

GLOBALISATION AND THE ALLEGED DEMISE OF THE SOVEREIGN STATE_s

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INTRODUCTION

While this article is a contribution to a topical debate about the limits of the sovereign state that draws on examples from a range of countries, including some references to the Pacific, it is not primarily a comparative discussion of states in the Pacific. However, the topics discussed are vitally important to all the states in the Pacific region. The claims made for political sovereignty by small states, and their responses to the expectations and demands of larger and more powerful states, have intense and ubiquitous political impacts.

In the past decade and a half, there has been widespread academic debate^[1] predicting the demise of the modern state. Unlike some earlier Marxist predictions that the end of the state would be the result of the collapse of the capitalist economy, this later representation of state obsolescence assumes the total victory of advanced capitalism in a post cold war global economy. Global economic and cultural forces have increasingly been successful, it is argued. Communication revolutions such as the World Wide Web have “shrunk” the globe, more than half of the top hundred largest economic entities are corporations, and societies are allegedly more homogenous and more connected to each other than ever before.

Other more radical criticisms point to the inequities of globalisation; for example, there are arguments that the international economy is now disrupted by massive speculative capital flows, or that the draconian policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund inhibit state economic performance as well as state independence. The apparent erosion of state sovereignty, it is argued, applies to both rich and poor states. Rich states such as Australia and United Kingdom, for instance, make unreciprocated international arrangements with the USA, on extradition, for example. Of course, for poorer countries this lack of reciprocity presents an even more serious plight. The interest repayments on international loans often economically cripple states dependent on international assistance and aid. Political sovereignty may be valued even more if a state is economically weak and dependent. Witness the frustration about the perceived loss of sovereignty by Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, following Australian government attempts to tightly monitor Australian aid expenditures in 2003.^[2]

Even more dramatically, the Australian 2003 and 2004 operation to assist Solomon Islands provides a clear example of military and police incursion in the affairs of a small pacific state. Although there are clear grounds for an argument about lost SI sovereignty here, a note of caution is required. A legal government that required substantial external assistance in maintaining law and order, and basic state institutions invited the military task force. If the bulk of the population and the government desire some form of outside intervention, it can hardly be seen as a return of colonial-type political power and the demise of a functioning sovereign state.^[3] Also there may be relevant arguments here that external

assistance is sometimes required to reclaim sovereign authority in circumstances where law enforcement and government authority have been seriously eroded. This points to a paradox that in the long-term sovereignty can sometimes be increased if it is diminished in the short-term. The case for strengthening central European Union institutions at the expense of the sovereignty of the constituent states can be argued in similar terms.

Before further considering the concept of globalisation, I shall briefly consider the external and internal dimensions of state sovereignty, including the cultural dimension of sovereignty.

EXTERNAL STATE SOVEREIGNTY

Externally, the concept of state sovereignty underpins the international state system that emerged from Westphalia and Versailles, and that found its high point in the second half of the twentieth century in European decolonisation and the multilateralism of the United Nations. In the Pacific, there is a range of sovereign entities. The most numerous are legally fully sovereign states. Since the rapid decolonisation of the last quarter of the twentieth century these states enjoy their own representation at the United Nations. Other polities aspire to statehood. This category includes states colonised by old colonial powers, such as New Caledonia, as well as aspirant states seeking independence by breaking away from new states, such as parts of PNG, SI, and Vanuatu. Other polities, Niue and Palau for example, have the intermediate status of associated states, and there is little pressure for more independence. Tokelau, some would argue, is being pushed from being a colony of New Zealand to be an associated state, even though the people of the small group of atolls do not want increased independence.^[4]

But whatever pressures are generated out of the colonial-nationalist struggle typical of the twentieth century, there are new tensions in world politics that have ramifications throughout the Pacific and throughout the international state system. Certainly this system is experiencing some recent dislocation. For example, the USA mega-state under the presidency of George W Bush adopted a policy of unilateralism with regard to international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change *eralism with regard to international treaties such as the* ^[5], the *International Criminal Court Treaty*^[6], the *Biological Weapons Convention*^[7], and the *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty*^[8]. An American so-called realist view of national interest and state sovereignty is asserting itself after the shock of 9 /11. According to this view, the USA and its closest allies can use a dispute anywhere in the world to justify an intervention in any country, using the so-called Bush doctrine of pre-emptive strike for reasons of home security. This argument for the special rights of the United States in international relations led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by a coalition led by the United States, the subsequent military occupation of Iraq, and the United States claim in 2004 to restoring Iraqi sovereignty while the military occupation continued.^[9]

The Bush doctrine assumed that the United Nations has failed to provide multilateral security (although by 2004 there was some change to this as the United States attempted to secure the support of the United Nations in Iraq). However, some arguments for intervention in the affairs of other states do not assume that the United Nations has failed, or that state sovereignty has necessarily diminished. Gareth Evans^[10] (former Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs) puts a more limited view of external state sovereignty. He defines sovereignty as both an external respect for the sovereignty of other states, and an internal responsibility to protect the basic right of all people within the state. In answering the question, is it permissible to intervene in a state that fails to protect its people, Evans says this is justified only when it is authorized by either the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations. Evan's position is one view among many.^[11] Some continue to see any intervention as necessarily neo-colonial. Rhetoric about rogue states, failing states, and the war on terror, raises similar concerns about the alleged decline of