



## JEFFRY FRIEDEN

Professor of government, Harvard University

### **Dominique Moïsi, Special Advisor, Ifri**

We will now move on to Professor Jeffrey Frieden, who is Professor of Government at Harvard University.

### **Jeffrey Frieden, Professor of government, Harvard University**

Thank you. Our theme for the last three days has been global governance. Out of respect for that theme, I want to present some observations about the topic of global governance, both as it has been discussed here and more generally. I will sound three notes: first, a note of scepticism, then a note of realism and, finally, a note of guarded optimism.

Let me start with the note of scepticism. Global governance is often invoked as a kind of Deus ex machina, probably descending from Geneva, that will force good policies on governments that somehow, inexplicably, have not undertaken them. However, the normative argument for global governance is quite strictly circumscribed. Typically, governance would be defined as supplying government like functions, and global governance therefore involves supplying government like functions at a supra national level.

In this context, global governance is only really justified if there are global public goods that cannot be supplied by national governments. There are plenty of such public goods – public health might be one, as is dealing with climate change – but they are circumscribed. The invocation of global governance does not serve as a justification for dealing with our frustration with national governments by trying to bump issues up to the international level. Just because national governments cannot or will not act on certain matters, or at least will not act adequately in our view to deal with macroeconomic instability or the situation in the Middle East, for example, it does not really help to call upon global governance as a solution. If governments will not act on their own, they are very unlikely to delegate these important policies to some non-existent international government or global governance.

I would therefore be very careful about prescribing global governance as a solution to all of our problems. Most issues, in most countries, most of the time can be adequately confronted by national governments. Even if national governments do not confront them, they have the ability to adequately confront them.

This brings me to a note of realism. I think that one of the reasons why people turn in frustration to ideas of global governance is that we remain mired in the most serious economic crisis since the 1930s. It is therefore not surprising that most national political economies are more or less completely absorbed in dealing with their extremely difficult domestic, social, economic and political conditions. Governments everywhere have been driven inward in trying to resolve the domestic implications of the crisis that has affected all of us. The conditions are therefore not very propitious for major nations to undertake significant international initiatives, especially if those initiatives draw them away from confronting their domestic concerns, unless those international initiatives can be found to be directly related to their domestic concerns.

I do not see this as an argument for doing nothing; I see it as an argument for scaling back our ambitions -- for realism -- and for trying to choose topics and approaches that governments will actually undertake, given the circumstances and constraints that they face. Some people might regard this as being pessimistic, but I would remind you that, after all, a pessimist is just a well informed optimist.



Let me end on a note of guarded optimism in this context. Despite the national self absorption of many of our governments, I think that in the context of the crisis there have in fact been some striking examples of successful international cooperation and even, perhaps, the beginnings of some global governance. Precisely because the situation in some realms was so dire, there have in fact been attempts to provide a global response to some of the problems that we face. The most striking of these to me – perhaps because it is my own area of expertise, although I think that it is of more general interest as well – has been the extraordinary degree of cooperation among national monetary and financial authorities in the aftermath of September/October 2008 on monetary policy and financial regulation. I think that few of us, including those who are specialists in the area, would have anticipated the degree of cooperation that has ensued after the crisis hit.

Therefore, perhaps the threat, which was very real seven years ago, of a new Great Depression, like the threat of imminent execution, concentrated the minds of policymakers and led to international cooperation. This was necessary no one government could possibly have confronted the global financial crisis effectively and it was forthcoming. Therefore, inasmuch as we are likely to face similarly pressing international problems, this may well be the cause of optimism. Faced and confronted with a serious problem that all governments had to deal with, there was in fact a tendency for governments to step up to the plate and work together quite effectively in the monetary and financial realm. There is therefore some cause for optimism, albeit guarded.

In conclusion, I would suggest that we should be sceptical of the excessive invocation of global governance as a cure for what ails us and a solution to intractable international problems. I suggest that we should be realistic about the ability of national governments to overcome the national self absorption that is natural in a crisis like this and embark on major new international initiatives. However, I would be guardedly optimistic, as there have in fact been some notable and important successes in both national policies and international cooperation. For me, therefore, the implication is that our principal efforts in these troubled times should, as usual, be to encourage our national governments to pursue better policies and on this basis we can perhaps look forward to more effective international cooperation and even, possibly, more global governance.