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An Emergent Urban Geopolitics.

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Our geopolitical space is getting crowded. Over the last three decades we have seen the addition and consolidation of significant new actors, such as the WTO and the International Criminal Court, and the strengthened role of older actors such as the IMF and civil society organizations. There are over a hundred other regulatory bodies that have emerged and aspire to govern our increasingly globalized economies, polities, criminalities, terrorisms, epidemics, environmental destructions.

None of these has fully replaced national governments. The latter continue to be the major actors, partly because they are far more complex in their all-encompassing functions and (at times at least) capabilities.

But now we see emerge a network of complex actors with multiple capabilities who find themselves at the forefront of many of our major challenges –from the environment to terrorism. They are cities, especially global cities. It is not that the diverse leaderships of cities want to compete with national states in our global geopolitical space. They don't. They simply have had to address these major challenges because it is in cities where they become acute, urgent, empirical –one can act on them directly.

More and more cities are collaborating with each other, sharing experiences and discoveries of what works and what not in a rapidly growing range of global challenges.

The C-40 network has made more advances on the environmental front than most national governments. In the recent Rio+20 conference, the Summit of Mayors organized by Rio's much-respected mayor, was a success in terms of exchanges of what works and agreements to implement; in contrast, the meeting of national governments got nowhere, no matter the formal document: misplaced nationalisms about the right to produce carbon dioxide seem to rule these discussions.

At the other extreme, and perhaps disturbing, most major cities now have ready-to-act anti-terrorism forces --not always brilliantly deployed, as when the New York City Police Department used its anti-terrorism force to fight the Occupy movement.

I see in all of this an emerging urban geopolitics centered in networks of cities - mostly, but not exclusively, global cities. Major cities will not replace any of the other geopolitical actors. But they will play a role, both as actor and as the site for major challenges. In my reading this is a process that began in the late 1980s with the rise of global cities as strategic to the corporate and financial global economy: the rapidly growing network of major and minor global cities, which now number over a hundred, has evolved into one of the key architectures of the global economy.

But now this architecture has begun to include aspects as diverse as the environment and terrorism. Cities are a new frontier zone for these challenges.

I find here the seeds of an urban geopolitics. Much of it is informal. And that might well give it its practical quality and effectiveness. But it has become clear over the last few decades that our geopolitical future is not going to be determined by the G8+ nor by the G2 combination of the United States and China, or the G20. It will include a very large range of specialized actors. And it will include urban networks. This is not about conventional hierarchies. It is about a far deeper trend.

Besides these global urban networks with their specific agendas, we can detect a second emergent development inside nation-states: a number of geopolitical urban vectors where much of global geopolitics plays out. These may well be more significant than the national government as such, partly because they account for much of the global economy. At some point these urban vectors might become more significant for our global geopolitics than the countries within which they exist. Here are what I see as dominant vectors today.

- a) **Washington/New York/Chicago**
- b) **Beijing/Hong Kong/Shanghai**
- c) **Berlin/Frankfurt/Brussels –as long as we have a European Union**
- d) **Istanbul/Ankara:** Istanbul, long the East/West and North/South hinge city, in combination with Ankara, is rapidly becoming a major global policy nexus.
- e) **Sao Paulo/Rio de Janeiro/Brasilia:** The new politico-economic heavyweight axis next to now-established China. Brazil's development bank is richer than the World Bank, and its economic power is large and ascendant.
- f) **Cairo/Beirut/Riad:** These cities rearticulate what the Middle East means as a region. Beirut has long had offshore politico-economic networks worldwide; Cairo has a history of empire. Riad is the Gulf.
- g) **Geneva/Vienna/Nairobi:** These cities have the critical mass and mix of institutions long devoted to social questions and justice for the powerless, with Nairobi increasingly important in a rapidly urbanizing world. They have long been overshadowed by global finance and mega-militaries. But they will emerge as critical actors in the global commons. We may then finally see a global environmental and social agenda rising from the current economic paralysis and financial excess.

There are major cities not included in this list, notably London. It stands alone, and succeeds by itself. It is, in that regard, probably the ultimate world city in this period –a major city without an empire. That is an achievement. Will it last? Nothing lasts forever, except our good old complex cities: they have outlived empires, kingdoms, republics, and financial firms.

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