Civilization and World Order:
The Relevance of the Civilizational Paradigm in Contemporary International Law

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I. The civilizational paradigm in the era of global unipolarity

In the era of global bipolarity — during the Cold War — the norm of non-interference was one of the fundamental principles of the international order. It ensured the stability of relations between states on the basis of the notion of sovereign equality as enshrined in Art. 2(1) of the United Nations Charter.

One of the most visible expressions of this post-World War II emphasis on non-interference in a nation’s internal affairs was the commitment to the policy of peaceful co-existence between states with different ideologies, cultures, and value systems. This doctrine was indeed the very essence of the international order of peace established after World War II and it incorporated quite consistently the philosophy underlying the provisions of the UN Charter related to partnership and co-operation among states.1

What, in modern terms, is being characterized as “co-existence among civilizations” was then ensured through the respect for the very principle of non-interference into each other’s internal affairs. In that particular era (up to the end of the so-called “East-West conflict”) the term mainly, though not

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1 See General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV), adopted on 24 October 1970: Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.
exclusively, applied to co-existence among state systems with distinct ideologies in the sense of competing philosophical and political world views.

On the basis of this interpretation in the overall framework of international relations (that was oriented towards the *stability* of the global system), we have outlined a general doctrine reflecting on the role of culture (civilization)\(^2\) in the preservation of international peace. In a lecture delivered at Jordan’s Royal Scientific Society in March 1974\(^3\) and in an international conference on “The Cultural Self-comprehension of Nations” held in Innsbruck, Austria, in July of the same year,\(^4\) we tried to explain that a civilization (or ideology, meaning a particular world view and value system) can only fully realize itself through the encounter with other civilizations. What we characterized, at the time, as the “dialectic of cultural self-comprehension”\(^5\) is indeed based on the principle of *mutual respect* which, in the realm of relations between states, is expressed in the norm of non-interference in the internal affairs. In our efforts at outlining the basic elements of an international order of peace we emphasized the structural similarity of what in modern terminology is called the “dialogue of civilizations” to the (political) doctrine of peaceful co-existence — and the mutual reinforcement between the two.

In a marked departure from the paradigm of co-existence as the basic norm of the international order, the post-Cold War period has witnessed a steady erosion of the principle of non-interference, implying its subordination to the interests of an increasingly self-assured hegemonial power. Accordingly, international relations in the era of global unipolarity (in terms of the political order) have brought about a profound change in the understanding of international law as such. In the absence of a balance of power in the relations

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2 In the context of this paper, we understand “civilization” as the comprehensive world view, including a universal value system, that has shaped the social identity of a collective (grouping of people) and been sustained over a period of time; accordingly, “culture” is understood as a sub-system of a given civilization.


5 Cultural-philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation, pp. 7ff.