

The Concept of the Globalization of Public Administration in Disaster Relief: The Case of Haiti

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ABSTRACT

Because of international political competition among donor powers especially, and the problems of coordination, it is not possible for relief efforts to be globalized effectively with sustaining long-term results. As a result, only the meaningful empowerment of the state in need will be tantamount to an effective solution to the problem.

Introduction

The print and electronic media have been supersaturated with information pertaining to the calamities surrounding the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that occurred in Haiti on January 12th, 2010. This type of frenzied coverage of natural disasters, especially, has been commonplace in United States media circles. For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami which plagued certain countries in Asia; and Hurricane Katrina, which plagued the Gulf Coast area of the United States in 2005, have all been covered in about the same journalistic vein. In this regard, the mass media succeeded in bringing the plight of these affected places into the international forum for observation, discussion and analyses. In the case of the Haitian earthquake, this exposure has set the stage for countries within the international system to make the attempt at mustering the needed resources designed to assist Haiti, not only to address the short-term impact of the earthquake, but also to emerge from the ruins of that catastrophe in the long run. In as much as such efforts are helpful in providing some measure of relief for the affected populations of that state, history has shown that they are nevertheless usually fraught with tremendous political (the actual provision of resources), and logistical (coordination) difficulties both of which in turn contribute extensively to operational delays and as a result the apparent ineffectiveness of the goals espoused by such missions.

For all intents and purposes, this international effort is tantamount to a globalization of public administration, defined as the “attempt” by other state governments, the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) to assume the governmental functions of another state, perhaps temporarily, in an effort to govern the affairs of that state. However, because there are inherent political and practical problems of the provision of adequate resources, in addition to very acute problems of the coordination or the logistics of relief efforts, achieving the goal of effective disaster relief has been demonstrated to be extremely difficult. In this exercise the view will be espoused that, as a result of the political and coordination difficulties encountered, the globalization of public administration in disaster relief efforts such as the one in Haiti will largely be ineffective. This difficulty is further highlighted by a comparison between Katrina and the Haitian earthquake experiences.

Comparative Analyses: Katrina and the Haitian Earthquake

Although one disaster took place in an advanced country with a tremendous amount of resources and technological capabilities, while the other took place in a third world country that is widely regarded as a failed state, Katrina and the Haitian earthquake nevertheless share similarities and also dissimilarities as regards disaster relief efforts, from a public administration perspective.

(1) Generating the needed resources for the purpose of addressing effectively a catastrophic aftermath the magnitude of which had not been expected and as a result, for which there had been no concrete plan, proved to be extremely difficult even for the United States and rather practically impossible for the impoverished and fragile state of Haiti. This fragility explains the reason that Haiti, unlike the United States, has had no choice but to acquiesce to an international donor force, at the price of the loss of a significant measure of its sovereignty.

(2) The coordination of the relief effort among donors, in the case of Haiti, and policy coordination among the three levels of government, in the case of the United States, also manifested extreme difficulties. In the United States, despite the stipulations in the federal constitution pertaining to the relations that govern the two levels of government under federalism, all three jurisdictions (the National Government, the state of Louisiana,

and the city of New Orleans) held each other culpable as to which level was supposed to have been responsible for performing certain functions in addressing the aftermath of that catastrophe. This is proof that disaster relief efforts, without regard to where they may occur, will be challenging undertakings for political and/or coordination reasons. These difficulties are compounded when the international status of Haiti is observed from two major perspectives: first, that Haiti is an impoverished society; and second, that the coordination of relief efforts was made much more complicated by the involvement of states worldwide in a globalization of public administration effort.

The Globalization of Public Administration: A General Theory

Because the globalization of public administration exacerbates the issues of resource availability and coordination, a number of positions are being posited in the form of a general theory. (1) That the long-term effectiveness of the globalization of public administration in disaster relief efforts, whether man-made or nature-made, is actually unattainable. Resources will be inadequate and relief efforts may not be coordinated effectively. (2) That any measure of success by such efforts will be temporary at best (a band aid) and will not necessarily, serve the long-term needs or interests of the populations in that particular state or country. The state would not have possessed the infrastructure that would enable it to address such problems on its own. (3) That the “disempowered” (unable to resolve its own domestic problems) state will continue to need such assistance in the future, thereby placing in jeopardy its sovereignty within the international system, and also placing a strain on the scarce resources of donor countries. Since the state will continue to be very dependent on foreign assistance, foreign donors will be returning to provide aid on a repeated basis. (4) That allowing disempowered states to remain disempowered, and as a result absolutely dependent on other states for the welfare of their populations, may cause serious disturbances within the international system of continued political competition among donor states; and even wars, if such problems are to become really intractable.

POLITICS OF THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

Addressed below are a number of reasons that are responsible for the politicization of the provision of resources to a country that may be in need of them. The reasons are

rooted in economic and political theories as regards the behavior of states or the “games nations play” within the international arena.

Global Competition

There is competition among some donor countries whose primary goal may simply be the creation of a “sphere of influence” or hegemony in that particular state, for the fulfillment of their own national political, economic and/or security interests. Because the world is decentralized (no world government), international relations are rife with this type of tacit “deal-making”, implying that such donor countries may have an ulterior motive other than the articulated humanitarian gesture. When this becomes the case, the emphasis is shifted away from humanitarianism to a quid pro quo strategy, which may have the effect of diluting that type of aid, or making it somewhat ineffective or unappreciated once the recipient state discovers that there are strings attached to it. Further, it is also possible that when state “A” discovers that it has successfully “out-bid” (given more aid) its competitor state “B”, it may then decide to end its allocations having satisfied perhaps one of its own national interests (the “out-bidding” of competitors), even though more aid may still be needed by the recipient state, and even though state “A” may still have more resources at its disposal. To elaborate, a number of examples involving the relief efforts in Haiti will be enunciated.

(1) According to NHK Radio, the International Shortwave Service of Radio Japan, the behavior of China and Taiwan is said to have the appearance of competition, as regards which one of the two was intent on providing more assistance to the Haitians. The following statements will explain the rationale underlying such competitiveness. China’s interest is that it regards Taiwan as an integral part of its jurisdiction, under the one-China policy or “one country two systems” principle. On these bases, China seeks the isolation of Taiwan. Taiwan’s interest, on the other hand, is to remain independent of China by breaking out of the “isolation trap” which China has supposedly set for it. Therefore one strategy, by Taiwan, in accomplishing this goal is to seek hegemony in various parts of the world through its participation in the relief efforts in Haiti, as an example.

(2) According to RHC (Radio Havana Cuba), the Cuban government boasts of having sent approximately four hundred medical doctors to Haiti, while the United States government is being accused of “militarizing” the relief efforts as a result of its deployment of approximately twenty thousand troops in the country. RHC also stated, and this was corroborated by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), that United States forces were in control of both the Haitian airport and the Presidential Palace – two very strategic and politically symbolic places in the country. Further, that a “Doctors without Borders” (an NGO) airplane was refused landing at the Port au Prince airport, and was redirected to land in the neighboring state of the Dominican Republic instead – an exercise of real power, by the United States, among the competing forces in that political theater. By virtue of its behavior, the primary interest of the United States is to maintain its traditional role as both a regional hegemon, as dictated by the Monroe Doctrine or “Backyard Theory”; and a global hegemon, as the only remaining superpower following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the primary interest of Cuba involves its determination to maintain the Cuban Revolution, and as a result, the sovereignty of the Cuban state. In order to accomplish this goal, among other strategies, Cuba has flooded medical personnel all over the world in an attempt to gain influence and seek support for its independence from the governments and people of those states. Cuba’s approach, of course, runs contrary to the Monroe Doctrine thereby explaining the reason for the on-going conflict between the two neighbors.

Scarce Resources

Since economics teaches that resources are scarce relative to the demand for them, the decision-making process as to “who gets what when and how”, according to Harold Lasswell, will be conducted on a political basis rather than on the basis of actual need. David Easton agreed with this assessment when he defined politics as “the authoritative allocation of values or scarce resources”. For example, donor states often decide to allocate scarce resources to countries primarily on the basis of a vital national interest. Any other condition such as, where the national interests are either too minimal or simply non-existent, may not be considered seriously. The rational basis of this principle is premised on costs and benefits, whereby “returns” are expected for the donor country’s “investments” in order that the effort is regarded as having been tantamount to rational

decision-making. In colloquial terms, a potential donor state will aspire, as individuals do in societies, to “put its money where its mouth is” in the international system.

Further, this phenomenon can be appreciated when one observes the ideological composition of the list of countries and organizations that have been involved in the Haitian earthquake relief efforts. Primarily, the countries consist of allies, enemies, and non-aligned states. The non-aligned states are themselves not absolutely non-aligned, since some are dependent on the major powers, occasionally, for various forms of assistance. Even some of the NGO's, sometimes regarded as not having any ideological orientation, are said to actually be representatives of their respective state governments and/or multinational corporations. Multinational corporations have also been known to have vested economic interests in various countries consisting of the international system.

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF COORDINATION

After having examined the politics underlying decision-making in international resource allocation, the technical issue of coordination will also be examined in terms of the practical problems posed in international relief efforts.

Because of the limitations imposed by political considerations, as has already been demonstrated, it will simply be impossible to assemble donor countries, whose national interests are at variance with each other, to agree to coordinate their functions for the purpose of increased effectiveness in relief efforts.

Another major obstacle, even under the assumption that coordination could have been possible, is the differences in the personnel systems of the states that are involved in the process. It may be possible, in a typical country; to assemble firefighters from various local jurisdictions to train them in anticipation of a terrorist attack, as has been done in parts of the United States. But, how can such a complicated enterprise be conducted at the international realm where there is decentralization? The United Nations could have been, perhaps, the most ideal organization to conduct such an initiative, but the organizational membership still consists of the same states that seek their individual national interests within the international arena. This makes the United Nations somewhat ineffective; especially, when it is considered that the permanent members the

Security Council are global hegemonies, each with its own vested interests that come into conflict with those of its competitors. Additionally, most of the organization's funding emanates from these major powers, with the United States at the top of the list. This would imply that, as an organization, the United Nations may not be able to promulgate policies that run counter to the vested interests of the permanent states in the Security Council, without the agreement of such states. To some extent, this explains the reasons international disaster relief efforts have been so handicapped.

Conclusion

What should be done in the case of Haiti to help it be more self-sustaining into the distant future? This becomes a valid question because it has been very clear for decades that the state is unable to sustain its sovereign status in the international community. In the United States President Clinton, certain members of Congress, and former bureaucrats in the national government, have all attempted to address this issue. But has not this same issue been delved into in the past, with no permanent solutions?

Since it is not possible to engage in effective global public administration, the only other approach to take is to empower the state of Haiti in a way that it may be able to maintain its sovereignty in the western hemisphere. Among other positive factors, this will assist greatly in stabilizing the region, a concern of the United States for over one hundred years.

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