

INTRODUCTION

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The essays collected in this section of the “Annals” are the result of a workshop held at the Luigi Einaudi Foundation in Turin on 25 September 2019, dedicated to the issue of “Regional Multilateralism in a Disintegrating World Order”.

This is an extremely complex subject. In fact, in the last thirty years, world order has not only become increasingly out of control and marked by growing tensions and bitter conflicts. It has also become almost completely indecipherable in the underlying logic that governs international relations.

In a nutshell, we may well summarize that, with the end of the Cold War and of the bipolar order, the following three “events” occurred simultaneously. First, between 1989 and 1991, an oppressive but tried and tested international order, which had dominated the international scene since World War II, suddenly collapsed. Second, after a brief period of unchallenged US primacy, there was a drastic change in the balance of power between the great powers, with an evident shift from West to East. Finally, globalization has occurred. In a context of growing interdependence of the entire planet, globalization has transformed the actors, the rules and the very agenda of international politics at its roots. The more traditional themes relative to the relations between the great powers such as peace and war, the balance of power and collective security, now stand alongside new burning issues: growing planetary inequalities, the global governance of the economy, the intensification of international migrations, the environmental question and the problem of climate change, the proliferation of populism and sovereignism and, more recently, the health emergency, an overwhelming accelerator of all the contradictions of the global era.

These and other transformations, due to a highly dramatic series of disorienting events, have made the world today very difficult to understand: the Gulf War (1990-1991), the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991-2001)

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and in post-Soviet space, genocides in Africa, the devastating attacks of 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), which were followed by endless postwar periods, the molecular spread of international terrorism (especially Al Qaeda and IS), the rise of religious fundamentalisms, the Great Recession (2007-2008), the destabilizing growth of China, the Arab springs (2010-2011) and, immediately after, the civil wars in Syria and Libya, the consolidation of EU and its crisis, the conflict in Ukraine, Brexit, the Trump presidency, the tension between the US on the one hand and China and North Korea on the other. All this, in the context of a latent but well defined crisis – with a few exceptions – of state sovereignties and liberal democracies and an advance of illiberal democracies (Zakaria) and authoritarian regimes.

It is therefore not surprising, in this situation, that contending images of world politics have multiplied over time. I here mention only the best known, those having the most influence: the idea of a world moving towards a sort of planetary standardization based on the Western model (Fukuyama); the idea of a highly fragmented and completely uncontrollable world (Brzezinski); the idea of world politics dominated and endangered by the clash of civilizations (Huntington); the idea of a return to the logic of the great powers and nationalisms; the idea of a re-emergence of bipolar logics, applied from time to time to relations between the North and the South of the world or to those between West and East.

What we have understood quite clearly in the thirty years following the end of the Cold War and of the bipolar order is that the world is now polycentric, multipolar or at least uni-multipolar, largely post-state, post-democratic, shattered between competing identities and above all potentially and dangerously conflictual.

Unfortunately, we are still not clear on how it would be possible to govern this kind of world. And this is precisely the question the essays in this section try to answer. They focus on a category that is gaining increasing success in the literature on international relations – regionalism – by analyzing the lights and shadows of some concrete related experiences: in the Americas (Luigi Roberto Einaudi, Sandra Honoré), in the African continent (Giovanni Finizio), in the Asia-Pacific region (Silvia Menegazzi) and in the Middle East (Marina Calculli). They also try to explore and suggest – as does Mario Telò with intellectual depth and insight in the opening essay, while also analyzing the experience of the “European Union” – the possibility of a new “regional multilateralism” as a recipe for successfully tackling the growing world disorder characterizing our times.

This seems to be an interesting and promising prospect which could be well worthy of reflection in coming years.