

Hollywood producers (which is why it’s usually the US president who ends up taking charge). Until something like that actually happens, we are still in the realm of fantasy politics.



However, the practical difficulties in the way of creating a truly global politics have not stopped people from trying. Modern political history is punctuated by repeated attempts to establish an institutional framework for nation-states to come together to settle their differences. These enterprises usually gain momentum in the aftermath of disastrous international conflicts. The First World War spawned the League of Nations. The Second World War gave birth to its successor, the United Nations. These organisations fall some way short of what would be required for a world state: they possess parliaments but not an army, and they lack tax-raising powers. They have also done as much to reinforce existing power differentials between states as to correct for them.

The League of Nations was the brainchild of British and American statesmen who wanted to cement their respective nations’ grip on global politics. They never really agreed on how this could be done in a way that could satisfy both. (One reason members of the US Senate ultimately refused to sanction American participation in the League was that the end-product looked to some of them like an extension of

the British Empire.) The constitution of the UN equally reflects the realities of post-war imperial power politics. The Security Council provides the big beasts of the international scene – the US, Russia and now China – with a veto over anything decided by the small fry. It also provides them with a veto to use against each other. This is enough to prevent the UN from morphing into a world government. It still seems likely that the only way for that to happen would be for one global empire to conquer the rest.

A world state is a pipe dream. But there are lots of international organisations that stand somewhere between the politics of individual nation-states and the ideal of a single government for everyone. The UN has multiple subsidiary agencies, in its various guises as peacekeeper, mediator, promoter of health and education and defender of human rights (you can find a list of them at <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/>). Then there are the continental unions, of which the EU is one. The African Union has grown in strength during the decade and a bit of its existence, reflecting the growing economic prosperity of some African states. There are trade zones such as NAFTA, sporting bodies like FIFA, scientific organisations like the WHO. There is the World Bank and the International Criminal Court. There is the G8 and the G20. There are numerous charitable NGOs of wide international reach. The list could go on and on. Finally it would have to include the many multinational corporations that operate in almost every national jurisdiction in the world. Some of these perform roles and provide benefits that we might normally associate with government: