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An Era of Accountability

It seems more natural in a globally framed world than it did in a statist world to posit accountability of leaders as an essential attribute of a more globalised world order.

Richard Falk

The start of the twenty-first century marked a period of significant questioning of leadership practice and privilege from the international community, civil society and leaders themselves. This has been most apparent in three sectors – political violence, political and economic corruption, and environmental security – but there has also been a significant ‘second track’ movement, for instance within public services and the workplace. The question of immunity and extradition is relevant across these three sectors and the role of civil society organizations, discussed in Chapter 4, has been central. This is distinct from related concerns. It is not issue-based accountability, for example about poverty or ecological degradation. It is not the down-system accountability of subordinates by superiors within a line-management system. Nor is it purely about political judgement and decision-making. The focus is now about specific wrongdoing for which specific powerful individuals are being brought to account by their peers and populations – personalized up-system leadership accountability.

The change has been noted in many ways. For example, in the UK, Peter Hain, then minister of state at the UK Foreign Office, identified the trend in 2001 when he talked of a new ‘globalisation of responsibility’. An opposition counterpart, Lord Howell of Guildford, claimed, ‘While in the past, political leaders could get away with [bad] behaviour, we have now moved into a revolutionary new world ... Voters want service and ongoing accountability, not dictation and top down arrogance’. From a
journalist's perspective Ed Vulliamy, known for his reporting of the conflicts in Central and Southern Europe, chose the word 'reckoning'.

Fergal Keane talks of 'something very profound [that] will register among the greatest achievements in the history of humanity' – events 'have forced the world to accept that leaders should be made accountable for the orders they give'.

During the 2002 BBC Reith Lectures, philosopher Onora O'Neill talked of 'a revolution in accountability' affecting the public services. As a member of the UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans mentioned in 2005 the need for a 'serious impunity exercise' against violent leaders in Sudan.

It is not just that such phrases have been given substance by the very many instances and wide variety of leadership accountability in a short space of time. There were three other striking features. Many of the reports also embody a ‘first’ of some sort, there has been an astonishing domino effect and, judging by the advanced age of many of those being challenged, accountability processes can no longer simply be timed out by powerful people.

**Political violence**

We must make clear to the Germans that the wrong for which their leaders are on trial is not that they lost the war, but that they started it. And we must not allow ourselves to be drawn into a trial of the causes of war, for our position is that no grievances or policies will justify resort to aggressive war. It is renounced and condemned as an instrument of policy.

Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, USA Senior Representative at the 1945 Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, and Chief Prosecutor

Following the Second World War, the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials provided the foundations for an international ethos within which leaders were to be made more accountable to their peers and their public for political violence. They affirmed the early Geneva Conventions and other proto-international law such as the Lieber Code of 1863, and reflected conclusions such as this from the Carnegie inquiry into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars in 1912–13 (note the date) which concluded:

The real culprits ... are not, we repeat, the Balkan peoples ... The true culprits are those who mislead public opinion and take advantage of