this result. Fifth, the article concludes with reflections on the likelihood of this occurrence.

1 National Interest and Global Justice

The aim of this section is to clarify the meaning of the notions of national interest and global justice. It begins by focusing on the national interest and continues with outlining some of the key features of global justice.

1.1 On National Interest

National interest is the aggregation of the interests of a country as it is constituted in a state.¹ Historically, at least in the Western world, the emergence of the national interest has echoed the emergence of the state as a unit of reference in national and

¹ For a good introduction to the notion of national interest, in general and the contemporary context, consult Robert Chaouad, “Le paradoxe de l’intérêt national”, in *RIS. La Revue Internationale et Stratégique* (Paris, No. 105, spring 2017).

international politics and law. In the process, the defense of the national interest has come to mean signify the defense of national sovereignty. Especially with the development of democratic ideas and ideals and what this meant for what the state owes to the well-being of its people, such aggregation of interests in the national interest understood as national sovereignty came to include the defense of the interests of the citizens of the country as well.

From this perspective, the interests aggregated in the national interest always amount to and represent strategic areas and assets, i.e., areas and assets a country can and should mobilize and defend in priority in order to preserve as much as possible its present and future integrity. These strategic areas and interests entail economic, political, military, cultural, natural resources, technological, and other interests that are brought together by the state in a holistic and somewhat unified vision that defines the national interest and that of its inhabitants.

Against this background, the task of the state is to ensure the defense of the national interest and that of its people in the midst of a multiplicity of constraints, internal and external. At the domestic level, the role of the state is to optimize and integrate the human, economic, natural, and other resources of the country. Internationally, looking after the national interest calls for managing in the best way possible the manner in which the nation competes and cooperates with other countries. The importance of this second aspect in the conception and practice of the national interest is illustrated by the attention given to its role in international life. In this regard, it is first and foremost within the framework of the relations among states and the deployment of their foreign policy, including in terms of military policy, that the concept of national interest has been principally conceptualized and deployed.

Among the strategic interests that enter into the composition of the national interest, we find areas and elements that, although themselves evolving, tend to maintain their relevance over time, as well as other elements that acquire crucial importance as the environment in which the nation-state functions transforms. Economic and military interests are among the elements that tend to be at the center of the politics and policies of national interest that remain relevant for the national interest over time. Economic stability and dynamism are indeed crucial for the well-being of a country and its population and its ability to maintain themselves. Military capability is equally important in the event competition among countries descend into conflict. The cultural dimension tends also to be one of the permanent features of the national interest insofar as it creates a vibrant narrative for a country and provides a frame of reference for how it views its relations with other countries. In this regard, cultural diplomacy is a form of ensuring its security by exercising “soft power” and influencing other countries.

In contrast to these factors of continuing relevance to the national interest, other considerations vary in their importance, particularly in relation to the evolution of technology. Today, for instance, the national interest of a country ignores at its own peril the deterritorialization and digitalization of the world, with both the possibilities and dangers these phenomena imply for its evolution. Changes in values of reference, such as human rights values, can affect also how the national interest is conceived and practiced. For example, a few centuries or even a few decades ago, a powerful nation could afford to disregard the rights of people beyond its

borders (especially when these people were not viewed as belonging to the «civilized world») without impairing its national interest. Ignoring those rights may even have been seen as the natural course of action for powerful countries and their national interests. Today, namely because of the international norms of human rights, the situation is slightly different. Although the price to pay for human rights violations is not generally high, especially for powerful countries, there is some reputational cost associated with ignoring altogether human rights beyond borders, which can negatively affect a country's national interest.

Before turning to the notion of global justice, I will add here two more considerations on the question of the national interest. They concern, first, the agreement on and conduct of the national interest and, second, the projection of the national interest.

Concerning the identification and conduct of the national interest, beyond the recognition that there are areas and elements that matter to the national interest, obtaining agreement on the specificities of the national interest and how to implement them is not always easy in a national context. This is the case when interests compete for attention and where social and political integration are unbalanced, fragmented, or in process of denationalization. Imbalance and its impact on the national interest arise where an economic and political elite monopolizes power in such a way that it equates its interest with the national interest and imposes it upon the rest of the country and its population. In time this type of attitude is destined to undermine the credibility and sustainability of the national interest, and even jeopardizes the continued existence of the country itself. Fragmentation of the national interest can occur when state institutions are unable to balance and adjudicate among the different interests at play and define a coherent course of action that appears legitimate to all. As for denationalization, the agreement on and conduct of the national interest can indeed be a challenge when a significant amount of the major economic actors of a country become transnational and begin to place their private transnational interests above their contribution to their country of origin. Arguably, this phenomenon is one of the problems faced by a number of Western nations today, where nation-state capitalism is less and less a reality. There was indeed a time when there was some sort of alignment, if not contract between the public sector and the private sector, so that industries, while pursuing profit, were also contributing to national wealth, that of the country and its people. In the West at least, this seems to be and less the case.² A good example of that is the corporate practice of “inversion,” in which a company in a high-tax country transfers its flag on paper to a low-tax country, arguing that it has an obligation to its shareholders to maximize its profits without regard to the fact that the very country in which it was founded aided

² On this question, Jean-Marc Coicaud, “The Paradoxical Perception of Contemporary Democracy, and the Question of its Future”, in *Global Policy Journal* (University of Durham and John Wiley & Sons, forthcoming, February 2019).

it in its success. In the process, it is, among other things, the possibility of conceptualizing and defending the national interest that runs the risk of being challenged.³

As for the projection of national interest, this is an issue that comes down to the scope of the projection. And here the bottom line is that the more powerful a country becomes, the more extensive and global is its national interest. The great powers, which have a very expansive conception of their national interest, amply illustrate this fact/tendency. In terms of geographical scope, their national interest is not limited to their own immediate territories. It becomes ubiquitous and at home, so to speak, in the many places around the world where they pursue in particular their economic interests. In this regard, military power can naturally complement economic power projection. The extent to which the USA has military bases and deployments in many corners of the globe is an illustration of this state of affairs. Needless to say, the big powers' expansive definition of their global interest has not always been a welcome development for other powers. This fact explains why big powers can be prompted to design and engineer an international system built around their global–national interest but that also reflects to a limited degree, in order to take into account the demands of legitimacy, the national interest of other countries. This is what to some extent the history and evolution of the international system, including in terms of international law, and of its relations with big powers show. However, an international system that is both organized around the global–national interest of the big powers and to some extent accommodates the national interest of other countries is not always sufficient to satisfy the latter group because the big powers perceive the interests of these countries as secondary to their own and therefore dispensable. This is especially the case when there is no obvious significant enemy from which big powers and their global national interest can pretend to offer protection and find justification for their existence.⁴ For this reason, during a period of international power transition, in which a great power is in decline or no longer powerful enough to impose upon others the rules it has helped shape, and another power is rising and eager to make more room for itself and its own interest, rivalries inevitably intensify and the risks of political and military instability increase. One current example is the US–Chinese economic and military rivalry.

1.2 On Global Justice

What about global justice? In the past decades, political theory, political philosophy, political science, and even international relations have become increasingly global, i.e., have paid more attention to issues of justice at the global level. Although global justice remains a sub-field of research that is still relatively marginal, it is steadily

³ This evolution is not the one that all countries have followed in recent years. For example, if globalization has meant for a number of Western countries the denationalization of their economy and industry, this has not been the case for China. To the contrary, globalization has been very good to China in the sense that the Chinese government has been able to embrace it in the context of a national project, of a form of post-communist “nation-state building.”

⁴ Hence the need to create enemies.

growing, and the number of books and articles exploring the topic is becoming quite significant. This has been particularly the case in the context of Western academia (the USA and Europe). Interestingly enough, so far this has had the effect of having the research agenda of global justice, with maybe to some degree the exception of Amartya Sen,⁵ essentially building on Western intellectual traditions and literature.⁶ A non-exhaustive list of some of the scholars who have done work in this area include Charles R. Beitz, David Miller, Thomas Pogge, David Held, Mathias Risse, Simon Caney and Kok-Chor Tan.⁷

At the most general level, the theories of global justice, including by the authors mentioned above, present, among other things, three major characteristics: They build on theories of justice in general; they distinguish global justice from international justice; and they identify and deal with the specific features, dilemmas, and challenges of global justice.

1.2.1 Justice in General

At the most general level, justice is about taking seriously the rights of actors who are viewed as legitimate, i.e., as having the right to have rights. The quest for justice happens in a social context, and its objective is to ensure that the interests of actors are made compatible. At the same time, this amounts to limiting and socializing these interests by embedding them into a logic and dynamic of rights and duties of actors toward one another. The rights of actors are secured to the extent that they acknowledge having duties and responsibilities toward others. The recognition by an actor of the rights of other actors secures order, creating the preconditions in which justice is possible. That is to say that justice enables the possibility of relations of reciprocity and cooperation among actors.

The rights and duties through which actors experience justice are not fixed forever, however. They can evolve over time with the evolution of society, of its core values and identity. Moreover, the rights and duties that bring together actors in

⁵ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁶ In a way the Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang has offered a Chinese alternative to the Western theories of global justice in *The Tanxia System: An introduction to the philosophy of the World Institution* (China Renmin University Press, 2011).

⁷ David Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2012), Mathias Risse, *On Global Justice* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2012); David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge, Polity Press 2010); Richard W. Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2010); Charles R. Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2009); Charles R. Beitz and Robert E. Goodin (eds.), *Global Basic Rights* (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2009); Thomas Pogge and Darrel Moellendorf (eds.), *Global Justice: Seminal Essays* (St Paul, MN, Paragon House, 2008); Thomas Pogge and Keith Norton (eds.), *Global Ethics: Seminal Essays* (St Paul, MN, Paragon House, 2008); Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005); Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Patriotism* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg and Marc A. Stern (eds.), *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

relations of reciprocity and cooperation are not all equally important. The most important rights (and associated duties and responsibilities) at the core of a theory of justice tend to have two main features. They concern the rights (and associated duties) without which people cannot sustain themselves and the absence of which also places the stability of the polity or community at risk. And they concern the core values on which the identity of a society and its members is structured and organized. From this perspective, a significant aspect of a theory of justice amounts to theorizing and evaluating how these two features come together, or not, in a society. For instance, today it is widely thought, in part under the influence of democratic values and ideas, that justice calls for a sense of equal access to physical, economic, and health security as well as educational opportunities, just to name a few core rights. Of these most important rights, justice is in principle uncompromising. In addition to the most important or core (or primary) rights and duties and responsibilities, there are rights that are far from peripheral. Incidentally, as societies develop and acquire more resources, more and more rights are accorded primary status. To some extent, as alluded to above, this phenomenon suggests that justice is not an absolute, fixed, and unyielding concept but rather one that is somewhat fluid and that grows organically as societies grow richer in access to physical and non-physical resources and start to recognize rights that were hitherto marginal as basic rights, like the right to clean water or clean air, the right to privacy, etc.

The principal responsibility of political institutions, such as the state, is to ensure the respect of what actors see as their rights and duties, especially those at the core of the sense of justice. The possibility and enjoyment of rights (and duties) is a key aspect of the function and responsibility of political institutions, especially if they aspire to be viewed as legitimate. One way for political institutions to achieve this outcome, for having rights taken seriously, is to produce and nurture public goods, being understood that a public good is a service that is provided to all members of society, being understood, also, that a public good is at the same time a good that is exchanged among actors and what allows the exchange. Security is a classic example of a public good: It is the good exchanged among actors, individual or collective, and it is the good that allows the good to be exchanged. This connection between discourse of rights and the production of public goods is critical because without it chances are that these rights will remain abstract, not concrete enough to be viewed as real and credible. A simple example can help understand this state of affairs: The right to education means little if it is not accompanied, in fact guaranteed, by widespread and affordable access to education. Similarly, rights to security, health, and socio-economic rights need to be embedded into public goods to be sufficiently realized and, therefore, credible.

1.2.2 International Justice

Although not as central as justice in the national context, international justice has been a research theme of political philosophy and political theory for a long time. International justice is about how communities or collective actors (such as, in the modern era, the state) should interact with and behave toward one another on the international level, about the rights and duties they have toward one another and,

to some extent, their people. One area in which international justice has been much discussed and theorized is just war theory. In this context, just war theory explores the conditions under which launching force against another country is just or legitimate (*jus ad bellum*) and the extent to which the modalities of use of force once conflict has erupted are just (*jus in bello*). And, of course, it is on this question of just war theory that over time and across cultures most developments dealing with international justice have focused.

Take Ancient Greece. For Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), for instance, the political community has a responsibility to act in accordance with the welfare of its citizens, as well as that of other human beings. This implies a kind of cosmopolitanism. This explains Aristotle's criticism of those communities—the Scythians, Persians, Thracians, Celts, and the Spartans—that glorify war and praise domination and conquest. In Aristotle's view, it is not appropriate to conquer and rule other regimes since doing so effectively denies the freedom and status of fellow humans.⁸ This type of thinking leads him to argue that war, when necessary, must serve peace, which itself cannot be dissociated from virtue.⁹ From this perspective, defensive war is perfectly permissible, and the justification of offensive war is limited to two types of cases—one being when a self-ruled community is under attack and in need of help or outside intervention, and the other when a community cannot rule itself.¹⁰

This way of thinking about war is not foreign to Ancient Chinese views either. Indeed, Mencius (372-289 B.C.) also reflects on how leaders should relate to the outside world in a legitimate manner, addressing in particular what makes war just. For this, he draws upon the general Confucian principles of good governance (or domestic political legitimacy), in particular the principle that rulers should strive for peace by governing with benevolence, which at a minimum entails securing the conditions for people's basic means of subsistence and intellectual/moral development. On this basis, Mencius is critical of rulers who launch bloody wars of conquest simply to increase their territory and engage in economic plunder.¹¹ This being said, he recognizes that some defensive and offensive wars can be just:

For Mencius..., a defensive war is justified only if an actually or potentially virtuous and capable ruler (one who aims to provide peace and benevolent government), with the support of his people, must resort to violence to pro-

⁸ Aristotle: "...how completely unreasonable it would be if the work of a statesman were to be reduced to an ability to work out how to rule and be master over neighboring peoples, with or without their consent. How could that be a part of statecraft or lawgiving, when it is not even lawful in itself? To rule at all costs, not only justly but unjustly, is unlawful, and merely to have the upper hand is not necessarily to have a just title to it." (Book VII, ii, 1324b22, p. 397), and: "To say that a state has trained itself in the acquisition of power with a view to ruling its neighbors—that is no ground for calling it happy or applauding its lawgiver." (Book VII, xiv, 1333b26, p. 435), in *The Politics*, translated into English by Thomas Alan Sinclair and revised by Trevor J. Saunders (London, Penguin Books, 1992).

⁹ *Ibid*, Book VII, xv, 1334a11, p. 437.

¹⁰ Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, and Nicholas Rengger (eds.), *International Relations in Political Thought: Texts from the Ancient Greeks to the First World War* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 27.

¹¹ Mencius, *Book 1*, Part A, translated by D. C. Lau (London, Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 3-14.

tect his territory against would-be conquering hegemony. An offensive war is justified if (and only if) it is led by an actually or potentially virtuous ruler who aims to punish oppressive rulers and bring about global peace. The “conquering” army must be welcomed by the “conquered” people, and if the welcome is not long-lasting, the “conquering” army should appoint a local leader in consultation with the “conquered” people and withdraw as soon as possible. The punitive expedition should only be launched if the conquering ruler can make a plausible claim to have the world’s support.¹²

In other words, not everything is legitimate internationally and, ultimately, the right line of international action for governments is rooted in one of the key principles of domestic political legitimacy applied to the international realm, benevolence.¹³

In this perspective, while the fate of people is not altogether forgotten in the framework of international justice (for instance by looking after the rights of other communities, international justice also addresses the rights of their citizens), people are not meant to be the primary beneficiaries and rights holders of international justice. Collectivities, in the modern era “states,” are. This is the primary distinction between international justice and global justice.

1.2.3 Global Justice

Global justice builds on key intuitions and insights developed in the framework of justice as it has been traditionally explored in the context of local and national communities. It is the pursuit of justice at the global level, i.e., at the level of the whole of humanity. As such, global justice entails at least four related defining features: (1) It makes the human being, whoever it is and wherever it is, the primary right holder. (2) It addresses issues that in nature and scope must be to a significant extent taken up at the global level (like climate change and the global political economy). (3) Addressing features (1) and (2) requires some sort of global community conscience, made up of shared global values and prudential considerations (a mix of projection of values by powerful countries, negotiation in the context of international agreements and the need to cooperate with one another). (4) Addressing features 1, 2, and 3 calls for conceiving and establishing public goods at the global level and making them complementary with the pursuit of public goods at the national and regional levels. Indeed, at the global level—as is the case with justice in general—rights and public goods complement each other and are mutually constitutive. In sum, these four features are by and large the benchmarks of global justice.

I should add here that the concept of global justice, just as the concept of justice in the national context, recognizes the existence of a distinction and a hierarchy between the most important rights (and duties) and the less important rights (and duties). The most important rights are the ones without which human beings

¹² Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 40.

¹³ For more on the traditional Chinese view of the world, see John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1968).

(and, ultimately the national and global polities and communities) are unable to sustain themselves and flourish. The idea is that in principle there are no circumstances under which it is morally just to allow the most important rights to become the subject of bargaining or trade-offs. As with justice in general, the most important rights at the global level concern physical, economic, and health security, access to education, etc. The pursuit of the respect of these rights takes place especially in the context of the development of public goods, as articulated between the national and the global levels. For instance, given the growing economic interdependence of countries (globalization), the pursuit of economic and environmental justice calls for establishing a complementarity of rights and duties and public goods at the national and global levels.

While most moral and political solidarity and global responsibility must be founded or based upon primary rights, global justice must also be evaluated on the basis of how rights that are not regarded as the most important but nonetheless significant for human life are respected. This factor is particularly important since global justice seeks to identify and respect the most important, and as such universal, rights of human beings in the mist of cultural pluralism (the world remain culturally diverse, for instance the West(s) and the non-West(s)¹⁴—a cultural pluralism that today is often embedded into and underwritten by the national bent of international life, by the fact that the international system is built around the nation-state and the specificities of the country it represents.

That global justice makes the human being and its welfare worldwide its primary objective does not mean that it is necessarily in conflict with the state or the nation-state, and its national sovereignty. The experience of living in a failed state, where the rights of human beings are not respected and public goods not provided, and of having the national sovereignty infringed upon in the context of neo-colonialism or imperialism, are an indication of the centrality of effective public institutions for a justice agenda, including from the global-level perspective. In this regard, even if international organizations were more effective than they are, they would not alone be capable of attending to all the needs and rights of people within borders. This is one reason why, the state, although criticized by the supporters of a cosmopolitan vision of global justice, is a key component of the global justice agenda. The nation or nation-state sees rights and the right to enjoy public goods as a first-order priority at home and a second-order priority internationally.

In this context of global justice, the national interest cannot be exclusively self-centered. It also has to be geared toward global solidarity and responsibility, and not simply in a marginal fashion. A hierarchy may exist in what a state owes to its people and what it owes to strangers, but this hierarchy is meant to be inclusive (make room for and looking after the rights of strangers, since they are human beings) and not exclusionary. Even the parochial attitude of a country does allow for recognition of the obligation to look after and respect the rights of those outside the national polity as fellow human beings.

¹⁴ There is more than one West in the West, and more than one non-West in the non-West.

From this perspective, the commitment of global justice unfolds in the midst of a world that is particularistic (countries) and pluralistic (different cultures). And indeed, most proponents of theories of global justice do not advocate, at least explicitly, the elimination of the national bent of the international system and for the desirability of global cultural homogeneity. Instead, their theorization of global justice aims at defending the universal rights of individuals and the duties associated with them, while at the same time recognizing the acceptable particularism of countries and cultural pluralism. Against this background, the challenge for the supporters of global justice is to determine, in the service of the rights of individuals and of the rights of countries to the extent that these serve the rights of individuals, the correct balance between just universalism and just particularism and pluralism. They try to adjudicate how the equality and hierarchy of individual rights (all people should have equal rights of some type but a hierarchy exists, as mentioned earlier, between certain kinds of rights) should be negotiated, conceptualized, and implemented in the midst of the dilemmas that relations between universalism, particularism, and pluralism can create.

In its most comprehensive formulation, a theory of global justice entails the following four related dimensions: (1) A normative dimension: Which criteria and values should be used for evaluating and judging what is just from a global standpoint? (2) A methodological and procedural dimension: Which procedures and mechanisms should be mobilized to identify and implement the substance of rights? (3) An institutional dimension: Which institutions and laws are best suited for an agenda of global justice? (4) A policy dimension: Which policies should be put in place to nurture access to and respect of rights at the global level?

2 The Traditional Relationship Between National Interest and Global Justice

Traditionally, national interest and global justice have been at odds. This is less the case because the logic of national interest has lacked any sense of ethics and morality, as is often assumed by idealists, but rather because it is at the service of a particularist sense of ethics and morality, of justice, which as such is prone to clash with the ambitious demands of global justice. This second section focuses upon this clash of views.

2.1 National Interest as the Antithesis of Global Justice

National interest and global justice are often presented as being in total opposition, foreign to one another. In the best circumstances, it is argued that national interest is minimally mindful of international justice considerations, let alone of global considerations. In the worst circumstances, it is viewed as ignoring matters of justice, especially those pertaining to global justice. Supporters of human rights who see these rights as a condition of political legitimacy as applied to the foreign policy of countries tend, of course, to hold this view. As political regimes, including

democratic ones, more often than not choose the demands of national interests over human rights demands, or endorse human rights only to the extent that doing so does not impair their national interest, supporters of human rights are prone to view national interest as their «enemy».¹⁵

2.2 National Interest and a Particularist Vision of Justice

That said, this critical view of the national interest is not really correct. The national interest is not intrinsically or definitionally antithetical to justice, for national interest and justice can be mutually constitutive. But despite the possibility of mutual constitution, the national interest does necessarily make global justice its priority, its first order of business, so to speak. For even in the best circumstances, the connection between national interest and justice amounts to a particularist form of justice.

As alluded to earlier, the notion of national interest is part and parcel of the interstate structure of international life. Once international life is organized on the basis of separate entities that interact with one another on the basis of cooperation but overall competitively, the issue of national interest becomes front and center. It becomes an existential question, on the basis of which rests the possibility for a country to put forward its right to existence and the various interests and rights that are associated with it. The priority of the national interest is to look after the country of which it is a part. This fact does not necessarily mean, however, that it must ignore altogether what it owes to others, if only for prudential reasons. After all, to a large extent, the rights and interests of a country are also secured to the extent that they go hand in hand with recognizing the rights and interests of others (hence the dynamics of reciprocity and rights and duties that is at the core of justice).

That said, national interest is a form of particularism that has a hierarchical view of justice, that puts what is owed to country above what is owed to others. This is to say that the interests and rights of other countries and their people do not constitute a «categorical imperative» but only what we could call a «conditional imperative», to use Kantian language. In other words, what is owed to others is recognized but conditioned by and based on what is owed to oneself.

In the context of the international system and international law, the sense of justice associated with the national interest is linked to the rights and duties that the values and norms of the time recognize to countries in their relationships with one another. This is, for instance, how we can interpret the nature and the role of international law, as a set of values, principles, norms, rules, practices, institutions, etc. meant to express and project a sense of justice built around the national interest of the state—national sovereignty in this regard being viewed as one of the key principles of defense of the national interest. Indeed, the relations among the fundamental principles of international law—which include sovereign equality of states, self-determination, prohibition of the use of force, pacific settlement of disputes,

¹⁵ On these issues, see Jean-Marc Coicaud. *Beyond the National Interest: The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Multilateralism in an Era of U.S. Primacy* (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, and respect for human rights¹⁶—are not simply relations of compatibility and competition.¹⁷ They are also relations of hierarchy.¹⁸ And, despite the fact that more attention is now, arguably, given to human rights than in the past, national sovereignty and the logic of national interest continue to stand at the top of this hierarchy.¹⁹

In the process, international law as a contributor to the regulation of international life helps identify the extent and limits of what member states can do in the name of the national interest by framing what is just and unjust, legitimate and illegitimate. In this context, a key question concerning the relationship between national interest and justice beyond borders is how far the conditional/conditioned character of what is owed to other countries and people by the national interest can go. The answer to this question suggests the possibility of distinguishing a national interest that has a strong sense of justice toward others beyond borders from a national interest that has little or even no sense of justice at all toward others.

A national interest is mindful of justice considerations toward other countries and their people when, while recognizing its own primacy, it makes room for the interests and right of others, moving as much as possible toward a relationship of equal reciprocity. A national interest overlooks the demands of justice when its recognition of the rights and interests of others is as secondary, as minimal as possible.

A national interest makes no room for justice beyond borders when it is conceived and practiced as an absolute particularism, not simply ignoring but actively denying as well the possibility that other countries and their peoples may possess legitimate national interests. In its worst malevolent circumstance, national interest as a form of absolute particularism can even actively challenge the right of other countries and their people to even exist. Nazi Germany, which was characterized by an overall culture and foreign policy obsessed with Germany's interests and rights and its rejection of those of others, is an example of absolute particularism.

3 The Future Relationship Between National Interest and Global Justice

In this section, I focus on two types of scenarios. First, I explore the reasons in favor of preserving the status quo between the national interest and global justice, that is essentially maintaining them principally at odds with one another, with maintaining the national interest as traditionally understood in the dominant position. Second,

¹⁶ On these principles and their relations, see, for example, Antonio Cassese, *International Law in a Divided World* (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 6.

¹⁷ For more on this topic, consult Jean-Marc Coicaud, «Deconstructing International Legitimacy», in Jean-Marc Coicaud and Hilary Charlesworth (dir.), *Fault Lines of International Legitimacy* (New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Ibid..

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of this issue, Jean-Marc Coicaud, *Beyond the National Interest: The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Multilateralism in an Era of U.S. Primacy* (op. cit.).

I list the reasons to change the status quo, i.e., to secure a relationship between national interest and global justice in which the two are more aligned.

3.1 The Status Quo

Among the reasons that call for maintaining the status quo, for keeping the relations between the national interest and global justice distant as they are, three are particularly worth highlighting.

First, there is the idea that global justice that aims to make human beings primary right holders globally is an unrealistic dream. So why try adjusting national interest and global justice when global justice continues to fail to materialize? It seems a bit of a waste of time. Global justice seems even more of a chimera in view of that fact that even when considerations of justice beyond borders are factored in, they are conditioned by the demands of the national interest. In *Beyond the National Interest*,²⁰ in which I examine the sense of solidarity and responsibility beyond borders as exercised by member states in the context of the United Nations, I show that such a sense of global solidarity and responsibility is extremely limited and always measured against the demands of the national realm and its members. This attitude also applies to democratic nations.

Second, what global justice could constitute, if it were not a dream, is not entirely clear and faces many intellectual, political, policy, and institutional challenges. As a result, trying to calibrate the national interest and global justice may not be a good investment of time and energy. As indicated above, most of the scholarly work that has been done so far in the context of justice has focused on justice at the national level (this is by and large what political philosophy and political theory have concentrated on for centuries, in the West and other parts of the world) or on international justice. It is only in recent decades that most of the scholarly work on global justice has been done and since then most of the conceptual, political, and policy difficulties entailed in the pursuit of global justice have proved extremely complicated to address. In a way, cracking the “code” of justice, so to speak, at the global level, even more so than at the national and international levels, has proved an elusive goal. The fact that global justice in support of the right of people at the world level has to be negotiated and conceptualized in the midst of countries’ particularism and cultural pluralism, contributes to this state of affairs. Finding the right balance of rights and public goods (of public goods associated with these rights) between the universal level of individuals’ rights, on the one hand, and those connected with the particularism of the countries and cultural pluralism, on the other hand, is a challenging task. In the United Nations context, it is a task that has been pursued through the establishment of international human rights instruments but with limited success in terms of establishing internationally recognized norms and even more so in terms of implementation. Considering the very thin commitment of

²⁰ Ibid.

member states to global justice considerations, a realist may well be satisfied with present achievements rather than aim for more ambitious objectives.

Third, the present international context is not an invitation to bet on more commitment to global justice and on less commitment to the national interest. In fact, as indicated at the beginning of the article, in contrast to the optimism that followed the immediate aftermath of the Cold War it is as if we were witnessing today a retreat from multilateral cooperation. We could go farther and say that we are indeed witnessing a movement toward nationalist interests. That is happening in the USA and in Europe. Think about Brexit and some of the recent political developments in other countries arising out of the refugee crisis and fear of the Other. In this perspective, more emphasis is given to the national interest and the competition it entails among nation-states. This orientation is prevalent within international organizations and in the context of relations among states in general.

Within regional and international organizations, cooperation seems to be receding and giving way to self-centered policies. This trend seems to be at work, in particular, in the European Union, in which countries, big and small, are now more or less openly recognizing the gap that separates them from one another and following first and foremost what they perceive as good for themselves regardless of the repercussions or consequences. This is also the case at the United Nations, where the dual identity of member states (as both member states and states) is becoming more and more unbalanced, with countries progressively less preoccupied with the search of a common ground and increasingly eager to look after their respective national interests. In the process, this phenomenon encourages some sort of “zombification” of many parts of the United Nations, looking more and more like living-dead organisms.

And outside international organizations, countries, particularly the most powerful of them, do not hesitate to embrace a unilateral pursuit of their national interest, as illustrated by Russia in Crimea, China in the South China Sea, and Trump’s USA and its slogan “America first,” ignoring what international law has to say on the issues at stake.

3.2 Alignment of National Interest and Global Justice

If these are the reasons militating in favor of the status quo, what would make it important, in the present context, to align and make compatible the demands of the national interest and those of global justice? There are at least seven reasons. They are a combination of related and partly overlapping normative (doing the right thing and a question of solidarity and responsibility) prudential (cooperation) and geopolitical (power distribution and projection) considerations. These reasons are related to (1) individuals as right holders; (2) the growing relations of interdependence among countries and people; (3) the global nature of problems; (4) the evolution of the international distribution of power; (5) the relations between national interest and global justice; (6) the link between security and justice, including global security and global justice; and (7) the insecure nature of a world in which competition among national interests dominate.

3.2.1 Individuals as Right Holders

As previously discussed, one of the defining features of global justice is that it recognizes the individual, whoever and wherever he or she is, as the primary right holder. It happens that in the past several decades, in some ways the individual has been accorded greater recognition at the international level by the UN and individual nations. The debates on international humanitarian interventions that have taken place since the early 1990s, be it in the context of the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East, are part of this story. A more individual-focused approach to development must be understood in this context as well, as illustrated by how the United Nations has been trying to tackle issues of poverty alleviation in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, now, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This focus on the individual does not mean that all is fine, that the rights of individuals are now fully respected. Far from it. Still, these developments echo and encourage the development of a global justice approach.

3.2.2 Growing Interdependence Among Countries and People

The growing interdependence among countries and people is another factor that underlines the relevance of a global justice research agenda. Here the bottom line is that the fate of countries and people does not unfold in isolation or in a siloed and self-contained fashion. Because the level of interdependence among countries is now quite high, in part due to globalization, it is very difficult for policy makers to conduct national policy in service of their constituencies by ignoring altogether what happens beyond their borders. For example, economic policies are more and more embedded into international and transnational networks and dynamics. From this perspective, the pursuit of economic and social justice at the national level, for instance, cannot ignore the requirements of justice at the global level.

3.2.3 Global Nature of Problems

With the idea of growing interdependence among countries and people is associated the growing global nature of issues and problems. The cross-national nature of some contemporary problems is another element that makes the question of global justice relevant. Problems related to the planet's environment are emblematic of the truly global nature of these problems, which arguably can be solved mainly at the global level. The debates over climate change and matters of sustainable development reflect how global justice has become a key theme of international negotiations. It is also in these domains of climate change and sustainable development that work is increasingly being done in relation to questions of global justice, as indicated by the debates surrounding the principle of "shared but differentiated responsibilities" that takes into account the national context in all its past (historical context), present (economic, social, and cultural context), and future (what is owed to next generations) dimensions.

3.2.4 Evolution of the International Distribution of Power

There are different ways in which the evolution of the international distribution of power affects the question of global justice and in fact makes it more relevant than before. This evolution of international distribution of power and its impact on the question of global justice includes the rise of China. In this regard, one of these ways has to do with issues of values, such as sovereignty and human rights. China, like Russia, sees respect for national sovereignty as a principle that cannot be trumped by human rights considerations—hence the fact that it has been prone to oppose international humanitarian interventions. Relatedly, when it comes to human rights, China has a greater commitment to economic and social rights than to civil and political rights, the latter being the focus of liberal democracies. As China gains global influence, its views on these matters could impact questions of global justice in the international system.

3.2.5 National Interest and Global Justice

The relations between the national interest and global justice are also what makes global justice relevant today. On the one hand, the logic of national interest, with the priority it gives to particular rights, the ones of a country and possibly its people, continues to dominate international life. On the other hand, the fact that the world is more globalized and that countries and people are more interdependent call for conceiving and pursuing the national interest, the interest of one's country and its people, in a fashion that is more aligned than in the past with a sense of international solidarity and responsibility, i.e., also a sense of global justice. From being essentially a solitary exercise in the past, national interest now has to be more concerned with global solidarity and responsibility.

3.2.6 Global Security and Global Justice

There is also the relation between security and justice, and what this relation means for the link between security and justice at the global level. This comes down to the following: Although most of the time matters of justice are presented as secondary and external to the pursuit of security and order, the fact of the matter is that the best way to achieve security and order—a security and order that is at the same time stable, sustainable and dynamic—is probably to take justice and its demands seriously. In other words, justice is central and internal (integral) to the pursuit of security and order. And what is true at the national level is true as well at the global level.

3.2.7 National Interest, Competition, and Insecurity

Subsequently, a world in which national interest is not socialized, i.e., not tamed and made compatible with other national interests (justice being the ultimate form of socialization of interests of actors by locking them into a dynamic of rights and duties, and of cooperation) and where competition among them prevails is a dangerous one. Unlike a context of an international order pacified by taking the demands of

justice seriously, peace where national interest is unrestrained is unstable and always more or less undermined by competing and conflicting interests.

4 Methodology of Reconciliation

The politics of national interest will remain one of the decisive factors of international life. It will continue to remain so as long as international life is structured around a national bent. There is no way around that. In the process, the international system at the same time protects states and countries, their national sovereignty and national interest, and creates dangers for them. As such, countries will continue to have competitive relations with one another. Emerging countries, China to begin with, like the big powers of the past, are certainly committed to this logic. In these conditions, it will be tempting for states to continue to embrace a minimalist ethics of national interest, that is, one that recognizes other countries' rights and interests that the defense of their own rights and interests cannot afford to ignore. But this attitude brings about major risks. At best it can only produce a very unstable peace, always on the verge of leading to confrontation, if not conflicts. This attitude also overlooks the mutual benefits that can be derived from relationships based on reciprocity.

It is therefore both the risks and opportunities represented by a better calibration of national interest and global justice demands that calls for trying to reconcile them as much as possible. From this perspective, the question becomes: How to do so? What would be the methodology to achieve such reconciliation? To answer these questions, very tentatively I suggest four possible orientations: The need to rethink the national dimension, or national realm; the need to rethink the national interest; the need to rethink competition and cooperation among countries; and the methodology to implement these needed changes, especially in the current times of transition.

4.1 Rethinking the National Dimension

Concerning the need to rethink the national dimension, or national realm, it is important to highlight the fact that the national dimension is no longer self-sufficient and closed but open and interdependent upon other countries. To be sure, the current protectionist temptation in developed countries—in the USA and in a number of European countries—following decades of deindustrialization and loss of jobs, encourages an impulse to turn inward and establish barriers. However, it is unlikely that we will witness a return to an entirely closed national dimension. It is therefore very important to examine what kind of renewed characteristics of openness, of combination of open and closed characteristics, the national dimension could take in the future.²¹ At the intellectual, economic, political, social, and cultural levels,

²¹ When countries are on top, they favor opening up. When they are on the defensive, they favor establishing barriers. Today, as globalization has been very good to China, China is presenting itself as a supporter of open economy. This does not mean, of course, that it is in favor of absolute openness. Like other countries, it combines selective and self-serving openness with selective and self-serving closeness. In this regard, it is ironic that at the time Western powers negotiated China's entry into the World

much thinking has to be done. This question includes the capacity of politics to regain leverage as a way of influencing the economic and overall life of the country. To reinvent the idea of a «national contract» between private actors—in particular big corporations—and the public sector (state) in relation to the need to rethink the articulation of the national/international/global levels can be a way forward.²²

4.2 Rethinking the National Interest

Connected with the need to rethink the national dimension emerges the need to rethink the national interest by avoiding a narrow approach. The modalities of the national interest are linked to those of the national dimension and of the relations of the national dimension with the international and global levels and their actors. To envision a national dimension in the context of which could exist different relations between the national and the international levels would consequently introduce significant transformations in the conception and the practice of the national interest and how it relates to justice.

4.3 Rethinking International Competition and Cooperation

From this perspective, the question is to find out whether or not it is possible to reverse the tendency of states to compete rather than to cooperate with one another, i.e., if it is possible to make cooperation rather than competition the main driver of international relations. If that goal is possible, the responsibility and solidarity of countries and of their citizens toward one another could become a more important dimension of international relations, rather than being relegated as very secondary considerations. This result could bring about a type of national interest and sovereignty that would be geared more toward solidarity than is the case today²³—a type of national interest that would be the manifestation of a conscience of international or global interest.

But then how to implement such an approach mobilizing a new way of thinking about the national dimension, the national interest, and relations of cooperation

Footnote 21 (continued)

Trade Organization (WTO), especially the USA, they thought that by China joining the WTO, China would become the market of the West (the US) and that it would become like the West (democratization). Yet the opposite has occurred. The world has become China's market, and the Chinese regime has been strengthened. On the dialectic of closed and open societies from a philosophical perspective, see Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, UK, Routledge, 2011).

²² In industrialized countries, a form of «national contract» has existed between major corporations and the public sector. Of course, this contract did not concern all relations between the private sector and the public sector. This contract was made possible and illustrated by some sort of economic nationalism. One of the characteristics of contemporary capitalism is that this contract has now more or less disappeared in many developed countries, weakening in the process the national industrial network (deindustrialization) and the capacity of the political sector to influence national life. The emergence of populism is one of the products of this state of affairs.

²³ Mireille Delmas-Marty, *Aux quatre vents de la mondialisation. Petit guide de navigation sur l'océan de la mondialisation*, Paris, Seuil, 2016, p. 93.

and competition? How to implement a new sense of justice associated with a new sense of national interest? Beyond simply mentioning the need to renew how we think about these issues, establishing the theory of it, and all the more in a detailed fashion, is a complex and Herculean task, calling at the same time for establishing the right prognosis on the contemporary world and suggesting practical and feasible orientations for the way forward.

4.4 Methodology of Change in Times of Transition

There is no room here to fully address these issues but I can at least put forward three suggestions.

First, it would be useful to encourage the development of public goods, and to do so in a symbiotic fashion. Doing so would entail at least two requirements. First, it would require that a culture of rights and duties, both for individuals and for countries, become associated with a culture of public goods, the latter making possible and real the former. For rights (and duties) and public goods are not disconnected but mutually constitutive. For instance, as indicated before, the right to education means very little if there is not a public good dedicated to making this right possible and real. Second, in order to ensure that the national interest is not exclusively self-referential and somewhat asocial or even antisocial, it has to be a part of public goods that at the national, regional, and global levels complement each other. This is to say that public policy cannot be limited to the national level (when it exists) or the regional level (when it exists, such as, not very successfully, in the European Union) but must extend as well to the global level (global policy).

Second, in the field of academic scholarship, exploring the conditions of possibility of a global political theory that could delineate more the conceptual foundations of rights and public goods at the national, regional, and global levels than presently exists would be useful. Today, we still by and large envision political theory, and political philosophy, as essentially focused on the traditional national level. This level will remain a valid area of research. But it is not enough to confine research to that level. It does not correspond to contemporary social, economic, and political realities and their complexities, let alone those of the future.

Third, nurturing mutual and global knowledge will be useful. The world is getting more interdependent but people, while they are getting closer, remain largely ignorant of other cultures and belief systems. We certainly have the technological means to communicate and interact like never before in human history. So it is paradoxical that this technological progress has not resulted in greater international closeness and in fact just the opposite seems to be happening. This is a recipe for problems. The first step toward finding some semblance of common ground and mutual accommodation is to make sense of who others are, what drives them, etc. Today, this intellectual project is largely missing from diplomatic discussions. This is the case also at the academic level. In particular, there is not much knowledge in the West about the non-West. There is little knowledge among its generalists and theoreticians of global issues about the world beyond the West. In the West, one has to be specialists in non-Western cultures to have such knowledge. How in these conditions could

they theorize the global in ways that would factor in the world beyond the West? How in these conditions can they mobilize intellectual imagination and resources in a manner that would be as holistic and embracing as possible? Such imagination and resources are all the more important when an international redistribution of power is under way, bringing about deep changes in the relations between the West(s) and the non-West(s)—a phenomenon that is altering not only the geopolitics of the world but the geopolitics of knowledge as well.

5 Conclusion: What Are the Chances For a Reconciliation?

In this article, I have started by clarifying what is meant by the notions of national interest and global justice. Then I alluded to what has been their traditional relationship, in the process indicating that in the best circumstances national interest can be a form of particularist justice that can make room for others' interests and rights. The third section explored factors that militate in favor of the status quo and those that would permit a rapprochement between the national interest and global justice. In the fourth section, I argued that a rapprochement would be desirable and examined how it could occur. In this brief conclusion, I want to finish with the question: What are the chances for such a rapprochement? The truth is that in the current environment they are quite slim. The current moment in history is not geared toward reconciling the national interest and global justice. In fact, it seems that the gap is deepening.

It is often said that in order to do good, one has to do well. That said, how much should one do well in order to do good? Moreover, since we are interdependent actors, to do well requires increasingly to be good to one another. Otherwise, it is the legitimacy of our "doing-well" that is questioned, being seen as illegitimate and challenged. The extent to which people in positions of leadership—economic, political, cultural leadership—understand this reality will in part determine the likelihood of a reconciliation of the demands of national interests and of justice beyond borders.

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Jean-Marc Coicaud is Professor of Law and Global Affairs, Rutgers School of Law, Rutgers University, USA. He is also an elected member of Academia Europaea. He has published 15 books and more than 100 scholarly articles and chapters in the fields of political and legal theory, international law and international relations.