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# Unfinished bridges

A great deal has been written of late concerning the dysfunctionalities and failures that have been plaguing our newer and more established international ambitions. Troubles highlighted by the E.U. referenda, recent events in Gaza, and particularly those accusations being aimed at the U.N. itself, all would indicate a reality check that we're currently facing in regard to our most meaningful benchmarks of international co-operation.

Our main articles in *Barricades* this month contribute to this ongoing dialogue. In the case of the Rozental-Castro piece on sustained North American integration, hope for Mexico is placed firmly in the expansion and deepening of the regional relationships that have thus far been facilitated by NAFTA. By contrast, Peter Reynolds' piece on the problems now facing the more mature E.U. integration points to a new phase of alienation being experienced by Europe's core national members, one based largely on the new ambiguities of identity and aspiration that the burgeoning E.U. bureaucracy has necessitated.

Thomas Hecht, meanwhile, takes a broader view of international affairs, decrying recent European criticisms of U.S. policies confronting the Islamic threat, and noting that our generation is witnessing the disintegration of the longstanding Atlantic Alliance as China begins to assert itself as the main counterweight to existing U.S. hegemonies.

There is a common thread to all of these opinions, a rather old and worn thread, but one which still defines a great deal concerning how we all get along with one another. It's telling, for instance, that a country such as Mexico would tout increased international integration as a type of panacea, while more affluent and powerful nations are looking upon it as a source of suspicion and concern. What this discrepancy points to, and what Hecht's piece makes very clear, is that self-interest is still the overriding factor in transnational arrangements of any kind, and that our more traditional and tribal forms of identity still assert themselves very forcefully against our efforts to define ourselves in terms of a more global and co-operative community.

What's at odds here is, to put it quite simply, the old and

the new. The old self-interest is represented by those same tribally-inspired, us-vs-them identities that have followed us as we've progressed from clans to villages, villages to cities, and onwards into nation states. The new world we aspire to is one where we are all equal citizens of the same global community, a place where we care for and co-operate with one another in the interest of sustainable peace and prosperity for all.

That the new seems very much like pie-in-the-sky to many of us should come as no surprise. All real aspirations begin as pie-in-the-sky at some point or another. Nor should we find too much misgiving in the fact that some populations are now balking at the idea of the diminishment of their national identities – these types of international growing pains are both predictable and surmountable.

What I have far more faith in is the inevitability of our political evolution toward larger forms of social organization. Although the path from clans to nations has thus far been one that could accommodate our tribal past, we're definitely now reaching for goals requiring a new, more co-operative outlook. In due time we'll likely relegate our nationalisms to more benign forms of competition and cultural expression, in much the same way that we've done so domestically in order to reasonably accommodate varying municipal or provincial identities.

Indeed, even as many commentators today are pointing to the numerous failings in our international ambitions and structures of governance, the recent Canadian study published by the Liu Institute for Global Studies at UBC provides us with a different sort of reality check. It clearly demonstrates that key indicators related to international political violence have dropped significantly in the past 50 years, and gives most of the credit for this fact to – wait for it – U.N. conflict resolution mechanisms.

It would seem that though the bridges we've been building between nations these past decades may be imperfect in both their design and their construction, the fact is that they're already having positive effects on peoples' lives, and that our destiny lies in their improvement, not their dismantling.

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