



Introduction

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This volume grew out of an article I wrote in 2021 for *The Independent Review* on libertarian interstate federalism.¹ In it, I was finally able to connect the enthusiasm for global federalism that F.A. Hayek possessed² and the yearning for a “world superstate”³ that Ludwig von Mises expressed to a states-system that actually fit into their ideal for world order. This volume in particular was undertaken in direct response to two developments that emerged after the publication of my article: (1) the lack of interest, or in some cases outright hostility, expressed in the idea of a “libertarian interstate federalist tradition,”—of a libertarian foreign policy that is actually global in scale and scope—by libertarians in the United States, and (2) the lack of interest, or in some cases outright hostility, to the libertarian interstate federalist tradition’s advocacy of transoceanic federalism that has emanated from Europe’s classical liberal circles.

¹ Christensen (2021).

² See, especially Hayek (1976 [1939]) and Hayek (2007 [1944]: 223–236).

³ Mises (2002 [1927]: 150).

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A libertarian foreign policy that is truly global in scale and scope has rubbed libertarians and classical liberals on both sides of the Atlantic the wrong way. For most American libertarians, the isolationist tradition of their heartland is far more appealing than the liberal tradition of their theoretical forebears.⁴ For most European classical liberals, the free riding of their small nation-states in regards to American military security is not a cost that's worth disrupting the status quo.⁵ My first attempt at cracking this disappointing standstill, a special issue in the journal *Cosmos + Taxis*, only exacerbated the cavernous differences held on foreign policy between U.S. libertarians and European classical liberals.⁶ Fortunately, the special issue also produced some new voices for global liberty from outside of the Atlantic, as well as some new grounds for thinking about libertarian foreign policy in a world without a Berlin Wall, and less than half of the articles published in that special issue were written by classical liberals or libertarians. There is an interideological demand for world governance, and libertarians are a part of it.⁷

GLOBAL FEDERATIONS AND WORLD SUPERSTATES

The staunch calls for federations and world superstates early in the careers of both Mises and Hayek have garnered recent attention by scholars,⁸ but almost none of this attention takes Mises and Hayek at face value. Sadly, the status quo up until this point has been that both men decided they were wrong to yearn for global federation—that they were men of their time—and that they settled for a world composed of Westphalian nation-states after it became clear that the United States would be staying in Europe once World War II concluded.

This is an especially disappointing intellectual development because not only were both men lifelong proponents of world governance, but both men are known for being anything but men of their time. While it is certainly possible that someone could spend his or her entire life going

⁴ See, for example, Sorens (2024).

⁵ Rohac (2017a, 2017b).

⁶ Masini (2022, 2024), Van de Haar (2022), Burns (2022, 2024), and Rohac (2022).

⁷ Van Staden and Woode-Smith (2022), Oyerinde (2022), Nicol and Zellen (2022), and Crepelle and Murtazashvili (2022).

⁸ Slobodian (2018: 91–120), Spieker (2014), and Hazony (2018: 141–154).

along with the times, Mises and Hayek lived through the collapse of four imperial regimes, the two bloodiest wars in human history, the worst genocides and totalitarian regimes in world history, and, for Hayek at least, the emergence of a(n ostensibly) democratic Russia and the collapse of socialism as a social order. They fought as young men in an army that boasted mounted cavalry units and, when they died of old age, lived under the shadow of a potential nuclear holocaust via missiles fired by rockets or via flying airships. The fact that both men stuck with federation as a viable and liberal alternative to the status quo of Westphalian nation-states, throughout such a drastic historical epoch, suggests that both men were anything but susceptible to the times in which they lived; rather, it suggests that both scholars viewed interstate federalism as a liberal answer to nationalism, protectionism, and the predation of smaller states by larger ones.

Hayek's enthusiasm for international federalism was well-known and lifelong, but this has not deterred some scholars from suggesting that, because he was not as vocal about it later in his career, he had given up on the prospects of interstate federalism and accepted the Westphalian nation-state,⁹ or that he preferred federation only between European polities. But Hayek clearly had "a program which [...] is not too severely practical, and which does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible,"¹⁰ in mind when it came to global federalism, "the next great step in the advance of civilization."¹¹ He may not have been as explicit about international federation later in his career, but he never gave up on it, even if it appeared, just as it had decades ago when the socialist calculation debate appeared to have buried his argument, that he and other internationalist liberals had lost the battle of ideas to the nation-state and its conservative and socialist backers.¹²

Mises followed the exact same trajectory as Hayek, despite what anti-federalist scholarship has suggested. Mises went from calling, in 1927,

⁹ Van de Haar (2022).

¹⁰ Hayek (1949: 432).

¹¹ Hayek (2007 [1944]: 233).

¹² For more on Hayek's lifelong passion for federalism, see Van de Haar (2022) but also Hayek's second magnum opus (2021: 256–257, 464–466, and 488–489), where his explicit calls for international federalism are replaced by more subtle appeals for international government.

for a liberal world superstate that would respect secession¹³ to, in 1962, stating that “[w]hen every territory can by majority vote determine whether it should form an independent state *or a part of a larger state*, there will no longer be wars to conquer more provinces (emphasis mine)” and “[secession and federation] makes recourse to arms and bloodshed unnecessary not only in domestic but no less in international relations.”¹⁴ Thus, like Hayek, he boldly called for world liberal government early in his career, and then, at the sunset of his long and distinguished career, called for the same in a more measured tone. In between 1927 and 1962, Mises wrote quite a bit on interpolity relations (especially for an economist), though none of this was meant to outline what a liberal world would look like in the way that 1927’s *Liberalism* and 1962’s *Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science* did.

FOMENTING A “SHIFT IN VISION” AMONG LIBERALS AND LIBERTARIANS OF ALL STRIPES¹⁵

So what would a Hayekian international federation look like? Or a Misesian world superstate? How do we contrast Hayek’s musings about world federation—exemplified in his praise for Lord Tennyson’s poetry about a federation of the world¹⁶—with arguments that his pleas for international federalism were “a rare phantasy” and instead should be put into geopolitical context and limited to Europe?¹⁷ How do we confront Mises’ calls for a world superstate, or for a non-federal (and thus politically unconstrained) Eastern Democratic Union,¹⁸ or his measured criticisms of colonialism,¹⁹ with his supposed lack of interest in interpolity relations

¹³ Mises (2002 [1927]: 105–151).

¹⁴ Mises (1962: 93).

¹⁵ Buchanan (2000 [1975]: 215); see also Christensen (2021: 444) for more context.

¹⁶ Hayek (2007 [1944]: 233).

¹⁷ Van de Haar (2022: 113).

¹⁸ Mises (2000 [1941]: 186–188).

¹⁹ Mises was an ardent critic of imperialism throughout his life, but he did praise the British Empire for opening up India and China to world commerce (1981 [1922]: 207): “The wars waged by England during the era of Liberalism to extend her colonial empire and to open up territories which refused to admit foreign trade, laid the foundations of the modern world economy. To measure the true significance of these wars one has only

later on in his career? The first step to answering these fascinating questions about political economy is to recognize that both men never gave up on the idea of a liberal world government. Yes, it's true that Mises didn't call for a liberal world superstate in 1962, or a unitary state in Eastern Europe that would have no constraints on its power; nor did he praise globalizing aspects of European colonialism by 1962,²⁰ but he clearly reaffirms that federation is just an integral to liberal world order as secession. Hayek, as also noted above, was similarly staunch in his convictions. The end of step one and the beginning of step two is to acknowledge that Mises and Hayek, rather than giving up on interstate federalism, or being men of their time, just missed a piece of the puzzle.

THE POLYCENTRIC FEDERALISM OF AMERICA'S COMPOUND REPUBLIC

During the review process for that 2021 article, one of the three anonymous referees that was working on my submission suggested that I look into the works of Vincent Ostrom to enhance portions of my argument, and devouring up *The Political Theory of the Compound Republic* opened up avenues for ideas that I would have never imagined.

Ostrom, like the American Founders,²¹ was of the opinion that the compound republic was much more than just a blueprint for a country. The compound republic not only represented a new way of thinking about, and organizing, modes of self-government; it represents a mode of government that could very well be applied to continental and world orders:

to imagine what would have happened if India and China [...] had remained closed to world commerce." See also Mises (2010 [1944]: 96–101).

²⁰ This is something Tullock (2009: 79) also noticed, when he referred to the East India Company as "honorable," and states "It's hard to argue that [nineteenth century European empires] were exploitative, since the colonial powers, with the possible exception of Belgium, gave governments better than those which they had replaced and, in many cases, better than what eventually replaced the colonial governments."

²¹ See the concluding paragraph of *Federalist Paper* #14, for example, where Madison boasts that "the world"—"the whole human race"—can benefit from the compound republic of the Americans (1982: 67). See also a fascinating essay by Tomasi (2002) on the compound republic's potential for "governance beyond the nation-state."

World government assumes absurd proportions, unless we begin with Madison's perspective that our capacity for self-government can only be realized with a proper structure of limited and concurrent governments where principles of self-government can be applied to each community of interest.²²

Ostrom and his students never invoked Hayek or Mises in any of their studies on federalism, and Hayek and Mises never invoked the *Federalist Papers*, as Ostrom and his students did, in any of their appeals for liberal world government. This fantastic gap in the puzzle for peace, liberty, and prosperity for the world can be filled with a new framework to think about interpolity relations and world order by melding the traditions of the Austrian School's liberal political economy with that of the Bloomington School's federalist studies. A polycentric world order could, and more importantly should, be federal in character if it is to avoid the pitfalls associated with international (or supranational) government that Mises and Hayek identified back in the 1930s and 1940s.²³

THE STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

In this particular volume, new ways of thinking about libertarianism in interpolity relations are juxtaposed by crisp chapters on how and why the non-interventionist position—so popular in American libertarian circles since the height of the Cold War in the late 1960s and early 1970s—should continue to be the standard bearer for the ideology's preferred foreign policy. American libertarians have come to prefer the anarchy that Westphalian nation-states require to exist because this anarchy can be utilized as an anti-imperialist tool in certain contexts. After World War II, the familiar triangle of anarchy-hegemony-federation²⁴ was replaced

²² Allen and Ostrom (2008: 223), but see 222-225 for a bigger picture.

²³ Hayek and Mises, among many other liberals, were ardent critics of the interwar and postwar international institutions that were established. Some interesting work on this, aside from Mises and Hayek themselves, is Rosenboim (2017: 130-167), Wasserman (2019: 195-232), Masala (2024: 255-280, and Carret (2024: 223-254).

²⁴ Ostrom (2008 [1971]: 85) explains that "federalism [...] provides an alternative to either imperialism or the reign of mutually destructive conflict." In the triangle of survival model, anarchy is what produces a balance of power-type situation in regional contexts, and it is this situation that Ostrom describes as being a "reign of mutually destructive conflict." Hegemony is the product of imperialism (also known as executive despotism),

by the dichotomy of anarchy-hegemony, which made sense given the onset of the Cold War and the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Out of this new dichotomy came Murray Rothbard and his call for American libertarians to “center their critical attention on the imperial and warlike activities of their own government”²⁵ rather than “a citizen of the world, a cosmopolite.”²⁶ In contrast to the former liberal position on foreign affairs—that of federation—the anti-imperial position emphasized the need for nation-states to resist hegemony, whether American or Soviet. Although the Soviet Union is gone, and the dichotomous anarchy-hegemony framework is defunct, especially relative to the classic above-mentioned triangle, the anti-imperialism of Murray Rothbard continues to resonate among American libertarians, so much so that this volume’s first section is dedicated to fresh insights on what is now known as “non-interventionism.” There are good reasons for this, and Scott Duryea and Michael Westbrook open the account with refreshing topics on non-intervention, one historical and one philosophical. In Chapter 3, Nathan Goodman builds off a now-large and respected body of work on peace studies by applying insights about polycentric orders to defense spending in the United States, and while this chapter is far more sophisticated than Rothbard’s impassioned pleas for non-interventionism during the Cold War, the latter’s influence is adroitly on display. Cory Massimino rounds out the section on non-intervention with an excellent chapter on conspiracy theories and international relations.

The next section of the volume moves the reader away from Westphalian anarchy and its balance of power and towards new ideas about sovereignties and how these can be applied to a world where hegemony and anarchy have another rival (federation) again. Barry Scott Zellen’s chapter on indigenous modes of governance and how they’ve melded with the federative structures of Canada and the United States provides a fascinating glimpse into how polycentric orders can incorporate indigenous peoples into federative governing structures. In Chapter 6, Clifford

and federation, representing an alternative to either hegemony or anarchy, is the product of a union or compound republic. For a sophisticated and thrilling account of the triangle of survival, see Deudney (2007). There is a useful parallel for American libertarians here: Hayek’s (1960: 398–411) use of a triangular model to help distinguish himself from conservatives in the United States.

²⁵ Rothbard (1994 [1973]: 270).

²⁶ Mises (2002 [1927]: 106).

“Chip” Poirot explains and contrasts the intellectual history around the Austrian School and one of its traditional rivals. Finally, Trent J. MacDonald gives us an exploration of sovereignty that has no connection to states whatsoever (here, too, we see echoes of Rothbard’s imprint).

The culminating section on federal and republican alternatives attempts to shed new light on an old liberal foreign policy doctrine. Bas Splet traces an 800-year history of the Low Countries to illustrate how polycentric governance worked in regional contexts and it could still work for the present-day and future, while Ilia Murtazashvili takes readers across the Atlantic and narrows the focus to three particular self-enforcing federations in what is now the United States. Federico Ottavio Reho takes us back to Europe, in particular what is now Germany, to highlight the intellectual thought of the oft-forgotten federalist thinker Constantin Frantz. Fabio Masini and Albertina Nania treat readers to a fantastic explanation of a major divide between the federalist theories of Hayek and Robbins during the interwar period. Oyebade Kunle Oyerinde applies polycentric governance strategies to some case studies in what is now Nigeria, while Martin van Staden provides a breathtaking chapter on what a libertarian world polity would—and should—look like. Devanshu Singh and the legendary Daniel Deudney confront the rise of artificial superintelligence and argue that republican constitutionalism could help us devise methods to bound superpower. Jack Birner concludes the volume, fittingly perhaps, with a plea for federation between European polities but not between transatlantic ones.

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