Globalization, the Liberal Imperative, Islamism, and the Future of Conflict in the 21st Century

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Many commentators perceive that international conflict has increased since the end of the Cold War and that globalization shares much of the blame. Stanley Hoffmann, for example, has written, "Globalization, far from spreading peace, … seems to foster conflicts and resentments."[1] Many others share this view—they believe that conflict is increasing, and that since globalization is also increasing, then it must be to blame. Hoffmann argues, "The spread of global media makes it possible for the most deprived or oppressed to compare their fate with that of the free and well-off." The dispossessed thus make common cause with others similarly disadvantaged with whom they share common grievances, ethnic backgrounds, or religious affiliation. A sense of hopelessness compels them "to seek revenge and self-esteem in terrorism."

Hoffmann is wrong on all counts. Although it is certainly the case that globalization is increasing, the frequency of conflict is actually decreasing. Moreover, in the conflicts that do occur, globalization does not seem to be the cause. Rather, transnational Islamism figures prominently as a factor sustaining these conflicts, much as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War.

The Rise and Fall of Internal Conflict

Several groups have been tracking the frequency of conflict globally, and all have noted a decline after the end of the Cold War. The Center for International Development and Conflict Management concludes that conflict, as measured by frequency and magnitude, peaked in 1991 and has been declining since.[2] According to Marshall and Gurr, "global warfare has been reduced by sixty percent since 1991."[3] In Figure 1, IW stands for interstate warfare, IV for internationalized civil violence, IN for wars of independence, EW for ethnic warfare, EV for ethnic violence, CW for civil war, and CV for civil violence. Interstate warfare virtually disappears after 1990.

Other analyses of the global trend in civil wars produce similar results, but show the decline occurring somewhat later. A list of intrastate conflicts prepared by a group at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo shows a later peak in conflict worldwide, occur
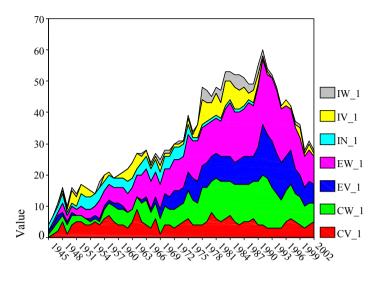
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[1] Stanley Hoffmann, "Clash of Globalizations," *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (Jul/Aug2002): 104ff.

[2] Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2003* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM), University of Maryland, 2003).

[3] Ibid., 8.

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Figure 1: Interstate and Internal Violence Since 1945.[4]

ring about 1993, which reflects the large number of conflicts that emerged from the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia.[5]

The most significant fact here is that the two datasets most often used in the international relations literature show a decline in the number of conflicts beginning sometime in the early to mid 1990s. No study has yet provided a clear explanation of this systemic decline.

Globalization

If the rise of globalization is related to the global decline in the number of conflicts, then we would expect that measures of globalization would show a similar decline. One way to define globalization is the "increased freedom and capacity of individuals and firms to undertake economic transactions with residents of other countries" and to "operate on a global scale."[6] The World Bank defines globalization as "the growing integration of economies and societies around the world."[7] The same report concludes,

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[4]   Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2003*.

[5]   See http://www.prio.no/page/Project_detail//9244/42133.html; accessed 24 May 2004; Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand, "Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 39:5 (2002): 615–37.

[6]   See http://www1.worldbank.org/economicpolicy/globalization/documents/globalization vs95.ppt; accessed 1 June 2004

[7]   *Globalization, Growth and Poverty* (Oxford: 2002), ix.

"Globalization generally reduces poverty because more integrated economies tend to grow faster and this growth is usually widely diffused."[8] If globalization reduces poverty, and poverty is the primary cause of conflict around the world, then increasing globalization must reduce conflict.[9]

Measures of globalization include greater trade and financial integration and the spread of global production networks. One common measure of the degree of trade integration is total trade as a percentage of GDP. Figure 2 shows that this measure increased until the early 1970s and remained static until the late 1980s, when it picked up again. After the events of 9/11, it has begun to decline.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) as a percentage of GDP also increased through the 1990s as a percentage of GDP, and fell only (and dramatically) in 2001 (as seen in Figure 3). The share of manufacturing associated with multinational enterprises has grown from 11.5 percent in the mid 1970s to 12.7 percent in the mid 1980s, to 17.6 percent in the mid 1990s.

It would appear, then, that globalization as defined as trade openness and relative increase in foreign direct investment has really only taken off since the 1990s. These measures increased only slightly after the first oil crisis in 1972. At the systemic level, it would appear that just as globalization began to take off, inter- and intrastate violence declined.
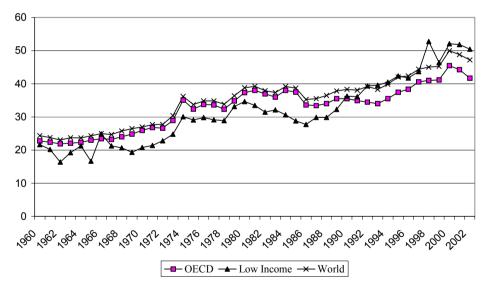

Figure 2: Trade (Exports + Imports) as a Percentage of GDP.

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8   Ibid., 1.
9   Cf. Paul Collier, et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003).
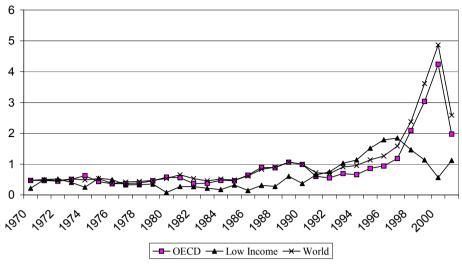
Figure 3: Net FDI as a percentage of GDP.

The End of the Cold War, Ideology, and the Change in the Dynamics of Conflict

Because few scholars and policy-makers recognize that the rate of worldwide conflict has declined since the end of the Cold War, it is not surprising that few have offered an explanation of why this may be the case. The most obvious explanation is that the end of the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union has meant the end of proxy wars in the Third World. Rather than compete directly during the Cold War era, the U.S. and the Soviet Union would support different sides in an on-going conflict that simply shifted location around the world.[10] Thus, parties to conflicts in the Third World (where most intrastate conflicts occur) could readily find a patron for support. Westad argues that the "character of the Soviet-American conflict in many countries enhanced the potential for revolution by making it impossible for established regimes to monopolize foreign support."[11]

There is also ample evidence that conflicts are more readily resolved in the post-Cold War period because Russia lacks the resources to support its former client states. The most obvious example is the first Gulf War, but the Kosovo conflict also provides a good example. Many think that an important factor in Serbian President Slobodan Milošević's decision to agree to NATO's terms ending the conflict was the realization

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[10] Peggy Ann James and Kunihiko Imai, "Measurement of Competition between Powers: The Cases of the United States and the U.S.S.R.," *The Journal of Politics* 58:4 (November 1996): 1103–31.

[11] Odd Arne Westad, "Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World," *Journal of Peace Research* 29:4 (November 1992): 455–64.

that no Russian support for continued resistance was forthcoming. Based on the data provided in *Peace and Conflict 2003*, conflicts that began during the Cold War were likely to last about three years longer than those that began afterwards.[12] The difference between the two periods could be greater since, of the twenty-six conflicts that had not ended by 2003, twelve had begun before 1991.

The question remains whether another state will challenge U.S. hegemony in the short to medium term. This would seem unlikely, since all major states adhere to at least the model of economic liberalism supported by the U.S., if not its style of political liberalism. The U.S. National Security Strategy identifies three countries as potential centers of global power that could pursue policies problematic for the United States: Russia, India and China. However, these three countries subscribe to the global liberal economic order, and offer no competing ideology. India and China are members of the World Trade Organization, and Russia is seeking to join. Russia apparently was willing to change its position to accept the Kyoto Protocol on the environment in order to gain EU support for its application to join the WTO.[13] The Russian president Vladimir Putin said, "The EU has met us halfway in talks over the WTO (World Trade Organization), and that cannot but affect positively our position on the Kyoto Protocol. We will speed up Russia's movement toward the Kyoto Protocol's ratification."[14]

Although some Western European countries have tried to oppose what they perceive to be U.S. unilateralism, they have not challenged the fundamental basis of the global political and economic liberal order. Indeed, some have argued that the countries of Western Europe have become the greater champions of that order, as the U.S. has adopted policies—such as preemption—that would seem to undermine a liberal political order based on the rule of international law.

The New Ideological Competition?: Liberalism vs. Islamism

The global environment of ideological competition has changed. Several commentators have suggested that the new ideological competition is no longer between communism and liberalism, but between liberalism and Islamism.[15] An examination of conflicts still ongoing at the end of 2002 reveals a number that have taken place in countries with large Muslim populations. Almost three-quarters of the open conflicts listed in Table 1 have a strong Islamist element to them. Some involve periodic Muslim-Christian sectarian violence, such as those that are ongoing in India (Gujarat State), Indonesia (Molucca), or Nigeria (Plateau State, Kona). Others involve largely Muslim separatist elements pitted against a largely non-Muslim or secular state structure—examples in

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[12] Calculations based on conflicts listed.

[13] "Putin U-turn could rescue Kyoto," BBC News Online, 21 May 2004; available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3734205.stm; accessed 24 May 2004.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Cf. Jonathon Rauch, "How Important Is Iraq? Just Think of it as World War IV," *National Journal* 35:36 (6 September 2003): 2679.

Table 1: Conflicts Ongoing in 2002

Location	Conflict begun	Description	Deaths to date	% Muslim [16]
Burma	1948	Ethnic war (Karen, Shan, and others)	100,000	4
India	1952	Ethnic war (Northeast tribal groups)	25,000	12
Israel	1965	Ethnic war (Arab Palestinians/PLO)	18,000	14.6
Spain	1968	Ethnic violence (Basque separatism)	1200	NA
Philippines	1972	Ethnic warfare (Moros)	50,000	5
Afghanistan	1978	Civil war	1,000,000	99
Sri Lanka	1983	Ethnic war (Tamils)	70,000	7
Sudan	1983	Ethno-sectarian war (Muslim vs. African/Christian)	1,000,000	70
Colombia	1984	Civil violence (leftist insurgency and drug-trade violence)	50,000	NA
Uganda	1986	Ethnic violence (Langi and Acholi)	12,000	16
Somalia	1988	Civil war	100,000	99
India	1990	Ethnic war (Kashmiris)	35,000	12
Algeria	1991	Civil warfare (Islamic militants)	60,000	99
India	1991	Ethnic violence (Hindu vs. Muslim)	3500	12
Burundi	1993	Ethnic warfare (Tutsis vs. Hutus)	100,000	10
Nepal	1996	Civil violence (UPF "People's War")	7000	3.8
Zaire	1996	Civil war (ouster of Mobutu & aftermath)	1,500,000	10
Indonesia	1997	Ethnic violence (Aceh; GAM militants)	3000	88
Indonesia	1999	Ethnic violence (Moluccas; Muslim vs. Christian)	3500	88
Nigeria	1999	Ethnic violence (Delta and northern regions)	5000	50
Russia	1999	Ethnic war (Chechen separatists)	20,000	NA
Ivory Coast	2000	Civil war (north, south, and west divisions)	2500	35-40
Liberia	2000	Civil violence (attacks by LURD guerillas)	1000	20
Afghanistan	2001	Ouster of Taliban; hunt for Al-Qaeda	10,000	99
Congo-Brazzaville	2002	Civil violence (Ninja militants)	500	2
Central African Republic	2002	Civil violence (attacks by Bozize loyalists)	600	15

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[16] Percentage of population that is Muslim taken from *CIA World Factbook 2003*; available at http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html; accessed 25 May 2004.

clude the conflict within India over Kashmir; the Philippines over the Moros; in Israel over Palestine; and in Russia over Chechnya. Still others involve a largely Muslim state authority against a non-Muslim minority, as is the case in Sudan. At least one involves a secular Muslim state in a civil war against a group galvanized by Islamist ideology: Algeria (and, perhaps, Afghanistan). A detailed examination of many of these conflicts reveals that they are not about differences between Muslim and non-Muslim communities *per se*, but about land and access to natural resources in impoverished areas. But once violence starts, local politicians are often able to organize the local population along sectarian lines. This is what happened in the recent bout of violence in the Plateau State in Nigeria.[17] Several commentators have argued that the violence in Nigeria is largely a "competition between those that see themselves as the true 'indigens' of an area, and those that are considered to be more recent 'settlers'."[18]

The violence in the Moluccas in Indonesia follows a very similar dynamics—Muslim settlers viewed as outsiders are putting pressure on limited local economic resources.[19] But the Moluccas reveal a disturbing trend: radical Islamist groups are intervening and sustaining local violence, just as during the Cold War the U.S. and the Soviet Union sustained local conflicts. In the Moluccas, the radical Islamist group Laskar Jihad sent 3000 militant fighters from their base in Java over 2500 km away.[20]

Such support also appears among separatist groups. The Chechen fighters have received extensive support from Muslims elsewhere, including Al-Qaeda. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) maintains that the Chechen militants receive considerable financial support from outside the former Soviet Union, including Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.[21] The Chechens have also adopted the tactic of suicide bombing, something they had previously avoided, and have launched attacks in Russia proper, including the notorious "Nord Ost" theater incident in October 2002.

Several groups in the Philippines have also received external support from transnational terrorist groups. This suggests a global nexus between local indigenous separatist groups and transnational terrorists. For example, the Philippine government asserts that there is a connection between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Jemaah Islamiya, the East Asian-wide Islamist group responsible for the Bali bombings in October 2002. Jemaah Islamiya, which is reputed to have training bases on the

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[17] Mark Doyle, "Poverty behind Nigeria's violence," BBC News online (19 May 2004); available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3730109.stm; accessed 25 May 2004.

[18] Dan Isaacs, "Analysis: Behind Nigeria's violence," BBC News online (5 May 2004); available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1630089.stm; accessed 25 May 2004.

[19] "Analysis: Moluccan peace deal," BBC News online (12 February 2002); available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1816452.stm; accessed 25 May 2004.

[20] "Who Are the Laskar Jihad?" BBC News online (20 June 2000); available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/770263.stm; accessed 25 May 2004.

[21] Dr. Mark Galeotti, "Putin under pressure from rise in terrorism," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (1 April 2004).

southern Philippine island of Mindanao, was implicated in attacks on police stations in southern Thailand in April 2004.[22]

Thus, transnational Islamist movements have assumed the role that the Soviet Union played in the Cold War—a leading supporter of local insurgencies. However, there is clearly a big difference: the Soviet Union espoused a universalist ideology, and thus could support insurgencies globally, whereas the Islamist transnationalists only have a toehold where a local Muslim population exists. This does not, of course, prevent transnational terrorist incidents such as the one that occurred in the United States on 9/11, or the train bombings in Madrid on 11 March 2004, which exploit local Muslim communities, but these communities are not large enough to engage in separatist activity on their own.

There is also considerable support among Muslim communities for terrorist activity that is perceived as being conducted in defense of Islam. A recent poll conducted for the Pew Research Center revealed that many Muslim countries evinced strong support for suicide bombing in defense of Islam, as seen in Table 2. The "Yes" column represents the percentage of individuals who answered "often" or "sometimes justified" to the following question:

Table 2: Is Suicide Bombing in Defense of Islam Justifiable?[23]

Country	Yes	No	DK/Ref
Lebanon	73	21	6
Ivory Coast	56	44	--
Nigeria	47	45	8
Bangladesh	44	37	19
Jordan	43	48	8
Pakistan	33	43	23
Mali	32	57	11
Ghana	30	57	12
Indonesia	27	70	3
Tanzania	18	70	12
Turkey	13	71	14
Uzbekistan	7	84	9

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[22] Kate McGeown, "Who was behind the Thai attacks?" BBC News Online (30 April 2004); available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3670537.stm; accessed 25 May 2004.

[23] Ibid.

> Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?[24]

These figures suggest that almost 100 percent of Muslims in Lebanon and Nigeria support suicide bombing, since Lebanon is about 75 percent Muslim and Nigeria 50 percent (see Table 1).

The Liberal Imperative, Islamism, and Internal Conflict

The liberal imperative also promotes the spread of liberal democracy. This can occur rather peaceably, as was generally the case in Central and Eastern Europe, or by force, as took place in Iraq and Haiti. One of the dominant paradigms explaining intra-state conflict and political instability is the relationship between political structure and violence. The likelihood of internal conflict follows a bell-shaped curve of political rights. Internal conflict is much less likely in countries that are either consolidated liberal democracies or firmly authoritarian than in transitional countries.[25] Consolidated liberal democracies have routinized procedures for adjudicating conflict, such as the political process and the legal system, that are recognized as legitimate by all elements of society, while authoritarian states have few avenues of protest and a strong repressive apparatus to deal with those individuals and groups who do protest.[26] Transitional states, on the other hand, lack these established methods of adjudicating differences, and contesting groups may view violence as a more likely way to achieve their objectives. The state itself often lacks the repressive resources to deal with civil violence. Therefore, internal violence is much more likely in transitional societies than in authoritarian or liberal democratic ones. Authoritarian and liberal democratic states also tend to be strong states, and transitional ones weak states. Thus the argument about "failed states" so often found in the literature can often be applied to transitional states as well, since they are frequently states that are on the brink of failure.

There are several ways of assessing the degree of democracy in a state. One is the method used in assessing political rights developed by the Washington-based nongovernmental organization Freedom House.[27] They score the extent of the political rights in all countries annually on a scale of one to seven, where scores of one and two are generally considered to indicate free countries (or consolidated liberal democracies),

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[24] The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *2002 Global Attitudes Survey*, FINAL TOPLINE; available at http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/165topline.pdf; accessed 27 May 2004.

[25] J. Craig Jenkins and Kurt Schock, "Global Structures and Political Processes in the Study of Domestic Political Conflict," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 161–85.

[26] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* (April 1996).

[27] Available at www.freedomhouse.org; accessed 25 May 2004

three through five indicate states that are partly free, and nations receiving scores of six and seven are autocracies. The Polity data set developed by Keith Jaggers and Ted Robert Gurr also attempts to measure the degree of democracy in states by looking at characteristics very similar to those examined by Freedom House: whether there are limitations on the executive power, whether the parliament is elected by free and fair elections, etc.[28] By subtracting the "autocracy score" from the "democracy score," they develop a uni-dimensional scale very similar to the one developed by Freedom House. Nations receiving scores from –10 to –5 are autocracies, and from +5 to +10 democracies. They call the transitional states that score between –5 and +5 "anocracies." Anocracies are highly transitional. Half of them undergo a major regime change within five years, and over seventy percent do so within seven years.[29] Also, they are six times more likely than democracies and two and a half times as likely as autocracies to suffer a civil war. Anocracies are much more likely than autocracies or democracies to experience an adverse regime change or a civil war, tending to provide confirmation for the theoretical argument that transitional societies are at greater risk of political instability.

The recent wave of democratization after the end of the Cold War has led to a considerable increase in the number of transitional states in the world. Although autocracies have decreased and democracies have increased, the number of anocracies has increased as well. These countries are a cause for concern because they appear in regions that offer minimal support for their continued movement towards liberal democratic status—Asia and the Pacific, North Africa and the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa.[30] Many of the countries in Eastern and Central Europe, even those with very little prior experience with liberal democracy, made a speedy transition to liberal democratic life because their elites all saw the benefits of joining the EU and NATO, and those institutions provided considerable assistance in the transition. Countries elsewhere do not have these advantages. Moreover, in those countries with considerable Muslim populations, they have the added disadvantage of being placed squarely in the battleground between liberalism and Islamism.

Conclusions and Observations

Much of the discussion about globalization and internal conflict tends to ignore systemic phenomena. Globalization was stalled in the 1980s and took off in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War brought with it an end of the global ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union that set the stage for the burst of globalization that occurred in the 1990s. It was the end of the Cold War, and not globalization *per se*, that led to the corresponding decrease in conflict around the world in the 1990s.

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[28] Keith Jaggers and Ted Robert Gurr, "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data," *Journal of Peace Research* 31:4 (1995): 469–82.

[29] Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2003*, 17

[30] Ibid., 24.

However, the global liberal economic and political order has brought with it the seeds of future trouble. Many countries seem stuck in a transitional status between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. If history and theory are any guide, then these countries are at considerable greater risk of state failure and internal conflict. The kind of support that NATO and the EU provided to countries in Central and Eastern Europe is not readily available elsewhere, nor is it likely to become so anytime soon.

Moreover, there appears to be a new ideological competition afoot to replace the one from the Cold War. Instead of liberalism versus communism, we are now witnessing a contest between liberalism and Islamism. This contest puts countries within the Muslim sphere at much greater risk than those elsewhere, as Islamist transnational terrorist groups exploit and sustain sectarian violence in these states. These transnational terrorist networks are also making their presence felt through mass casualty terrorism in liberal democracies, such as the events of 9/11 in the U.S. and those of 3/11 in Spain.

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