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Still a Western World?

Continuity and change in global order

Edited by Sergio Fabbrini and Raffaele Marchetti

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1 Our new and better world

Robert Jervis

As many commentators have observed, much is new in international politics since the end of the Cold War. Contrary to the view of Kenneth Waltz and others who see the anarchic structure of international politics as both unchanging and establishing the most important patterns of international life (Waltz, 1959 and 1979),¹ even without a world government momentous changes can and have occurred. But, contrary to what is often argued, the key changes are not the spread of democracy, the rise of civil society and non-governmental organizations, the development of new norms and networks, and the concomitant decline of state power (and perhaps of power itself) (Naim, 2013), but the spread of peace, especially among the leading powers of the world, the end of much of the game of international politics played for the highest stakes, and the reduced prospects for other enormous changes in the near future.

My argument will proceed in three sections. After an introduction, I will elaborate the basic argument for the decline of great-power war, follow this with an analysis of what the new world means, and conclude by discussing the implications for when and why the US should resort to the use of force.

Introduction

What I want to discuss can be summarized in three quotations. The first is the question that Marshal Ferdinand Foch asked of any conflict of issue: “De quoi s’agit-il?” – “What is it all about?”² To simplify greatly, in the eighteenth century international relations (IR) was all about monarchs and dynasties jockeying for power, wealth, and glory; in the nineteenth century, it was about coping with social upheaval and the resulting clashes of classes and nationalisms; the twentieth century started out in this vein, but after the Bolshevik revolution and the rise of Hitler became the clash of ideologies. Some observers have tried to make parallel summaries of the current era. Perhaps most famously, Samuel Huntington called it the clash of civilizations (Huntington, 1996). Others see new forms of global democracy, and related is the claim that IR now revolves less around states than around congeries of private actors, albeit ones often concerned with public issues. There is something to

these claims, but I think most striking is the very fact that we have trouble answering the question. That is, although we can locate, or at least argue about, what particular conflicts are all about, I think it is hard to provide an overall characterization of our era in these terms. Of course it may simply be that we are still living through it and lack the wisdom that hindsight will provide, but I think the reason is deeper than that – there no longer is a straightforward answer to Foch's question. The central explanation for this is that, as I will discuss below, the leading powers no longer pose security threats to each other, and this removal of the prime goal of international politics allows for the development of a plethora of others.

The second summary quotation is that "We live in the best of all possible worlds." I do not mean this in the sense that Leibniz, who coined it, did, and I am not arguing that evil is necessary for good to become manifest. Even less do I mean it in the sense that Voltaire did when he ridiculed it by linking the phrase to blind optimism. Rather, I want to couple the enormous importance of the era of peace among the leading powers with the less pleasant news that, while we can readily imagine even better worlds, it is not likely that we can achieve them in the immediate future. Thus, with all its defects, this may be the best, not of all worlds, but of all possible worlds.

The third quotation is the question asked on the cover of a recent issue of the *Economist*, "What would America fight for?"³ Although the cover attributes this question to America's allies, the text makes clear that the journal shares the concerns. What is interesting for my purposes is that it never tries to answer the question, let alone to ask what Britain and other European countries are or should be willing to fight for. Wars are a serious business, and Iraq taught those who had forgotten it that even small wars can have large costs. Clearly, the US or any other country should fight only when it has to, when the stakes are high, and there are no alternatives. Today this set is small for the US and Europe.

Here is probably the appropriate place to note that my analysis is centered on the US and, to a lesser extent, on Japan and the countries in the EU. In part, this reflects the extent of my knowledge, but I think it also is justified by the importance of these countries.

A better world – at least for the leading states

The fact that it is hard to answer Foch's question is good news. It means that we can no longer detect a dominant divide in world politics or a motive for large-scale war, at least among the leading states. As I have argued previously, the states of North America, West and Central Europe, and Japan both are those with the greatest hard and soft power and form a security community (Jervis, 2002 and 2011). (The European Union is of course a subset of the security community, and its development is both a cause and an effect of war among them being unthinkable. For all its cost and problems, the EU is one of our era's crowning achievements.) According to Karl Deutsch, a security

community is a group of countries who not only are at peace, but among whom war is unthinkable (Deutsch, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998). This is a very restricted category. Even countries who remain at peace with each other for prolonged periods often think about and plan for war with one another. It is exceedingly rare for major states to fail to do so, and when they do put the thought of war between them out of their minds, the reason often is the pressing threat from a common enemy. Indeed it was the perception of a common threat from the USSR that was partly responsible for the rise of the security community, but that country's demise has not led to the community's. This break with the past hardly can be exaggerated: it is not an exaggeration to say that the history of world politics has been dominated by war and the shadow of war among the most powerful states. It is the blessed turning off of this engine of world politics that makes Foch's question so hard to answer.

My definition of leading powers excludes Russia and the PRC, and a skeptic might argue that it was designed with that purpose in mind. Nevertheless, even if a war involving these two countries remains possible, one reason why these possibilities receive as much attention as they do is the lack of greater dangers. Furthermore, when we look at the possible causes of a war between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia or the US (and/or Japan) and China we see that, despite some overheated rhetoric growing out of the conflict over Ukraine, the issues are not direct and vital. That is, only those with overheated imaginations can envision Russia as a military threat to Europe (the leverage gained by Europe's partial dependence on Russian gas, although certainly significant, is not of the same magnitude as the previous Soviet threat was assumed to be), and the danger to the US arising from China's rise is indirect only, stemming as it does from the maintenance of America's Cold War alliances in East Asia.

In other words, the leading powers now have an unprecedented degree of security, or at least security against threats from other countries (I am leaving aside the dangers of climate change, for example), and the result is to give greater salience to a wide range of issues of different types that produce and result from shifting alignments and that tap into different fears and hopes.

This means that many of the issues that receive so much attention are in a large gray area between vital and trivial. This is true, for example, of the Ukraine crisis. Leaving aside the rights and the wrongs of the issue, both morally and pragmatically (and I think blame is to be quite widely distributed), the salient point in this context is that it fits somewhere on this continuum. Few would say that the issue does not affect Europe or the US at all, but it is equally clear that it is not worth a war. Russian dominance or even absorption of the Ukraine would certainly be unfortunate for its inhabitants, perhaps would solidify authoritarian rule in Russia, and could weaken norms that the West believes are conducive to peace and good governments (although the Russian charge that the West has violated them when doing so serves Western interests has much to be said for it), such eventualities could hardly be seen as the first steps in a Russian plot to dominate West Europe. It

then does not rise to the level of a vital interest, a term reserved for interests important enough to merit fighting or threatening to do so. On the other hand, the issue is not trivial. The West does have a stake in Ukraine, in seeing that the continent is not divided again, in reassuring the new members of NATO, in discouraging the idea that countries have a unilateral right to protect their co-ethnics in other countries (not that the Russians in Crimea were actually threatened), and in putting relations with Russia on a good footing.

In this regard, the Cold War's preoccupation with security leaves us with two harmful intellectual legacies. First, scholars and leaders suffered an atrophy of their skills in dealing with non-vital interests and with conflicts that were significant but that did not endanger the state. This is what world politics among the leading powers, and between them and others, will be dominated by, but we have lost at least some of our skills in both understanding and dealing with them. Second, the Cold War fear of the USSR (granted that this fear was greater in the US than in the EU) compounded the inherently difficult problem of maintaining a sense of proportion in the problems we now face. To return to the case of Ukraine, putting aside the question of how we got here, Putin's Russia certainly is now a problem for the West. Indeed, it may be one of the greatest foreign policy challenges the West now faces. But saying this does not tell us how great this problem is. It looms large in part because there are so few other dangers. Similarly, cyber conflict, especially but not only with the PRC, certainly is a danger worth taking seriously. But how large the stakes are and how important the menace is is difficult to determine. The same is true for the proliferation of nuclear weapons, another issue high on the American agenda. Even those who reject the argument that proliferation will be stabilizing have difficulty estimating the magnitude of the danger, and therefore the level of effort and resources that should be arrayed against it. Although rank ordering these and other threats is difficult, more difficult still is putting them on some absolute scale. The result, I believe, is that the American leadership if not the mass public has lost its sense of proportion in the international dangers being posed, and concomitantly has failed to see how much safer we are now thanks to the existence of the security community.

International politics after the end of history

Francis Fukuyama famously declared the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992). Understood – or rather misunderstood – as the claim that history and conflict had come to an end, this is clearly incorrect. But this is not what Fukuyama argued. His claim is that we have seen the end of clashing ideologies that purport to be universally valid and that, as such, seek to spread themselves throughout the world.⁴ There is much to this. It is not so much that the ideology of liberalism, democracy, and capitalism has converted everyone as it is that there is no other general contender such as fascism or communism. Islamic fundamentalism (the term is imprecise if not misleading,

but there is no other term in widespread use) rejects and seeks to exclude Western liberalism, but in no realistic sense aspires to spread its truth to the entire world. The PRC has also followed its own path, and the combination of some degree of economic liberalization coupled with authoritarian rule and enriching the leaders has produced dramatic results. But China has not touted this as a model for others to follow, its success may depend on factors particularly Chinese, and others have not flocked to approach. A generation ago, Lee Kuan Yew proclaimed that "Asian values" were a true alternative to the West, but despite Singapore's own success this claim has attracted few followers.

A recent entrant into the possible competition for an alternative ideology is more interesting, however. In a speech in January 2012, Putin issued a challenge to the West, or rather issued a challenge that was aimed at potentially anti-Western allies as well as the Russian public.⁵ The contrast with Gorbachev is interesting in this regard. At the Malta Summit in 1989, Gorbachev took great exception when George H. W. Bush talked about "Western values." At first it was not clear to Bush why Gorbachev was so upset, but the latter clarified the situation by saying that the values of democracy and individual rights were universal, not uniquely Western – i.e. they were Russian values as much as American ones. This is the position that Putin starkly rejected, instead associating Western liberalism and tolerance for individual choice and diversity, especially in the form of respect for individual sexual orientation, as odious and decadent. Russia, he said, rejected these values in favor of traditional and even pre-Enlightenment ones of community, discipline, and respect for older social mores.⁶ Although Putin did not explicitly appeal to those outside Russia, his call might strike a responsive chord. Many leaders and members of the public outside the West resent its power, its arrogance, and the way its values are threatening and transforming their societies. It is not impossible to imagine broad support for "traditional values," diverse as they are, in opposition to the West. Granted that such an ideology would be defined more by what it opposes than by its positive content, at this point it seems the most likely contender for an alternative ideology.

Most likely, but still fairly unlikely, and I think that at this point Fukuyama's judgment still stands. This has enormous consequences for international politics because it takes the twentieth century's answer to Foch's question off the board. Of course there can be crucial ideological or quasi-ideological splits elsewhere, as in the Sunni-Shi'a divide in the Muslim world. But without deep ideological divisions to fuel international conflict, the fires are likely to burn less hot. It makes a difference whether the US-PRC conflict over the terms on which natural resources in the East and South China Sea will be exploited or even the broader question of influence in the region or over two clashing sets of values and world views.

This does not mean that future conflicts will be driven only by disputes over resources and other material factors, even among the leading powers or

between them and Russia and China. As Arnold Wolfers explains, when states have met their needs for security and autonomy, they often turn toward what he called "milieu goals" (Wolfers, 1965). These are the pursuit out of non-material motives. For the West today, this means democracy, human rights, and limits on, if not the elimination of, corruption. These embody the way of life in the West, or, to be more precise, the way the West likes to see itself. The argument for spreading these values and ways of behaving is partly that they will enhance international cooperation and so be in the interests of the West, but at least as important is that they will benefit the societies that adopt them. Whether or not this is the case is fortunately beyond my scope here; all that is relevant is the claim that milieu goals are increasingly important in world politics.

One large open question is the extent to which the West, and especially the US, will seek to impose its values on others by force, a question which is related to whether its leaders believe that countries with different social systems are a threat to it. The obvious example is the war against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003, which I believe can be traced in large part to the fact that President George W. Bush held what Waltz called a "second image" theory of the causes of international conflict (Waltz, 1959) in believing that the fundamental source of a state's foreign policy was the nature of its domestic regime, and therefore that a regime like Iraq's that ruled its own people by force and terror would inevitably behave in a parallel fashion internationally. The sad results of the war have dampened the enthusiasm for such enterprises and weakened the hold of the theory behind it, but whether this is a permanent or only a temporary development is yet to be determined.

One important question – one that I cannot answer – is how disputes will be settled when force is no longer considered to be an option. In 1977, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye published a path-breaking book on what they called "complex interdependence," the relations among states within a security community (although they did not use that term) (Keohane and Nye, 1977). But while this book is one of the most cited in the field, the fundamental question of dispute resolution within a security community has not been well explored. Some of our standard bargaining models are likely to apply with economic dependencies serving as at least the partial arbiter, as Keohane and Nye indicted when they drew on the important work of Albert Hirschman (1945), but lots of questions remain. How strong will appeals to common values and normative standards be? Will even states who share them be able to interpret them in the same way when the conflicts of interest are significant? Will leaders appeal to nationalism to bolster their claims, and will such claims resonate in countries within the security community? Will states engage in minor skirmishing even when full-scale war is unthinkable, as Great Britain and Iceland did during the "Cod War"? Will states increasingly turn to international organizations or third parties to settle their disputes? Perhaps we will see more protracted stalemates in the absence of a final arbiter. Although we have had 25 years of experience within the security community

after the end of the Cold War, the emerging patterns are still unclear, or at least understudied.

Another crucial question I cannot even begin to answer is whether war will disappear outside of the existing security community. Its decline has been striking but fully convincing explanations, let alone projections into the future, are still out of reach.⁷ A cautious judgment would be that these wars have not disappeared and that, at minimum, security considerations will continue to be important in many parts of the world, most obviously in the Middle East. It is worth noting, however, that in both East Asia and South Asia, areas that Western analysts and leaders generally single out as particularly dangerous, states have pursued security policies that are more relaxed than those followed by the great powers throughout most of history in the West. Particularly striking is the behavior of the nuclear and near nuclear states. Although the PRC is now expanding and modernizing its nuclear force, it has been remarkably slow to do so and the best guesses for the future place it will follow the trajectories the US and USSR followed. North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons, undesired as it was by every other nation on the globe, has led neither to more aggressive behavior on its part nor to Japan's acquiring nuclear weapons (although it could do so quite rapidly). Scholars have argued about the impact of the Indian and Pakistani bomb on their behavior, but, with the possible exception of the Kargil adventure, it does not seem to have had the dangerous effects that many expected. Turning to Africa, what is most striking is the absence of international wars, with the major exception being the bloody one between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the skirmishing between Sudan and South Sudan, both the result of the break-up of previously single if fractious countries.

The chances of violent conflict in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are beyond my expertise and the scope of this chapter and so I cannot go further. What I would argue, however, is that whether these prospects are bright or bleak depends much more on developments and choices within the region and particular countries than it does on what the West does. At various times in the past the political left or the right within the West thought that their countries' policies would be a major determinant if not the major determinant of what happened in the rest of the world. I believe that this was and continues to be mistaken. Although external influences are indeed important (and often underestimated by students of comparative politics)⁸ and outside states can sometimes provide security umbrellas and peacekeeping forces (Fortna 2004, 2008), it is far from clear that, on balance, external intervention does more good than harm. This is even true for the seemingly benign granting of foreign aid.

This is why I say that our current world is not only better than those we have seen before, but is the best of all possible worlds. I grant that further improvements in human welfare are not only possible, but likely. They will come by the efforts of the states and societies concerned. The West cannot do a great deal in this regard. As far as it is concerned, we are indeed in the best of all possible worlds.

Conclusions: should the US fight more?

In closing, I want to return to the question the *Economist* raised: "What would America fight for?" This is obviously part of the much larger debate about the role the US will or should play in the world, a debate I cannot fully engage here. Briefly put, those who call for deep engagement, including heavy military presence and the willingness to use force to protect America's far-flung allies, believe that this is necessary to maintain the sort of world order that fits with both American values and American interests. It is not so much that this stance is necessary to ward off immediate and direct threats as it is that unless the world is policed – and the US is the only country strong enough to be the police officer – world order will crumble and the retraction of American power will produce arms races and probably wars throughout the globe that will not only do great damage to the local populations, but will disrupt international trade and bring economic harm to the US. The reply is that while indeed it is harder to reassure allies than to deter adversaries,⁹ no matter what the American stance is, adversaries have to take seriously the possibility that the US will respond with force and that even a fairly low probability of this produces a significant degree of restraint. Furthermore, the efficacy of military instruments should not be exaggerated nor should that of economic and diplomatic ones be downplayed. The US has a lot of tools in its kit in addition to military ones. Of course the basic argument for the need for using force in the foreseeable future, for example in Ukraine or against the Chinese seizure of a disputed island, is not that the consequences of not doing so will be immediate disaster, but that acquiescence, or even a response restricted to diplomatic and economic instruments, will lead to the unraveling of the world order and grave consequences in the future. Such dire projections may be correct, of course. The future is difficult to foresee and small disputes can have large consequences. The 1930s taught us that.

But Hitlers are rare, and neither Russia nor the PRC has anything like the power of Nazi Germany. We should remember what Lord Salisbury, a great British statesman of the nineteenth century, said: "It has generally been acknowledged to be madness to go to war for an idea, but if anything it is yet more unsatisfactory to go to war against a nightmare" (Seton-Watson, 1935: 168). The leading powers have an unprecedented degree of security. The US would be well advised to follow the path the Europeans have recently gone down of answering the question "What would America fight for?" by saying, "As little as possible, and we are fortunate to live in a world in which very little fighting is necessary." The difficulty in answering Foch's question complicates matters for scholars and confuses national leaders, but is a blessing for societies and citizens.

Notes

1 For a critique of the concept of anarchy and the argument that, contrary to conventional wisdom, it has only recently been stressed, even by Realists, see (Donnelly, 2015).

- 2 I owe this quotation and its significance to the first chapter of Brodie's magisterial *War and Politics* (1973).
- 3 *The Economist*, May 3–9, 2014.
- 4 For arguments similar to Fukuyama's, see Owen (2010).
- 5 V. Putin, "Russia: The Ethnicity Issue," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (January 23, 2012), at <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17831/>; also see Galeotti and Bowen, 2014, 16–19.
- 6 V. Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *Russian Presidential Executive Office* (March 18, 2014), at eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889.
- 7 For excellent discussions, see, for example, Mueller (2007) and Pinker (2011).
- 8 For the classic corrective, Gourevitch (1978).
- 9 The point was well put by a former British Minister of Defence: "It takes only 5% credibility of American retaliation to deter the Soviets, but 95% credibility to reassure the Europeans" (quoted in Payne 2010: 220).

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2 Uncertain global governance

Bertrand Badie

Global governance appears as something radically new in international relations, a kind of intruder, even a 'crank' who does not respect the traditional syntax. It breaks with the common rule, by banning interstate competition or depriving it of its predominant role. It overshadows and even contradicts sovereignty which was, however, the cornerstone of the Westphalian order. It promotes common goods and puts national interest in a new and more modest perspective ... That is to say that governance does not fit easily into the realm of international relations studies, and was painfully adopted by political actors who feared losing part of their power and legitimacy.

The conditions of its emergence play out as an aggravating factor. If global governance is defined as a way of managing cooperation among states and other potential international actors in a context of interstate competition, we can consider that it was shaped for the first time, and in a very elementary manner, during the Vienna Congress in 1815. Princes then came to believe that war-based competition was too costly for them, while they understood that they were about to lose their crowns due to the wars stemming from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire (Schroeder, 1994). From then on, war was no longer a routinized tournament, whereas competition was no longer simply considered as an expected winning game. Global concert – or, at least, concert among the most powerful states – thus became a functional initiative. However, fear is not necessarily considered a good starting point for innovation. The general concern over losing their thrones was a negative motivation among princes and leaders: governance was invented as an emergency solution rather than as a positive way to manage a new international order.

For these reasons, states and governments went slowly or even backtracked in this new adventure. Their aim was to participate in this new practice at minimal risk, using trickery to save their sovereignty and protect their privileges. The main issue at stake was to define a way of cooperating which would limit losses of sovereignty, without worrying about the growing cost of adopting a resilient attitude. In practice, states adopted governance in a reactive and defensive way which substantially reduced the efficiency of their innovation. We would regard this as *stakeholding* rather than real *sharing*.