



GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS



# The Idea of World Government

From ancient times to the twenty-first century

James A. Yunker

ROUTLEDGE



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First published 2011  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Typeset in Times New Roman by Taylor & Francis Books  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Yunker, James A.

The idea of world government : from ancient times to the twenty-first century / James A. Yunker.

p. cm. – (Routledge global institutions ; 52)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. International organization—History, I. Title.

JZ1318.Y864 2011

341.2'109—dc22

2010040765

ISBN13: 978-0-415-78162-6 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-78163-3 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-82647-8 (ebk)

# The Idea of World Government

The notion of a single political organization encompassing the whole of humanity—a world state—has intrigued mankind since earliest recorded history. This book provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of the history of world government, and questions whether political globalization, in the form of a federal world government, could and should complement the ongoing processes of economic and cultural globalization.

While the potential peacekeeping advantage of such a state is obvious, the consensus judgment has always been against it, because it could lead to totalitarian tyranny. Yunker examines whether this judgment is still correct, considering that nuclear weapons of unimaginable destructiveness now exist, capable of destroying human civilization as we know it. Summarizing the lessons of history, the author suggests that while the conventional world federalist concept of an unlimited world government is still impractical in today's world, there may be a role for a limited federal world government that would go well beyond the existing United Nations, thereby providing a stronger institutional basis for the evolutionary development of genuinely effective global governance.

This book is an important resource for all students and scholars of global governance, international relations and international organizations.

**James A. Yunker** is Professor of Economics at Western Illinois University (Macomb, Illinois), where he teaches economic theory and econometrics. He is the author of *Common Progress: The Case for a World Economic Equalization Program* and *Political Globalization: A New Vision of Federal World Government*.

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Edited by Thomas G. Weiss

*The CUNY Graduate Center, New York, USA*

and Rorden Wilkinson

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The “Global Institutions” series is designed to provide readers with comprehensive, accessible, and informative guides to the history, structure, and activities of key international organizations as well as books that deal with topics of key importance in contemporary global governance. Every volume stands on its own as a thorough and insightful treatment of a particular topic, but the series as a whole contributes to a coherent and complementary portrait of the phenomenon of global institutions at the dawn of the millennium.

Books are written by recognized experts, conform to a similar structure, and cover a range of themes and debates common to the series. These areas of shared concern include the general purpose and rationale for organizations, developments over time, membership, structure, decision-making procedures, and key functions. Moreover, current debates are placed in historical perspective alongside informed analysis and critique. Each book also contains an annotated bibliography and guide to electronic information as well as any annexes appropriate to the subject matter at hand.

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# Foreword

The current volume is the fifty-second new title—two have already gone into second editions and two others are about to go into production—in a dynamic series on global institutions. These books strive (and, based on the volumes published to date, succeed) to provide readers with definitive guides to the most visible aspects of what many of us know as “global governance.” Remarkable as it may seem, there exist relatively few books that offer in-depth treatments of prominent global bodies, processes, and associated issues, much less an entire series of concise and complementary volumes. Those that do exist are either out of date, inaccessible to the non-specialist reader, or seek to develop a specialized understanding of particular aspects of an institution or process rather than offer an overall account of its functioning and situate it among the increasingly dense institutional network operating internationally. Similarly, existing books have often been written in highly technical language or have been crafted “in-house” and are notoriously self-serving and narrow.

The advent of electronic media has undoubtedly helped research and teaching by making data and primary documents of international organizations more widely available, but it has complicated matters as well. The growing reliance on the Internet and other electronic methods of finding information about key international organizations and processes has served, ironically, to limit the educational and analytical materials to which most readers have ready access—namely, books. Public relations documents, raw data, and loosely refereed web sites do not make for intelligent analysis. Official publications compete with a vast amount of electronically available information, much of which is suspect because of its ideological or self-promoting slant. Paradoxically, a growing range of purportedly independent web sites offering analyses of the activities of particular organizations has emerged, but one inadvertent consequence has been to frustrate access to basic,

authoritative, readable, critical, and well-researched texts. The market for such has actually been reduced by the ready availability of varying quality electronic materials.

For those of us who teach, research, and operate in the area, such restricted access to information and analyses has been frustrating. We were delighted when Routledge saw the value of a series that bucks this trend and provides key reference points to the most significant global institutions and issues. They are betting that serious students and professionals will want serious analyses. We have assembled a first-rate team of authors to address that market. Our intention, then, is to provide one-stop shopping for all readers—students (both undergraduate and postgraduate), negotiators, diplomats, practitioners from nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, and interested parties alike—seeking insights into the most prominent institutional aspects of global governance.

### **The idea of world government**

Few ideas produce such diverse reactions as those pertaining to world government. Mere mention of world government generates hostility among fundamentalist Christian, neo-Fascist, and other right-wing groups in the United States (and to a lesser degree in other settler states such as New Zealand and Australia). In Europe the reactions are more muted; there is little hostility (though it is not absent), but despite more than half a century of European integration, little enthusiasm as well. At the same time, other progressive and religious groups see the idea as a solution to the problems of global warfare, famine, poverty, and environmental degradation. Simultaneously and paradoxically, a principled objection comes from many liberals across the world who see the dangers of a global Leviathan.

Such diametrically opposed views result in virtually no serious public discussion of the topic, indeed the virtual total absence of the topic in serious conversations although it was central in the 1930s and 1940s, and ironically nowhere more prominently than in the United States. What is perhaps most surprising is that, with a few noted exceptions (such as the World Order Models Project),<sup>1</sup> discussions of world government are conspicuous by their absence in academic discourse, particularly in the field of international relations. With the exception of Alexander Wendt, who sees it as inevitable,<sup>2</sup> interest in a single overarching authority has been replaced by the “mushier” and less threatening idea of global governance—the underlying focus of this book series. As one of us has written, “Most analysts of global governance

see world government as atavistic idealism that is beyond the pale. To investigate or support such a policy is seen as naïveté at best, and lunacy at worst. And certainly no younger scholar would wish to cut short her career by exploring such a thought for a dissertation.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet, those aspects of “what world government we actually have,”<sup>4</sup> more often than not are reduced to international institutions but occasionally extended to include large-scale private actors (non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, religious groups, and so on) as well as various machineries including financial markets and credit rating agencies.<sup>5</sup> As a result, there are signs that academic curiosity in the problems and prospects of the idea may have once again been piqued.<sup>6</sup> No series on global institutions would be complete without a full length treatment of the concept of world government. And few are as well placed to write that book as James A. Yunker.

Yunker has a long-standing interest in the prospects for and possibilities of world government and has written extensively on the topic as well as on related ideas such as a global Marshall Plan.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, his interest in the idea of world government comes from his life-long work researching, writing, and teaching in the field of economics. He is currently Professor of Economics at Western Illinois University, having spent more than 40 years on the faculty there. He is author of more than 80 articles and 10 books, the most recent of which is *Political Globalization: A New Vision of Federal World Government*.<sup>8</sup>

We are delighted to have this book in the series. His book meticulously charts the development of the idea of world government from its origins in antiquity to the present. It is essential reading for all interested in the power of ideas in world politics. As always, we welcome comments from our readers.

Thomas G. Weiss, The CUNY Graduate Center, New York, USA  
Rorden Wilkinson, University of Manchester, UK  
October 2010

# Acknowledgments

When I first became interested in the possibility of federal world government as a university student during the turbulent 1960s, the Cold War was raging, and in light of that reality it did seem more or less utopian to speculate on world government. With the renunciation of communism by the USSR and the effective end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, however, prospects for world government improved considerably. My interest in the possibility revived and deepened, and I commenced contributing to the literature, adding what are hopefully some important innovative elements of my own. Many individuals encouraged and assisted my work during this period, and to these individuals I owe a large debt of gratitude, most importantly to Saul Mendlovitz, Jan Tinbergen, Walter Isard, Dietrich Fischer, Richard Falk, James Sabin, Vernon Ruttan, Paul Streeten, Derek Heater, Cliff Kinkaid, Hanna Newcombe, Ronald Glossop, Philip Isely, Errol Harris, Scott Hoffman, Gordon Anderson, James Rosenau, Strobe Talbott, Claus Dierksmeier, Luis Cabrera, Alexander Wendt, James Keeley, Andrew Strauss, Joseph Schwartzberg, Vincent Auger, Richard Hattwick, Jim Stark, Josef Ortega, Hugh Steadman, and Daniel Kurtz-Phelan. I am also most grateful to Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, editors of the Routledge Global Institutions series, for providing me with this welcome opportunity to survey the idea of world government as it has evolved over the course of human history.

James A. Yunker  
September 2010



# Abbreviations

AUD	Association to Unite the Democracies
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EU	European Union
FUDN	Federal Union of Democratic Nations
GMP	Global Marshall Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USE	United States of Europe
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WCPA	World Constitution and Parliament Association
WEPP	World Economic Equalization Program
WMWFG	World Movement for World Federal Government