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Global Supremacy

ERIC HOBBSBAWM



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PREFACE

The twentieth century was the most extraordinary era in the history of humanity, combining as it did unparalleled human catastrophes, substantial material improvement, and an unprecedented increase in our capacity to transform, and perhaps to destroy, the face of our planet—and even to penetrate outside it. How are we to look back at that “age of extremes” or forward at the prospects for the new era which has emerged from the old? The present collection of essays is a historian’s attempt to survey, analyze, and understand the situation of the world at the start of the third millennium and some of the main political problems confronting us today. They supplement and bring up to date what I have written in earlier publications, notably my history of the “short twentieth century” (*The Age of Extremes*) and my conversation on *On the Edge of the New Century* with Antonio Polito. Such attempts are necessary. What can historians contribute to this task? Their main function, apart from remembering what others have forgotten or wish to forget, is to stand back, so far as possible, from the contemporary record and to see it in a broader context and in a longer perspective.

In this collection I have chosen to focus on two sets of questions that require clear and informed thinking today: the general question of war and peace in the twenty-first century and the past and future of world empires. They take place on a world scene dominated by two linked developments: the enormous and continuing acceleration of the ability of the human species to change the planet by technology and economic activity, and globalization. The first of these, unfortunately, has so far had no significant impact on those who make political decisions. Maximizing economic growth remains the aim of governments, and there is no realistic prospect of any effective steps to meet the crisis of global warming. On the other hand, since the 1960s, the accelerating advance of globalization—that is to say, turning the world into a single unit of interconnected activities unhampered by local boundaries—has had a profound political and cultural impact, especially in its currently dominant form of an uncontrolled global free market. It is not specifically discussed in these essays, chiefly because politics is the one field of human activity that remains practically unaffected by it. Attempting the dubious task of quantifying it, the Swiss KOF Index of Globalization (2007) has no difficulty in finding indices of economic and information flows, personal contacts, and cultural diffusion (for instance, the number of McDonald’s restaurants and IKEAs per capita) but it can think of no better measures for “political globalization” than the number of embassies in a country, its membership in international organizations, and its participation in U.N. Security Council missions. A general discussion of globalization is outside the range of this book. However, four general observations about it are particularly relevant to the book’s themes.

First, the currently fashionable free-market globalization has brought about a dramatic growth in economic and social inequalities both within states and internationally. There is no sign that this polarization is not continuing within countries, in spite of a general diminution of extreme poverty. This surge of inequality, especially in the conditions of extreme economic instability such as those created by the global free market in the 1990s, is at the roots of the major social and political tensions of the new century. Insofar as international

inequalities may be under pressure from the rise of the new Asian economies, both the threat to the relatively astronomic standards of living of the peoples of the old North, and the practical impossibility of achieving anything like them for the vast populations of such countries as India and China, will produce their own domestic and international tensions.

Second, the impact of this globalization is felt most by those who benefit from it least. Hence the growing polarization of views about it, between those who are potential beneficiaries—sheltered from its negative effects—the entrepreneurs who can outsource their costs to countries of cheap labor, the high-tech professionals, and graduates of higher education who can get work in any high-income market economy—and those who are not. That is why for most of those who live by the wages or salaries of their employment in the old “developed countries,” the early twenty-first century offers a troubling, not to say sinister, prospect. The global free market has undermined the ability of their states and welfare systems to protect their way of life. In a global economy they compete with men and women abroad, of equal qualifications but paid a fraction of the Western pay packet, and at home living standards are under pressure from the globalization of what Marx called “the reserve army of labor”—immigrants from the villages of the great global zones of poverty. Situations such as this do not promise an era of political and social stability.

Third, while the actual scale of globalization remains modest, except perhaps in a number of generally smallish states, mainly in Europe, its political and cultural impact is disproportionately large. Thus, immigration is a major political problem in most developed economies of the West, even though the world share of people living in a country other than the one in which they were born is no more than 3 percent. In the KOF Index of Economic Globalization, the United States is in 39th place, Germany in 40th, China in 55th, Brazil in 60th, South Korea in 62nd, Japan in 67th, and India in 105th, though all except Brazil are somewhat higher in the ranking of “social globalization.” (The United Kingdom is the only major economy in the top ten of both economic and social globalization.)¹ While it may or may not be a historically temporary phenomenon, in the short term this disproportionate large impact may well have serious national and international political consequences. I would guess that, in one way or another, political resistance, though unlikely to revive formal protectionist policies, is likely to slow down the progress of free-market globalization in the next decade or two.

The pieces collected here, mostly given as lectures before various audiences, try to set out and explain the situation in which the world, or large parts of it, finds itself today. They may help to define the problems that we confront at the start of the new century, but they do not propose programs or practical solutions. They were written was dominated by the decision of the U.S. government in 2001 to assert a single-handed world hegemony, denouncing hitherto accepted international conventions, reserving its right to launch wars of aggression or other military operations whenever it wanted to, and actually doing so. Given the débâcle of the Iraq War, it is no longer necessary to demonstrate that this project was unrealistic, and the question whether we would have wanted it to succeed or not is therefore entirely academic. Nevertheless, it should be evident, and readers should bear in mind, that my essays were written by an author who is deeply critical of the project. This is partly because of the strength and indestructibility of my political convictions, including a hostility to imperialism.

whether of Great Powers that claim they are doing their victims a favor by conquering them or of white men assuming automatic superiority for themselves and their arrangements over those of other skin colors. It is also due to a rationally justifiable suspicion of the megalomania that is the occupational disease of states and rulers who believe there are no limits on their power or success.

Most of the arguments and lies justifying U.S. actions since 2001 by U.S. and British politicians, paid or unpaid advocates, rhetoricians, publicists, and amateur ideologists no longer need detain us. However, a less disreputable case has been made, if not for the Iraq War then for the general proposition that armed cross-border intervention to preserve or establish human rights is legitimate and sometimes necessary in an era of growing global barbarity, violence, and disorder. For some this implies the desirability of a world imperial hegemony, and specifically one exercised by the only power capable of establishing it, the United States of America. This proposition, which may be called the imperialism of human rights, entered public debate in the course of the Balkan conflicts arising out of the disintegration of communist Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia, which seemed to suggest that only outside armed force could put an end to endless mutual massacre and that only the United States was able and willing to use such force. That the United States had no particular interests, historic, political, or economic, in the region made its intervention more impressive and apparently selfless. I have taken note of it in my essays. Though my essays contain reasons for rejecting it, some additional observations on this position may not be out of place.

Justification for such intervention is fundamentally flawed by the fact that Great Powers in the pursuit of their international policies may do things that suit the champions of human rights, and be aware of the publicity value of doing so, but that this is quite incidental to their purposes, which, if they think it necessary, are today pursued with the ruthless barbarism that is the heritage of the twentieth century. Those for whom a great human cause is central can be in a relationship of alliance or opposition with a state, but never of permanent identification. Even the rare case of young revolutionary states genuinely seeking to spread their universal message—France after 1792, Russia after 1917, but not, as happens, George Washington's isolationist America—is always short-lived. The default position of any state is to pursue its interests.

Beyond this, the humanitarian case for armed intervention in the affairs of states rests on three assumptions: that intolerable situations may arise in the contemporary world—usually massacre or even genocide—which call for it; that no other ways of dealing with them are possible; and that the benefits of intervening are patently greater than the costs. All these assumptions are sometimes justified, although, as the debate on Iraq and Iran proves, there is rarely universal agreement about what precisely constitutes an "intolerable situation." Probably there was consensus in the two most obvious cases of justified intervention: the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam that put an end to the appalling regime of Pol Pot's "killing fields" (1978) and the destruction of Idi Amin's regime of terror in Uganda by Tanzania (1979). (Not all rapid and successful foreign armed interventions in local crisis situations have produced such satisfactory results—for example, Liberia and East Timor.) Both were achieved by brief incursions, produced immediate benefits and probably some lasting improvements, while implying no systematic abrogation of the established principle of

noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Incidentally, they had no imperial implications, nor did they involve wider world politics. Indeed, both the United States and China continued to support the deposed Pol Pot. Such ad hoc interventions are irrelevant to the case for the desirability of a world hegemony by the United States.

The same cannot be said of the armed interventions of recent years, which have been selective, not touching what by humanitarian standards were some of the very worst examples of atrocity, notably the Central African genocide. In the Balkans of the 1990s humanitarian concern was certainly a significant factor, though not the only one. Probably though the opposite has been argued, outside intervention helped to end the local bloodshed in Bosnia earlier than if the war between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Moslems had been allowed to continue to its conclusion, but the region remains unsettled. It is by no means clear whether in 1999 armed intervention was the only way to settle the problems raised by a rebellion against Serbia of an extremist minority group among Albanian nationalists in Kosovo. The humanitarian basis for the action was rather more doubtful than in Bosnia and by provoking Serbia into the mass expulsion of the Kosovo Albanians, as well as by the civilian casualties of the war itself and some months of destructive bombing of Serbia, it may actually have made the humanitarian situation worse. Nor have relations between Serbs and Albanians been stabilized. At least the Balkan interventions were rapid, and in the short run decisive, though so far nobody, except perhaps Croatia, has reason to feel satisfied with the outcome.

On the other hand, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 were U.S. military operations not undertaken for humanitarian reasons, though justified to humanitarian public opinion on the ground that they removed some rather unsavory regimes. But for 9/11, not even America would have regarded the situation in either country as calling for immediate invasion. Afghanistan was accepted by other states on old-fashioned "realist" grounds; Iraq was almost universally condemned. Though the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's regimes were rapidly overthrown, neither war achieved victory, and certainly neither achieved the aims announced at the outset, the establishment of democratic regimes in line with Western values, a beacon to other as-yet-undemocratized societies in the region. Both, but especially the catastrophic Iraq War, proved to be lengthy, massively destructive, and bloody, and both still continue at the time this is written without a prospect of conclusion.

In all these cases, armed intervention has come from foreign states with far superior military power and resources. In none of them has it so far produced stable solutions. In all the countries concerned, foreign military occupation and political supervision continue. In the best of cases—but plainly not in Afghanistan and Iraq—intervention has ended bloody wars and produced some kind of peace, but the positive results, as in the Balkans, are disappointing. In the worst of cases—Iraq—nobody would seriously deny that for the people whose liberation was the official excuse for the war, the situation is worse than before. The recent record of armed interventions in the affairs of other countries, even by superpowers, is not one of success.

Its failure is based partly on an assumption which also lies behind much of the imperialism of human rights: that regimes of barbarity and tyranny are immune to internal change, and that only outside force can bring about their end and the consequent diffusion of our values and political or legal institutions. This assumption is inherited from the days when Co

Warriors denounced “totalitarianism.” It should not have survived the end of the U.S.S.R.—which was internally generated and not externally imposed—or, for that matter, the evidence of a process of relatively successful internal democratization after 1980 in several once unsavory noncommunist authoritarian, militarist, and dictatorial regimes in Asia and South America. It is also based on the belief that acts of force can instantly bring about major cultural transformations. But this is not so.

The diffusion of values and institutions can hardly ever be brought about by a sudden imposition by outside force, unless conditions are already present locally which make them adaptable and their introduction acceptable. Democracy and Western values and human rights are not like some technological importations whose benefits are immediately obvious and which will be adopted in the same manner by all who can use them and afford them, like the peaceful bicycle and the murderous AK-47, or technical services like airports. If they were, there would be more political similarity between the numerous states of Europe, Asia, and Africa that all live under similar democratic constitutions in theory, but by no means in practice. In a word, there are very few shortcuts in history: a lesson which the author has learned, not least, from living through and reflecting on much of the past century.

Finally, a word of thanks to those who provided the occasion for the first presentation of these studies. [Chapter I](#) was an inaugural address at the presentation of an honorary degree at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in Greece, in 2004; [chapter II](#) is based on a paper written for a colloquium to commemorate the centenary of the Nobel Peace Prize (Oslo, 2001); [chapter III](#) is based on the Nikhil Chakravarty Memorial Lecture given in Delhi in 2004, by invitation of the *Indian Review of Books*; and [chapter IV](#) was the William E. Masse Sr., Lecture at Harvard University in 2005.

On the End of Empires

When I was born, all Europeans lived in states which were part of empires in the traditional monarchical or the nineteenth-century colonial sense of the world, except the citizens of Switzerland, the three Scandinavian states, and the former dependencies of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans—and some of these had left the Ottoman Empire only just before the First World War. The inhabitants of Africa lived under empires almost without exception, and so, without any exception, did the inhabitants of the Pacific and Southeast Asian islands, large and small. But for the fact that the ancient Chinese Empire had come to an end some six years before I was born, one might have said that all the countries of Asia were parts of empires, old and new, except perhaps Thailand (then known as Siam) and Afghanistan, maintaining a sort of independence between rival European powers. Only the Americas south of the United States consisted primarily of states which neither had nor were colonial dependencies, even though they were certainly economically and culturally dependent.

In the course of my lifetime all this has gone. The First World War broke the Habsburg Empire into fragments and completed the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. But for the October Revolution, this would also have been the fate of the empire of the Russian tsars, though it was severely weakened, as was the German Empire, which lost both the imperial title and its colonies. The Second World War destroyed the imperial potential of Germany, which had been briefly realized under Adolf Hitler. It destroyed the colonial empires of the imperialist era, great and small, the British, French, and Japanese, the Dutch and Portuguese, the Belgian, and what little remained of the Spanish. Incidentally, it also brought the end of the relatively brief U.S. excursion into formal colonialism on the European model, in the Philippines and a few other territories. Finally, at the end of the last century, the collapse of European communist regimes brought to an end both Russia as a single multinational entity as it had existed under the tsars and the more short-lived Soviet Empire in East and Central Europe. The metropolises have lost their power, as they have lost their dependencies. Only one potential imperial power remains.

Thirty years ago, most of us welcomed this dramatic change in the political face of the globe, as many of us still do. However, today we look back on it from a troubled new century that seems to lack the relative order and predictability of the Cold War era. The era of empires has gone, but so far nothing has effectively replaced it. The number of independent states has quadrupled since 1913, most of them the debris of former empires, but while in theory we now live in the world of free nation-states which, according to Presidents Wilson and Roosevelt, was to replace the world of empires, in practice we live in what we can now recognize as a deeply unstable form of global disorder both international and within states. A number—probably a growing number—of these political entities appear incapable of carrying on the essential functions of territorial states or are threatened with disintegration by secessionist movements. What is more, since the end of the Cold War we live in an era when uncontrollable or barely controllable armed conflict has become endemic.

in large areas of Asia, Africa, Europe, and parts of the Pacific. Massacre amounting to genocide and the mass expulsion of populations (“ethnic cleansing”) are once again taking place on a scale not seen since the years immediately following World War II. Can we wonder that in some countries the survivors of former empires regret their passing?

How should these empires be remembered? The nature of official and popular memory depends to some extent on the length of time that has elapsed since an empire disappeared and whether it has left any inheritors. The Roman Empire, both in its western and eastern form, was so completely destroyed, and destroyed so long ago, that it has no inheritor, though the mark it has left on the world, even outside the area it once occupied, is enormous. Alexander’s is gone forever, and so is Genghis Khan’s and Timur’s. So are the empires of the Umayyads and Abbasids. More recently, the Habsburg Empire was so completely destroyed in 1918, and was so completely a-national in structure, that it has no effective continuity with the small nation-state now called Austria. However, often there is some continuity, especially as the end of so many empires is so recent, and has usually been accompanied or followed, in the former metropolitan states, by periods of considerable political and psychological stress. True, today no state that once ruled over a colonial empire intends to, or has any hope of, restoration. But where the metropolises of former empires survive as effective states, usually as nation-states, there is a tendency among them after a while to look back on the times of past greatness with pride and nostalgia. There is also an understandable temptation to exaggerate the benefits which the empire is said to have conferred on its subjects while it existed, such as the law and order within its territories and, with more justification, the fact that several (but not all) vanished empires have been more tolerant of ethnic, linguistic, and religious multiplicity than the nation-states that succeeded them. Nevertheless, as a writer on empires points out, reviewing Professor Mazower’s remarkable social history *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1954*, “this theory of empire is too good to be true....”¹ The reality of empires should not be in the hands of selective nostalgia.

Only one collective form of imperial memory has practical implications today. This is the feeling that the superior power of empires to conquer and rule the world was based on a superior civilization, easily identified with moral or even racial superiority. In the nineteenth century both tended to go together, but the historical experience of Nazi Germany has eliminated racial or ethnic claims to superiority from polite discourse. However, the tacit rather than openly articulated Western claim of moral superiority remains, and finds expression in the conviction that our values and institutions are superior to others’ and may, or even should, be imposed on them to their benefit, if necessary by force of arms.

The claim that historically empires and imperialism brought civilization to backward people and substituted order for anarchy is doubtful, though not entirely spurious. From the third to the seventeenth century of our era, most empires were the products of military conquest by warrior tribes from the outer edges of the Asian and Mediterranean civilizations. Culturally backward, they brought little to the conquered and often more advanced lands but their swords and, if they wanted to last, a willingness to use the infrastructure and the expertise of those they had defeated. Only the Arabs, who carried their written language and their new religion with them, brought something new. The Europeans who colonized the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific were indeed technologically superior to the local societies

though until the nineteenth century not to Asian and some Islamic ones. Colonial territories were indeed eventually integrated into an occidentalo-centric world economy. But we may well ask how positive is the balance sheet of the colonial era for the inhabitants of the Americas other than the descendants of the European immigrants who settled there. Or, to take a more recent case, for the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa.

The memory of empire among its former subjects is more ambiguous. Most colonies and other dependencies of former empires have been transformed into independent states, which like all states however new and unprecedented, need a history as well as a flag. So the memory of the former empire is almost always dominated by the history of the creation of the new state, which tends to take the form of a foundation myth of struggle and liberation. Not unnaturally it also tends to take a uniformly negative view of the era of imperial rule. In most cases this calls for historical skepticism. Such narratives tend to exaggerate the independent role of the forces of liberation, to underestimate the local forces not involved in the liberation movements, and to oversimplify the relationship between an empire and its subject population. Even in countries with a long history of liberation struggle, separation from empire usually was a more complex process than official nationalist history allows. The truth is that what has brought empires to an end is rarely the revolt of their subject people alone.

The relation between empires and their subjects is complex, because the foundation of the power of lasting empires is also complex. Brief periods of foreign occupation may rely essentially on military power and the willingness to use coercion and terror, but these alone cannot guarantee durable foreign rule. Especially when that rule is exercised, as it almost always has been, by relatively, and indeed usually absolutely, tiny numbers of foreigners. Let us remember that the number of British civilians engaged in governing the four hundred million in the Indian Empire was never more than about ten thousand. Historically, empires may have been conquered by military force and established by terror ("shock and awe," the phrase of the Pentagon), but if they wanted to last, they have had to rely on two major instruments—cooperation with local interests and the legitimacy of effective power—which also exploiting the disunity of their adversaries and their subjects (*divide et impera*). The present situation in Iraq illustrates the difficulties of even the most powerful occupier, when these are absent.

But for that very reason, the old era of empires cannot be revived, least of all by a single superpower. One of the major assets of Western imperialism, formal or informal, was that in the first instance "Westernization" was the only form in which backward economies could be modernized and weak states strengthened. This provided Western empires or modernizing metropolises of traditional empires with the built-in goodwill of such local elites as were interested in overcoming local backwardness. This was so even when the indigenous modernizers eventually turned against foreign rule, as in India and Egypt. Paradoxically, an official Indian national song was written by a senior native member of the Indian Civil Service of the British Raj. Yet the globalization of the industrial economy has made modernization international. South Korea has little to learn from the United States, which imports its software experts from India and exports its office work to Sri Lanka, while Brazil produces not only coffee but executive jets. Asians may still find it useful to send their children to study in the West, often to be taught there by immigrant Asian academics, but the

presence of Westerners in their countries, let alone local political power and influence, are no longer needed to modernize their societies.

Yet would-be empires face an even greater handicap. They can no longer rely on the obedience of their subjects. And, thanks to the heritage of the Cold War, those who refuse to obey now have access to weapons sufficiently powerful to hold strong states at bay. In the past, countries could be ruled by a comparative handful of foreigners, because the rule of an alien regime with effective power was accepted by people used to being ruled from above, whether by natives or foreigners. Imperial rule, once established, was likely to be resisted only by peoples who rejected any central state power, indigenous or foreign, and who usually lived in zones like the Afghan, Berber, or Kurdish mountains, beyond effective civilizational control. And even these knew that they had to coexist with the greater power of sultan, tsar, and Raj. Today, as the former French territories in Africa demonstrate, the presence of a few French troops alone is no longer enough to maintain local regimes, as it was for decades after formal decolonization. Today, the full armed power of governments has proved incapable of maintaining unchallenged control of their territory for decades—in Sri Lanka, in India, Kashmir, in Colombia, in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, or still, for that matter, in parts of Belfast. There is, indeed, a general crisis of state power and state legitimacy even on the home territories of old and stable European states like Spain and the United Kingdom.

In these circumstances there is no prospect of a return to the imperial world of the past, let alone the prospect of a lasting global imperial hegemony, unprecedented in history, by a single state, such as America, however great its military force. The age of empires is dead. We shall have to find another way of organizing the globalized world of the twenty-first century.

War and Peace in the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century was the most murderous in recorded history. The total number of deaths caused by or associated with its wars has been estimated at 187 million, the equivalent of more than 10 percent of the world's population in 1913. Taken as having begun in 1914, it was a century of almost unbroken war, with few and brief periods without organized armed conflict somewhere. It was dominated by world wars: that is to say, by wars between territorial states or alliances of states. The period from 1914 to 1945 can be regarded as a single "thirty years' war" interrupted only by a pause in the 1920s—between the final withdrawal of the Japanese from the Soviet Far East in 1922 and the attack on Manchuria in 1931. This period was followed, almost immediately, by some forty years of Cold War, which conformed to Hobbes's definition of war as consisting "not in battle only of the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known." It is a matter for debate how far the actions in which U.S. armed forces have been involved since the end of the Cold War in various parts of the globe constitute a continuation of the era of world war. There can be no doubt, however, that the 1990s were filled with formal and informal military conflict in Europe, Africa, and Western and Central Asia. The world as a whole has not been at peace since 1914, and is not at peace now.

Nevertheless, the century cannot be treated as a single block, either chronologically or geographically. Chronologically, it falls into three periods: the era of world war centered on Germany (1914 to 1945), the era of confrontation between the two superpowers (1945 to 1989), and the era since the end of the classic international power system. I shall call these periods I, II, and III. Geographically, the impact of military operations has been highly unequal. With one exception (the Chaco War of 1932–35), there were no significant interstate wars (as distinct from civil wars) in the Western Hemisphere (the Americas) in the twentieth century. Enemy military operations have barely touched these territories: hence the shock of the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Since 1945, interstate wars have also disappeared from Europe, which had until then been the major battlefield region. Although in period III war returned to southeast Europe, it seems very unlikely to recur in the rest of the continent. On the other hand, during period II interstate wars, not necessarily unconnected with the global confrontation, remained endemic in the Middle East and South Asia, and major wars directly springing from the global confrontation took place in East and Southeast Asia (Korea, Indochina). At the same time, areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, which had been comparatively unaffected by war in period I (apart from Ethiopia, belatedly subject to colonial conquest by Italy in 1935–36), came to be theaters of armed conflict during period II, and witnessed major scenes of carnage and suffering in period III.

Two other characteristics of war in the twentieth century stand out, the first less obvious than the second. At the start of the twenty-first century we find ourselves in a world where armed operations are no longer essentially in the hands of governments or their authorize

agents, and where the contending parties have no common characteristics, status, or objectives, except the willingness to use violence. Interstate wars dominated the image of war so much in periods I and II that civil wars or other armed conflicts within the territories of existing states or empires were somewhat obscured. Even the civil wars in the territories of the Russian Empire after the October Revolution, and those which took place after the collapse of the Chinese Empire, could be fitted into the framework of international conflict insofar as they were inseparable from them. On the other hand, Latin America may not have seen armies crossing state frontiers in the twentieth century, but it has been the scene of major civil conflicts: in Mexico after 1911, for instance, in Colombia since 1948, and in various Central American countries during period II. It is not generally recognized that the number of international wars has declined fairly continuously since the mid-1960s, while internal conflicts became more common than those fought between states. The number of conflicts within state frontiers continued to rise steeply until it leveled off in the 1990s.

More familiar is the erosion of the distinction between combatants and noncombatants. The two world wars of the first half of the century involved the entire populations of belligerent countries; both combatants and noncombatants suffered. In the course of the century, however, the burden of war shifted increasingly from armed forces to civilians, who were not only its victims, but increasingly the object of military or military-political operations. The contrast between the First World War and the Second is dramatic: only 5 percent of those who died in World War I were civilians; in World War II the figure increased to 66 percent. It is generally supposed that 80 to 90 percent of those affected by war today are civilians. This proportion has increased since the end of the Cold War because most military operations since then have been conducted not by conscript armies, but by quite small bodies of regular or irregular troops, in many cases operating high-technology weapons and protected against the risk of incurring casualties. While it is true that high-tech weaponry has made it possible in some cases to reestablish a distinction between military and civilian targets, and therefore between combatants and noncombatants, there is no reason to doubt that the main victims of war will continue to be civilians.

What is more, the suffering of civilians is not proportionate to the scale or intensity of military operations. In strictly military terms, the two-week war between India and Pakistan over the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 was a modest affair, but it produced ten million refugees. The fighting between armed units in Africa during the 1990s can hardly have involved more than a few thousand, mostly ill-armed, combatants, yet it produced, at its peak, almost seven million refugees—a far greater number than at any time during the Cold War, when the continent had been the scene of proxy wars between the superpowers.

This phenomenon isn't confined to poor and remote areas. In some ways the effect of war on civilian life is magnified by globalization and the world's increasing reliance on a constant, unbroken flow of communications, technical services, deliveries, and supplies. Even a comparatively brief interruption of this flow—for instance, the few days' closure of U.S. airspace after September 11th—can have considerable, perhaps lasting, effects on the global economy.

It would be easier to write about the subject of war and peace in the twentieth century if the difference between the two remained as clear-cut as it was supposed to be at the beginning of the century, in the days when the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 codified

the rules of war. Conflicts were supposed to take place primarily between sovereign states or if they occurred within the territory of one particular state, between parties sufficiently organized to be accorded belligerent status by other sovereign states. War was supposed to be sharply distinguished from peace, by a declaration of war at one end and a treaty of peace at the other. Military operations were supposed to distinguish clearly between combatants—marked as such by the uniforms they wore, or by other signs of belonging to an organized armed force—and noncombatant civilians. War was supposed to be between combatants. Noncombatants should, so far as possible, be protected in wartime. It was always understood that these conventions did not cover all civil and international armed conflicts, and notably not those arising out of the imperial expansion of Western states in regions not under the jurisdiction of internationally recognized sovereign states, even though some (but by no means all) of these conflicts were known as “wars.” Nor did they cover large rebellions against established states, such as the so-called Indian Mutiny; nor the recurrent armed activity in regions beyond the effective control of the states or imperial authorities nominally ruling them, such as the raiding and blood feuding in the mountains of Afghanistan and Morocco. Nevertheless, the Hague Conventions still served as guidelines in the First World War. In the course of the twentieth century, this relative clarity was replaced by confusion.

First, the line between interstate conflicts and conflicts within states—that is, between international and civil wars—became hazy, because the twentieth century was characteristically a century not only of wars, but also of revolutions and the breakup of empires. Revolutions or liberation struggles within a state had implications for the international situation, particularly during the Cold War. Conversely, after the Russian Revolution, intervention by states in the internal affairs of other states of which they disapproved became common, at least where it seemed comparatively risk-free. This remained the case.

Second, the clear distinction between war and peace became obscure. Except here and there, the Second World War neither began with declarations of war nor ended with treaties of peace. It was followed by a period so hard to classify as either war or peace in the ordinary sense that the neologism “Cold War” had to be invented to describe it. The sheer obscurity of the position since the Cold War is illustrated by the current state of affairs in the Middle East. Neither “peace” nor “war” exactly described the situation in Iraq since the formal end of the Gulf War—the country was still bombed almost daily by foreign powers—nor can the situation there since the 2003 invasion be made to fit the traditional meaning of war, though it is certainly not a peace in any sense. This also applies to the relations between Palestinians and Israelis, and those between Israel and its neighbors Lebanon and Syria. All this is an unfortunate legacy of the twentieth-century world wars, but also of war’s increasingly powerful machinery of mass propaganda, and of a period of confrontation between incompatible and passion-laden ideologies which brought into wars a crusading element comparable to that seen in religious conflicts of the past. These conflicts, unlike the traditional wars of the international power system, were increasingly waged for nonnegotiable ends such as “unconditional surrender.” Since both wars and victories were seen as total, any limitation on a belligerent’s capacity to win that might be imposed by the accepted conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century warfare—even formal declarations of war—was rejected. So was any limitation on the victors’ power to assert the

will. Experience had shown that agreements reached in peace treaties could easily be broken.

In recent years the situation has been further complicated by the tendency in public rhetoric for the term “war” to be used to refer to the deployment of organized force against various national or international activities regarded as antisocial—“the war against the Mafia,” for example, or “the war against drug cartels.” Not only is the fight to control, or even to eliminate, such organizations or networks, including small-scale terrorist groups quite different from the major operations of war, this use of the term also confuses the actions of two types of armed force. One—let’s call them “soldiers”—is directed against other armed forces with the object of defeating them. The other—let’s call them “police”—sets out to maintain or reestablish the required degree of law and public order within an existing political entity, typically a state. Victory, which has no necessary moral connotation, is the object of one force; the bringing to justice of offenders against the law, which does have a moral connotation, is the object of the other. Such a distinction is easier to draw in theory than in practice, however. Homicide by a soldier in battle is not, in itself, a breach of the law. But what if a member of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) regards himself as a belligerent, even though official British law regards him as a murderer? Were the operations in Northern Ireland a war, as the IRA held, or an attempt in the face of lawbreakers to maintain orderly government in one province of the United Kingdom? Since not only a formidable local police force but a national army was mobilized against the IRA for thirty years or so, we may conclude that it was a war, but one systematically run like a police operation, in a way that minimized casualties and the disruption of life in the province. In the end, there was a negotiated settlement, one which, typically, for nine years brought not peace, but merely an extended absence of fighting. Such are the complexities and confusion of the relations between peace and war at the start of the new century. They are well illustrated by the military and other operations in which the United States and its allies are presently engaged.

There is now, as there was throughout the twentieth century, a complete absence of an effective global authority capable of controlling or settling armed disputes. Globalization has advanced in almost every respect—economically, technologically, culturally, even linguistically—except one: politically and militarily, territorial states remain the only effective authorities. There are officially about two hundred states, but in practice only a handful count, of which the United States is overwhelmingly the most powerful. However, no state or empire has ever been large, rich, or powerful enough to maintain hegemony over the political world, let alone to establish political and military supremacy over the globe. The world is too big, complicated, and plural. There is no likelihood that the United States, or any other conceivable single-state power, could establish lasting control, even if it wanted to.

A single superpower cannot compensate for the absence of global authorities, especially given the lack of conventions—relating to international disarmament, for instance, or weapons control—strong enough to be voluntarily accepted as binding by major states. Some such authorities exist, notably the United Nations, various technical and financial bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and some international tribunals. But none has any effective power other than that granted to it by agreements between states, or thanks to the backing of powerful states, or voluntarily accepted by states. Regrettable as this may be, it isn’t likely

change in the foreseeable future.

Since only states wield real power, the risk is that international institutions will be ineffective or lack universal legitimacy when they try to deal with offenses such as “war crimes.” Even when world courts are established by general agreement (for example, the International Criminal Court set up by the U.N. Rome Statute of July 17, 1998), the judgments will not necessarily be accepted as legitimate and binding, so long as powerful states are in a position to disregard them. A consortium of powerful states may be strong enough to ensure that some offenders from weaker states are brought before these tribunals, perhaps curbing the cruelty of armed conflict in certain areas. This is an example, however, of the traditional exercise of power and influence within an international state system, not of the exercise of international law.

This is also the case, by definition, where individual states accept international humanitarian law and unilaterally assert the right to apply it to citizens of other countries through their national tribunals—as, notably, the Spanish courts, supported by the British House of Lords, did in the case of General Augusto Pinochet of Chile.

There is, however, a major difference between the twenty-first and the twentieth century: the idea that war takes place in a world divided into territorial areas under the authority of effective governments which possess a monopoly on the means of public power and coercion has ceased to apply. It was never applicable to countries experiencing revolution, or to the fragments of disintegrated empires, but until recently most new revolutionary or postcolonial regimes—China between 1911 and 1949 is the main exception—emerged fairly quickly as more or less organized and functioning successor regimes and states.

Over the past thirty years or so, however, the territorial state has, for various reasons, lost its traditional monopoly on armed force, much of its former stability and power, and, increasingly, the fundamental sense of legitimacy, or at least of accepted permanence, which allows governments to impose burdens such as taxes and conscription on willing citizens. The material equipment for warfare is now widely available to private bodies, as are the means of financing nonstate warfare. In this way, the balance between state and nonstate organizations has changed.

Armed conflicts within states have become more serious and can continue for decades without any significant prospect of victory or settlement: Kashmir, Angola, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Colombia. In extreme cases, as in parts of Africa, the state may have virtually ceased to exist; or may, as in Colombia, no longer exercise power over part of its territory. Even in strong and stable states it has been difficult to eliminate small unofficial armed groups, such as the IRA in Britain and ETA in Spain. The novelty of this situation is indicated by the fact that the most powerful state on the planet, having suffered a terrorist attack, felt obliged to launch a formal operation against a small, international, nongovernmental organization or network lacking both a territory and a recognizable army.

How do these changes affect the balance of war and peace in the coming century? I would rather not make predictions about the wars that are likely to take place or their possible outcomes. However, both the structure of armed conflict and the methods of settlement have been changed profoundly by the transformation of the world system of sovereign states.

The dissolution of the U.S.S.R. means that the Great Power system, which governed

international relations for almost two centuries and, with obvious exceptions, exercised some control over conflicts between states, no longer exists. Its disappearance has removed a major restraint on interstate warfare and the armed intervention of states in the affairs of other states—foreign territorial borders were largely uncrossed by armed forces during the Cold War. The international system was potentially unstable even then, however, as a result of the multiplication of small, sometimes quite weak states, which were nevertheless official “sovereign” members of the U.N. The disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and the European communist regimes plainly increased this instability. Separatist tendencies of varying strength in hitherto stable nation-states such as Britain, Spain, Belgium, and Italy might well increase it further. At the same time, the number of private actors on the world scene has multiplied. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that cross-border wars and armed interventions have increased since the end of the Cold War.

What mechanisms are there for controlling and settling such conflicts? The record is not promising. None of the armed conflicts of the 1990s ended with a stable settlement. The survival of Cold War institutions, assumptions, and rhetoric has kept old suspicions alive, exacerbating the postcommunist disintegration of southeast Europe and making the settlement of the region once known as Yugoslavia more difficult.

These Cold War assumptions, both ideological and political, will have to be dispensed with if we are to develop some means of controlling armed conflict. It is also evident that the United States has failed, and will inevitably fail, to impose a new world order (of any kind) by unilateral force, however much power relations are skewed in its favor at present, and even if it is backed by an (inevitably short-lived) alliance. The international system will remain multilateral and its regulation will depend on the ability of several major units to agree with one another, even though one of these states enjoys military predominance. How far international military action taken by the United States is dependent on the negotiated agreement of other states is already clear. It is also clear that the political settlement of wars, even those in which the United States is involved, will be by negotiation and not by unilateral imposition. The era of wars ending in unconditional surrender will not return in the foreseeable future.

The role of existing international bodies, notably the U.N., must also be rethought. Always present, and usually called upon, it has no defined role in the settlement of disputes. Its strategy and operation are always at the mercy of shifting power politics. The absence of an international intermediary genuinely considered neutral, and capable of taking action without prior authorization by the Security Council, has been the most obvious gap in the system of dispute management.

Since the end of the Cold War, the management of peace and war has been improvised. At best, as in the Balkans, armed conflicts have been stopped by outside armed intervention, and the status quo at the end of hostilities maintained by the armies of third parties. This sort of long-term intervention has been applied for many years by individual strong states in the sphere of influence (Syria in Lebanon, for instance). As a form of collective action, however, it has been used only by the United States and its allies (sometimes under U.N. auspices, sometimes not). The result has so far been unsatisfactory for all parties. It commits the interveners to maintain troops indefinitely, and at disproportionate cost, in areas in which they have no particular interest and from which they derive no benefit. It makes the

dependent on the passivity of the occupied population, which cannot be guaranteed—if there is armed resistance, small forces of armed “peacekeepers” have to be replaced by much larger forces. Poor and weak countries may resent this kind of intervention as a reminder of the days of colonies and protectorates, especially when much of the local economy becomes dependent on the needs of the occupying forces. Whether a general model for the future control of armed conflict can emerge from such interventions remains unclear.

The balance of war and peace in the twenty-first century will depend not on devising more effective mechanisms for negotiation and settlement but on internal stability and the avoidance of military conflict. With a few exceptions, the rivalries and frictions between existing states that led to armed conflict in the past are less likely to do so today. There are, for instance, comparatively few burning disputes between governments about international borders. On the other hand, internal conflicts can easily become violent; the main danger of war lies in the involvement of outside states or military actors in these conflicts.

States with thriving, stable economies and a relatively equitable distribution of goods among their inhabitants are likely to be less shaky—socially and politically—than poor, highly inegalitarian, and economically unstable ones. A dramatic increase in economic and social inequality within, as well as between, countries will reduce the chances of peace. The avoidance or control of internal armed violence depends even more immediately, however, on the powers and effective performance of national governments and their legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of their inhabitants. No government today can take for granted the existence of an unarmed civilian population or the degree of public order long familiar in large parts of Europe. No government today is in a position to overlook or eliminate internal armed minorities. Yet the world is increasingly divided into states capable of administering their territories and citizens effectively—even when faced, as the United Kingdom was, by decades of armed action by an internal enemy—and a growing number of territories bounded by officially recognized international frontiers, with national governments ranging from the weak and corrupt to the nonexistent. These zones produce bloody internal struggles and international conflicts, such as those we have seen in Central Africa. There is, however, no immediate prospect for lasting improvement in such regions, and a further weakening of central government in unstable countries, or a further Balkanization of the world map, would undoubtedly increase the dangers of armed conflict.

A tentative forecast: war in the twenty-first century is not likely to be as murderous as it was in the twentieth. But armed violence, creating disproportionate suffering and loss, will remain omnipresent and endemic—occasionally epidemic—in a large part of the world. The prospect of a century of peace is remote.

War, Peace, and Hegemony at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century

1

It is impossible to talk about the political future of the world unless we bear in mind that we are living through a period when history—that is to say, the process of change in human life and society and the human impact on the global environment—has been accelerating at a dizzying pace. It is now proceeding at a speed which puts the future of both the human race and the natural environment at risk. In the middle of the last century, we suddenly entered a new phase in world history which has brought to an end history as we have known it in the past ten thousand years, that is to say since the invention of sedentary agriculture. We do not know where we are going.

I tried to sketch the outlines of this dramatic and sudden break in world history in my history of the “short twentieth century,” published in 1994. The technological and productive transformations are obvious. Think only of the speed of the communications revolution which have virtually abolished time and distance. The Internet was barely ten years old in 2004. I also singled out four social aspects of it, which are relevant to the international future. These are the dramatic decline and fall of the peasantry, which had until the nineteenth century formed the great bulk of the human race as well as the foundation of its economy; the corresponding rise of a predominantly urban society, and especially what might be called the hyper-cities, with populations measured in eight digits; the replacement of a world of oral communication by a world of universal reading and writing by hand and machine; and, finally, the transformation in the situation of women.

The decline and fall of the agricultural part of humanity is obvious in the developed world. Today it amounts to 4 percent of the occupied population in members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—2 percent in the United States. But it is evident elsewhere. In the mid-1960s, there were still *five* states in Europe with more than half the occupied population in farming, *eleven* in the Americas, *eighteen* in Asia and, with three exceptions (Libya, Tunisia, and South Africa), all of Africa. The situation today is dramatically different. For practical purposes, no countries are left with at least half the populations on farms in Europe and the Americas, or indeed in the Islamic world—even Pakistan has fallen below 50 percent, while Turkey has fallen from a peasant population of three-quarters to one-third. Even the major fortress of peasant agriculture—Southeast Asia—has been breached in several places—Indonesia is down from 67 percent to 44 percent, the Philippines from 53 percent to 37 percent, Thailand from 82 percent to 46 percent, Malaysia from 51 percent to 18 percent. In fact, omitting most of sub-Saharan Africa, the only solid bastions of peasant society left—say, over 60 percent of the occupied population in 2000—are in the former South Asian empires of Britain and France—India, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), and the Indochinese countries. But, given the acceleration of industrialization, how long will this last? In the late 1960s the farming population formed half of the population

Taiwan and South Korea: today it is down to 8 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Within a few decades we will have ceased to be what humanity has been since its emergence, a species whose members are chiefly engaged in gathering, hunting, or producing food.

We shall also cease to be an essentially rural species. In 1900, only 16 percent of the world's population lived in towns. In 1950 it had risen to just under 26 percent; today it is just under half (48 percent). In the developed countries, and in many other parts of the globe, the countryside, even in the agriculturally productive areas, is a green desert in which human beings are hardly ever visible outside motorcars and small settlements, until the traveler reaches the nearest town. But here extrapolation becomes more difficult. It is true that the old developed countries are heavily urbanized, but they are no longer typical of current urbanization, which takes the form of a desperate flight from the countryside into hypercities. What is happening to cities in the developed world—even the ones nominally growing—is the suburbanization of growing areas around the original center or centers. Today, only ten of the world's largest fifty cities are in Europe and North America, and only two of the eighteen world cities of ten million and more. The fastest-growing cities over one million are, with a single exception (Porto, in Portugal), in Asia (twenty), Africa (six), and Latin America (five). Whatever its other consequences, this dramatically changes the political balance, especially in countries with elected representative assemblies or presidents, between highly *concentrated* urban populations and geographically *spread-out* rural ones in states where up to half the population may live in the capital city, though nobody can say exactly how.

As to the educational transformation, the social and cultural effects of general literacy cannot easily be separated from the social and cultural effects of the sudden, and utterly unprecedented, revolution in the public and personal media of communication in which we are all engaged. Let me note only one significant fact. There are today twenty countries in which more than 55 percent of the relevant age groups continue studying after the secondary education. But with a single exception (South Korea) *all* of them are in Europe (old capitalist and ex-socialist), North America, and Australasia. In its capacity to generate human capital, the old developed world still retains a substantial advantage over the major newcomers of the twenty-first century. How fast can Asia, and particularly India and China, catch up?

I want to say nothing here about that greatest single social change of the past century, the emancipation of women, except for one observation supplementing what I have just said. The emancipation of women is best indicated by the degree to which they have caught up with or even surpassed the education of men. While this has made dramatic progress in most Western countries since the 1960s, it is still badly lagging in most parts of the developing world and, what is more troubling, actively impeded in some, though not all, parts of the Islamic region.

2

If one looks more closely at the factors affecting war, peace, and power at the outset of the twenty-first century, the general trends are not necessarily guides to practical realities. It is evident, for instance, that in the course of the twentieth century the world's population outside the Americas ceased to be overwhelmingly ruled, as it were, from the top down, by hereditary princes or the agents of a foreign power. It now came to live in a collection of

technically independent states whose governments claimed legitimacy by reference to “the people” or “the nation,” in most cases (including even the so-called totalitarian regimes) claiming confirmation by real or bogus elections or plebiscites and/or by periodic mass public ceremonies that symbolized the bond between authority and the people. One way or another, people have changed from being *subjects* to *citizens*; including, in the twentieth century, not only men but women. But how close to reality does this get us, even today when most governments have, technically speaking, variants of liberal-democratic constitutions with contested elections, though sometimes suspended by military rule that is deemed to be temporary, but has often lasted a long time? Not very far.

Nevertheless, one general trend can probably be observed across most of the globe. It is the change in the position of the independent territorial state itself, which in the course of the twentieth century became the basic political and institutional unit under which human beings lived. In its original home in the North Atlantic region, it was based on *several* innovations made since the French Revolution. It had the monopoly of the means of power and coercion—arms, armed men, prisons. It exercised increasing control by a central authority and its agents of what takes place on the territory of the state, based on a growing capacity to gather information. The scope of its activity and its impact on the daily life of its citizens grew, and so did success in mobilizing its inhabitants on the grounds of their loyalty to state and nation. This phase of state development reached its peak forty years or so ago.

Think, on the one hand, of the “welfare state” of Western Europe in the 1970s, in which “public consumption”—that is, the share of the gross domestic product (GDP) used for public purposes and not private consumption or investment—amounted to between roughly 20 percent and 30 percent. Think, on the other hand, of the readiness of citizens not only to let public authorities tax them to raise such enormous sums, but actually to be conscripted to fight and die “for their country” in the millions during the great wars of the last century. For more than two centuries, until the 1970s, this rise of the modern state had been continuous and proceeded irrespective of ideology and political organization—liberal, social democratic, communist, or fascist.

This is no longer so. The trend is reversing. We have a rapidly globalizing world economy based on transnational private firms, doing their best to live outside the range of state law and state taxes, which severely limits the ability of even big governments to control their national economies. Indeed, thanks to the prevailing theology of the free market, states are actually abandoning many of their most traditional direct activities—postal services, police, prisons, even important parts of their armed forces—to profit-making private contractors.¹ It has been estimated that 100,000 or more such armed “private contractors” are at present active in Iraq.² Thanks to this development and the flooding of the globe with small, but highly effective, weaponry during the Cold War, armed force is no longer monopolized by states and their agents. Even strong and stable states like Britain, Spain, and India have learned to live for long periods at a time with effectively indestructible, if not actually state-threatening, bodies of armed dissidents. We have seen, for various reasons, the rapid disintegration of numerous member states of the U.N., most but not all of them products of the disintegration of twentieth-century empires, in which the nominal governments are unable to administer or exercise actual control over much of their territory, population, or even their own institutions. Actual separatist movements are found even in old states like

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