

Ethiopia at Starbucks. At the strategic level, globalization is responsible for rapid growth in emerging economies such as China and India.

While the effects of globalization are widely contested and not fully understood, what is becoming clear is that globalization is a force that is significantly changing how the world works. Predicting the future of war is a fool's errand, but an examination of global trends provides insightful clues to the security environment that will shape how the United States conducts war in the future.

As a result of globalization, the security environment the United States now faces is shifting away from interstate conflict. Therefore, its military strategy must reflect this change by enhancing its capacity to project power in a future dominated by intrastate conflict, transnational terrorism, and urbanization.

The following sections will address these global trends and provide recommendations for how we can face the challenges that stem from them despite the fiscal realities at home.

Decline of Interstate Conflict

*The world has entered the era of permanent great power peace.*¹

—Christopher J. Fettweis

Since 1945, the number of interstate conflicts has declined precipitously despite the number of states in the international community tripling.² In comparison to intrastate conflict, interstate conflicts are quite infrequent. In most years, less than three conflicts are ongoing at any time, and from 2004 to 2010, zero interstate conflicts existed.³ This declining trend in interstate conflict is remarkable, and yet the trend is mostly unacknowledged in the U.S. military. Undoubtedly, many variables contribute to this trend, such as the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons or the advance of democracy across the globe. But, a number of studies attribute the decline of interstate conflicts to globalization.⁴ Kristian Gleditsch and Steve Pickering best describe the pacification effect of globalization: “States with more trade and more extensive economic relations are likely to have higher opportunity costs from escalation to war and may have more opportunities to signal intent and reach resolution by means other than

force.”⁵ The interconnectedness of states is, in effect, limiting the benefits of conventional war and promoting other means to achieve political ends.

While the decline of interstate conflict is a positive trend, it is important to note two things. First, although the incidence of interstate conflict remains low, the risk of conflict between states still exists, particularly among neighboring nations with increasing populations competing for declining resources. Second, states are increasingly inclined to support proxy wars rather than engage in direct conflict themselves in an effort to achieve political or strategic gains. Russia's material support to the separatists in Crimea and eastern Ukraine highlights such a strategy. While an all-out conventional invasion would be unacceptable to the international community, Russia's strategy of plausible deniability enables it to violate Ukraine's sovereign borders, instigate instability, and seize strategic territory.

To further illustrate the reluctance of the international community to resort to conventional war, consider the following example. On 17 July 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over Ukraine, killing 298 people.⁶ Shooting down an airliner flying at 32,000 feet is clearly beyond the normal capacity of a guerrilla fighter, and evidence points to Russian-backed separatists.⁷ Yet, despite Russia's indirect involvement in an attack that killed citizens from several different countries, the international community chose to respond with an investigation and economic sanctions.

These are powerful examples of how states are inclined to behave in the era of globalization—and they raise the question: What would be the threshold for the United States to commit to a large-scale conventional war again, given the recent drawdown from our longest period of war?

Rise of Intrastate Conflict

*U.S. strategic culture has a long tradition of downplaying such atypical concerns in favor of a focus on more conventional state-based military power.*⁸

—Audrey K. Cronin

While irregular warfare accounts for approximately 83 percent of all conflicts in the past two centuries of war, globalization creates conditions that will further encourage irregular warfare and intrastate conflict



(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

A man carries a sign endorsing Facebook as "the Egyptian social network" during a protest 1 February 2011 in Egypt. Social networks played a vital role in the uprising that eventually forced the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

as opposed to interstate conventional warfare.⁹ As observed in the previous section, states that are integrated into the global economy appear less likely to use conventional military force. Rather, the rise in opportunity costs is forcing states to use proxy forces to achieve political goals. Iran's support of the Houthis in Yemen and U.S. support for the mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War are two examples.

In addition, the potential of cyber warfare is expanding, as evident by the Stuxnet virus that caused physical damage to the Iranian nuclear facility in 2009–2010.¹⁰ While this event was allegedly carried out by Israel and the United States, the capacity of nonstate actors to eventually achieve an attack of similar scale on critical infrastructure or global networks should not be underestimated.

Another global trend influencing intrastate conflict is the process of democratization. While conflicts between developed democratic states are practically nonexistent in modern times, the path to democracy is often through intrastate conflict because

globalization provides greater avenues and tools for people seeking democratic freedoms.

Consider the revolutionary movements that swept across the Middle East and North Africa, which began with the self-immolation of a 26-year-old street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi in 2011.¹¹ The video of his death spread rapidly among the populace and ignited mass demonstrations calling for democracy, which eventually led to the fall of multiple regimes in the region.

The effect of globalization as a source promoting dissatisfaction among populations for their governments cannot be understated. The interconnectedness of people through technology gives ways for the oppressed to have a voice where no avenue existed previously. For example, when Egypt's Mubarak regime cut off Internet access during the early protests in 2011, Google and Twitter established a service that enabled protesters to post messages to Twitter by calling and leaving a voicemail.¹² In this incredible development, two multinational corporations influenced the affairs within a country in an unprecedented way.

The rapid expansion of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, also illustrates the capability of globalization to enhance the power and influence of nonstate actors. ISIS has proven to be remarkably effective at using social media to inflict terror, seize territories, raise funds, recruit members, and propagate its agenda.

Additionally, using social media and modern transportation capabilities, ISIS exploited the poor governance and weak governance of Syria and Iraq in order to establish territorial control over broad expanses of territory in a very short time span. While a substantial number of immigrants entered Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War, the rapid movement of tens of thousands of ISIS supporters in a short period is very revealing of globalization's influence today.

These examples show the potential for greater intra-state conflict and irregular warfare as nonstate actors grow in influence and become increasingly involved as competitors in internal state affairs. With respect to such developments, U.S. strategy must take into consideration that modern communications and transportation capabilities provide adversaries with more tools and incentives for conducting asymmetric warfare.

Effect on Transnational Terrorism

States experiencing high degrees of state failure are indeed more susceptible to transnational terrorist attacks and disproportionately contribute to transnational terrorism that targets other countries.¹³

—James A. Piazza

Prior to 11 September 2001, the U.S. counterterrorism strategy treated terrorism largely as a criminal activity rather than as a form of warfare. The lethality and sophistication of the 9/11 attacks demonstrated that al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations were capable of projecting their power and influence on a global scale and at a level of intensity well above what had commonly been viewed as mere criminality before the 9/11 events. Audrey Cronin contends that globalization is partly responsible for this change, as terrorists

now “have access to more powerful technologies, more targets, more territory, more means of recruitment, and more exploitable sources of rage than ever before.”¹⁴

As a result of globalization, the improved availability of various goods, technologies, and transportation at cheaper-than-ever costs is providing a greater range of options and tools for terrorist organizations to leverage control. Advances in global technologies and communications also enable terrorists to share ideas, exchange techniques, coordinate activities, and connect with a larger audience beyond their local communities. An important question is whether their access to asymmetric weaponry will eventually extend to weapons of mass destruction or catastrophic cyber attacks.

The effect of globalization on transnational terrorism, however, is more complicated than simply aiding terrorist organizations. Economic development resulting from globalization also has a notable effect on terrorist activity, particularly between any two well-integrated economies. A 2004 study examined 112 countries between 1975 and 1997, and the results suggested, “a 1 percent increase in the average GDP per capita of the country’s top eight export destination countries decreases the expected number of transnational terrorist incidents within this country by 47.5 percent.”¹⁵ This important finding highlights that states with economic ties are influencing terrorist activity within and between their countries,



(Photo courtesy of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine) Ukrainian heavy weaponry withdraws 4 March 2015 from the Donbass region, Ukraine.

and the strength of a state's economy affects whether terrorism is exported to an economic partner. Therefore, the greater the economic integration (and the economic prosperity), the less likely the terrorist activity occurs.

To further illustrate this point, areas where the economic benefits of globalization have yet to fully materialize, such as in failing or failed states, are more vulnerable to terrorist activities. James A. Piazza explains that these areas of weak governance "are easier for terrorist movements to penetrate, recruit from, and operate within."¹⁶ States with strong economies have a greater capacity to provide essential security and law enforcement functions to counter the activities of terrorist organizations. For example, a developed nation such as Germany enjoys a robust law enforcement and intelligence apparatus, because it can afford it. On the other hand, al-Qaida exploited the lawless areas of Afghanistan prior to 9/11, just as the Islamic State filled the void in poorly governed areas of Iraq and Syria.



(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

A teenager gestures for the camera during a demonstration 21 January 2011 to protest election fraud in Albania.

Growth of Urbanization

The continuing urbanization and overall growth of the world's population is projected to add 2.5 billion people to the urban population by 2050, with nearly 90 percent of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa.¹⁷

—United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Globalization is also influencing the security environment by encouraging the global phenomenon of urbanization. Populations are gravitating toward urban centers, as they are the principle beneficiaries of the increased trade, foreign direct investments, and economic development that globalization promotes. For the past six decades, the world has undergone a period of exceptional urban growth. In 2007, the world's urban population surpassed the global rural population. By 2050, two-thirds of the world will reside in urban areas.¹⁸ The world is not just transforming villages into cities; some cities are expanding to simply staggering numbers.

Today, the world's six largest megacities have populations that range from twenty-one million to thirty-eight million inhabitants.¹⁹ By 2030, the world is expected to have forty-one megacities with more than ten million residents populating each.²⁰ To put this in perspective, the war in Iraq was fought in a country with approximately twenty-four million people (as of 2014).²¹ Today, the world's largest city is Tokyo, which has fourteen million more people than Iraq, concentrated in an urban area.²²

For much of the world, the effect of globalization with respect to urbanization is mostly positive in that the increased economic development provides employment, raises the standards of living, and promotes education opportunities.²³ This trend, however, also creates significant strain on governance, essential services, education, health care, and the energy sector. For example, Egypt recently announced plans to build an entirely new capital in order to alleviate the infrastructure stressors caused by Cairo's eighteen million residents.²⁴ These stressors are further compounded on a global scale, as illustrated by a 2011 study that found that by 2050 more than one billion people living in urban centers will be

without adequate water.²⁵ The scenarios that could draw the United States into these areas are equally daunting. Megacities beset by natural disasters, epidemics, or a failed government would present immense humanitarian and security challenges for the international community.

Two geographical areas in particular will face increasing problems and strain due to rapid population growth. Minh Dao explains, “many cities in Africa and the Middle East are rapidly growing even in the absence of industrial development, which brings concerns about increasing underemployment and unemployment in those areas.”²⁶ Lack of employment opportunity, especially among young men of military age, leaves developing countries more susceptible to intrastate conflict, criminal activity, and terrorism. David Kilcullen further describes these underdeveloped areas as “the poorest equipped to handle it: a recipe for conflict.”²⁷

The Way Ahead

*The Department of Defense will continue to have a critical role to play, but we cannot kill or capture our way out of this problem.*²⁸

—John A. Nagl

To be best postured to handle these global trends and future security conditions, the United States must rethink its current national security strategy. Change in strategy begins with the U.S. military’s acknowledgement that intrastate conflict and irregular warfare will likely dominate our operating environment, and that we can no longer afford to be fixated on large-scale conventional warfare. It is imperative that U.S. national security policy shift its emphasis



Photo: Shacks sit on stilts 1 November 2010 in the Makoko slum in Lagos, Nigeria. Originally a fishing village, its population has been estimated between 85,000 and 250,000 residents. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Top Left: A child begs for food as his brothers play near an open sewer 20 July 2005 in the Kibera slum district of Nairobi, Kenya. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Bottom Right: Skilled workers hold placards offering temporary employment services 7 October 2010 in Glenvista, south of Johannesburg, South Africa. (Photo by Themba Hadebe, Associated Press)

toward using nonmilitary elements of power (diplomacy, information, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement) to promote greater international security and stability.²⁹ As U.S. Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster observes,

Winning in war, of course, is not a military-only task. Achieving sustainable outcomes consistent with vital interests is an inherently civil-military task that requires integrated planning and execution of political, diplomatic, military, economic, informational, intelligence, and, increasingly, law enforcement and rule-of-law efforts.³⁰

McMaster recognizes that conflicts are not won solely by air strikes or offensive operations but through a balanced application of elements of national power to create conditions for sustainable stability and security.

For example, an inadequate stabilization effort or an overreliance on air strikes leaves an area vulnerable to a power vacuum, as evident with the post-Qaddafi era in Libya.

We can best facilitate national security strategy through two approaches. First, the expansion of military alliances through the regionally aligned forces initiative is an exceptional opportunity for promoting security cooperation, facilitating stable conditions for economic development, and deterring aggressive actions abroad, while reducing the economic burden of maintaining a large conventional army.³¹ U.S. Army Gen. Joseph Votel explains, “globalization has created networked challenges on a massive scale. Only by working with a variety of security powers can we begin to address these issues.”³² Networked challenges will require networked solutions since the United States simply cannot afford to pursue this strategy alone.

Second, the United States needs the capacity to rapidly deploy a joint force with enhanced training and expertise in stabilization tasks. Moreover, this deployable force cannot be solely military; it needs robust interagency representation. Provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq and Afghanistan—when they were fully resourced—provide good examples of the successful organization and employment of interagency units. The United States must develop, fully fund, and resource forces of similar conception and capability as a standing national strategic asset. John A. Nagl, scholar and former soldier, explains why such organizational and strategic planning measures are needed:

Victory in this long struggle requires changes in the governments and educational systems of dozens of countries around the globe. This is the task of a new generation of information warriors, development experts, and diplomats.³³

Although critics will dislike the return of peacekeeping missions, the consequences of allowing states to fail or failed states to remain ungoverned will continue to undermine our efforts to root out

transnational terrorism. Pre-9/11 Afghanistan as well as current-day eastern Syria, northern Iraq, and Yemen are examples where ungoverned space created the opportunity for terrorist groups to find sufficient sanctuary to gather and organize. In fact, international peacekeeping efforts have a solid historical record of success, with a 2004 study concluding that the probability of civil war returning to countries was reduced by 84 percent due to the presence of peacekeepers.³⁴

Such a refined national security strategy would provide the United States with critical assets for promoting international security and conflict mitigation, while reducing the economic burden of a large conventional army.

Conclusion

*By complementing its military and economic might with greater investments in its soft power, the United States can rebuild the framework it needs to tackle tough global challenges.*³⁵

—Joseph S. Nye Jr.

This article is by no means intended to serve as a prophetic declaration on the future of war but rather as a way to encourage deep thought and discussion on our changing security environment. The decline of interstate conflict and rise of intrastate conflict reflect changes that are mainly fueled by the forces of globalization and other global trends, perhaps the most notable of which is urbanization in the form of megacities. If we choose to ignore these trends, we are destined to maintain a force that will be largely ill-prepared for the challenges associated with future intrastate conflict and irregular warfare. It is time to accept that the future of war will likely not be fought how the U.S. military has historically preferred to fight (i.e., stand-up battles between nation-state conventional forces), but it will nonetheless remain very familiar as a profoundly human endeavor that will be as ugly as ever. ■

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Notes

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