

## **Is the age of Sovereignty of nation states over?**

Today, we are living in a globalised world. Thanks for the modern technologies, contacting and travelling between peoples in all around the world became much easier. Business goes every different parts of the world and financial flows are instantly made between far distant places. As the time and spaces for human activities feel compressed, politics and economy of a country seem to be rather easily exposed to influences from outside its boundary. Hence, a lot of authors today argue that the process of globalisation is undermining the sovereignty of nation-states and will lead to the eventual disintegration of the sovereign states system in international politics. Since the phenomenon of globalisation seems to weaken the traditional power and sovereignty of nation-states, and thereby much of those aspects seem to be out of control for the states. Wherever this is true or not, the purpose of this essay is going to find it out. To do this, first of all, we are going to look at the concepts of sovereignty and globalisation, and then I shall proceed to discover the relationship between sovereignty of nation-states and globalisation as well as to make a conclusion.

### **What is the Sovereignty of Nation-States?**

Sovereignty in its simplest sense is the principle of absolute and unlimited power. (Andrew Heywood, 2000:37) The concept of sovereignty is inseparably related to the very existence of the nation-states. And the sovereignty of nation-states is a state's place in the international order and its capacity to act as an independent and autonomous entity. For example, a state exercises its sovereign right to sign a treaty

The concept of sovereignty emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as a result of the development in Europe of the modern state. As the authority of trans-national institutions, such as the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire faded, centralising monarchs in England, French revolution was able to claim to exercise supreme power, and they did this in a new language of sovereignty. Originally Sovereignty intended in reference to the establishment of order within a state, or we could call 'internal sovereignty'. While questions about internal sovereignty have in a democratic age appeared increasingly out of date, and the issue of sovereignty of nation-states has become absolutely vital. Some of the deepest divisions in modern politics, from Arab-Israeli conflict to the tension across Taiwan Strait all involve disputed claims to such sovereignty. Therefore, sovereignty of nation states has thus come to embody the principles of national independence and self-government. Only if a nation is sovereign its people capable of fashioning their own destiny according to their particular needs and interests. To ask a nation to surrender its sovereignty is tantamount to asking its people to give up their freedom. This is why as the sovereignty of a nation has been threatened, it will be so fiercely defended. The political nationalism is the best evidence of this. However, as a result from globalisation today, some authors argue that the age of sovereignty nation-states is over and no longer to be meaningful. Is that true? In order to find the answer, we should first be understand what globalisation is and how it was affecting the rights of sovereignty nation states in the modern world.

## **What is the Globalisation?**

In our current age, globalisation is having a profound affect upon national and international rules. It is, for example, influencing the norms that govern world commerce, transportation, environmental protection etc. However there is no universally agreed definition of this term. It made its debut in western public policy circles in the mid-1980s, was replacing "interdependence" and was at the time generally viewed in an economic context.

In the common sense, Globalisation simply referred to a largely commercial process involving rapid increases in the exchange of goods, capital, and services across national frontiers and also, more importantly, globalisation is the functional integration of such internationally dispersed activities. The central feature of globalisation is therefore that geographical distance is of declining relevance and that territorial boundaries are becoming less significant. (Peter Dicken, 1999:5) It is also pointed out by many authors that this process is initiated, most of all, by economic forces who are seeking for higher profits in one single conceptual global space, and is supported by the rapid development of technology in communication, transportation, media, and production. Despite those dramatically developments and changes throughout the world, the role of the sovereignty of nation-states still playing in the one of the most important part of our life. The following part of this essay will be turn to discuss the impact of globalisation on the sovereignty of national states.

## **Is the age of Sovereignty of nation states over?**

Proponents of the globalisation argument often claim that the process of globalisation implies the 'death of sovereignty of nation states'. This is because national economies have effectively been absorbed into a larger global economy and information and cultural exchanges are now routinely, and national government thus is an anachronism. It has been reducing to a managerial role in which it strives to cope with economic constraints that are beyond its control, it watches helplessly as the balance of forces swing towards the global markets. Within its historical borders it has ceased to be the locus of political action and identity, of social cohesion and the general interest. National government will be eventually lost its control altogether, and the sovereignty of nation states thus do not exist anymore, it would be replaced by a universally agreed law. And this law will be has capable of influencing the course of any events. This view is particularly fashionable in Europe, where unification is proceeding by way of agreed transfers of sovereignty.

Despite the unification proceeding in Europe. So far, it is rather clear that the sovereign nation states are still the basic constituents of the international society. The concept of sovereign states has formed the basis of the political structure of the modern world, and it looks still valid. Even in Europe, members of EU countries such like Germany, France and Italy etc today still keeping their own seat in the UN, having their own embassies in their diplomatic countries. You and most people in this world probably never heard about a sovereignty of nation state called European Union yet. So the above mentioned proponents say that this structure is changing and human

beings will have to expect completely different polities rather than in which they have ever lived.

However, from some aspects, we can not deny that the globalisation does challenge to the sovereignty of nation-states. First challenge to the state sovereignty arise from the global economy which entail in it the dominant role of Multinational Companies (MNCs) and global capital markets. The next challenger is the Trans-national bodies such as The World Bank, IMF, WTO and UN, etc. The remaining two forces are International laws and Hegemonic Powers. But this doesn't mean that those challenges would be replace the sovereignty of nation states.

Regarding to the role of MNCs, a range of mechanisms has been identified. First and foremost is the point that MNCs make decisions on the basis of optimising their profitability rather than the economic health of particular nations. Their decisions on investment, flows of resources are made rather independently regardless of national policies of host countries, thereby affecting the economic growth, employment, industrial structure, and even the government taxation. In this way, they erode the sovereignty of nation-states.

Together with MNCs, the development of global capital market is also widely reported to challenge to the sovereignty of nation-states. Today, gamblers and investors can transfer huge amount of money from one country to another literally in a moment through the electronic communication network. It seems that states cannot control this movement properly. The devastating effects of this rapid movement of money to sovereignty have well proved the case through such like South East Asian financial crisis in 1997, where the flight of gambling money is said to have provoked the financial turmoil. Besides, the development of huge offshore bank deposits has also caused states to lose sole ownership of another hallmark of sovereignty, which is the national currency.

Despite those challenges arise from MNCs and global capital markets, the nation-states today are still central to the governance functioning and state sovereignty doesn't been affected too much. One of the main reasons is that states distribute power upwards to the international level and downwards to sub-national agencies to keep the system of governance together. This is because most multinational companies in international economy have an interest in financial stability to reduce uncertainty in their planning of investment, production and marketing strategies. But stability in the international economy can only be had if states combine to regulate it and to agree on common objectives and standards of governance.

Equally, the Trans-national bodies such as The World Bank, IMF, WTO and UN, etc. The remaining two forces are International laws and Hegemonic Powers could not also never replace the sovereignty of nation-states in many senses. It is because international agencies and common policies sanctioned by treaty, and they all come into existence because major nation states have agreed to create them and to confer legitimacy on them by pooling sovereignty.

This aspect is well illustrated by some surveys on the case of UN. These surveys point out that all members of the UN are automatically parties to the Statutes of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) but need not accept the Court's Jurisdiction. A

survey calculates that only around a third of UN members accept its jurisdiction. Transnational legal bodies generally lack the ultimate capacity military or otherwise to force recalcitrant nations to accept the outcome of judicial process. This means that nations choose to regulate themselves rather than being coerced to change direction.

So from these points of view that those challenges have little affect on the Sovereignty of Nation-States indeed. In fact, on another side of view, comparing to history, the sovereignty of nation-states actually is expanding. Michael Mann represents this point. He analysed the historical development of the sovereignty of nation-states, and has shown the process in which nation-states have continuously expanded their functions. According to Mann, prior to the 18th century, states did comparatively little apart from conducting war and diplomacy, and internal repression. The sovereignty states' role was expanded during the 19th and early 20th centuries with the extension of citizenship rights and the provision of economic and social infrastructure. During the 20th century, further extension of welfare state function has been combined with macro-economic planning activities. With this historical dynamics in background, Mann argues that the sovereignty state is in a sense maturing rather than being in the last gasp of senility and decrepitude. While certain state functions may grow or recede in importance, the institution itself is in healthy shape.

## **Conclusion**

It is true that at the moment the nation-states are still the pivots of international society and certainly remaining for some time. In some senses, globalisation is taking place really fast and is challenging to the sovereignty of nation-states. But in other senses, the sovereignty states are still robust.

It seems certain that there exist globalising forces that make the existence of nation-states redundant. MNCs are certainly the most important forces. They would feel the states' control over their activities very cumbersome and uncomfortable. However, those international companies cannot exist without the protection and agreement of nation-states. Therefore, globalisation has not dissolved the sovereignty of nation-states. In another words, the age of sovereignty of nation-state is not over.

## **Bibliography**

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