

## *Chapter 13*

# **International Security in 2020**

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Much of today's geopolitical punditry rests on two assumptions; that American power has passed its zenith and will continue to decline, and that this will occur in a world of increasing disorder and rising conflict. Both these predictions represent straight line projections of what are perceived as current trends: the rise of China, America's diminishing clout, the decline of the West, the growth of terrorism and the importance of non state actors, the shift from a uni- to multi-polar world and the consequent rise in turbulence. As predictions, these two prognoses may or may not be true. As descriptions of the recent past, they are both largely false.

### **The End of American Hegemony**

The early 1990s is generally seen as the apogee of American power. With its Soviet adversary vanquished and no other competitor in sight, the United States emerged as the world only superpower. Yet by any objective measure, the real peak of American power was between 1945 and 1950, when the United States produced and consumed half the world's wealth and had a monopoly on nuclear weapons. By 1970, the American share of global GDP had fallen from half to one-quarter of the world total, and there were four other nuclear powers, two of them hostile.

The relative decline in American power that occurred between 1945 and 1970 was in some measure the product of American policy, specifically its efforts to turn both former allies into prosperous competitors and former enemies into well-armed allies. Since the 1970s, American economic power has remained steady, at about a quarter of global GDP, while American military dominance has grown, not

diminished, to the point where today the U.S. defense budget is almost as large as that of every other nation in the world combined. Recent American setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the limits on that power, but the United States had an even harder time forty years ago and enjoyed less success in pacifying a significantly smaller and less populous, country, South Vietnam. A comparison of the Vietnam, Afghan and Iraqi campaigns does not suggest any degradation in American military capacity, nor indeed of its political weight, since the United States has been able to secure more international support for both of the latter two ventures than it did for its Vietnam intervention.

Whereas the United States economy has grown at about the global average since the 1970s, Europe, Japan and Russia have grown more slowly than the norm, even as China, Taiwan, South Korea, India and Brazil have expanded more quickly. As a result, the rise of China (and these others) has come at the expense not of the United States, but of Europe, Japan and Russia, all of which have seen their share of global GDP, and their resultant influence shrink over the past several decades. Their comparative decline has been even more precipitate in the military sphere for both Europe and Russia.

The United States has also grown demographically at a faster rate than the rest of the world, to include even China. Thus the American population has grown 10 percent since 2000, while its economy expanded by 21 percent, and its defense budget by 55 percent. The United States also has a higher proportion of working age people to dependents than do Russia, Japan, China and most European nations—another source of economic strength.<sup>1</sup>

## The Rise of China

While America's global predominance has not significantly diminished since the 1970s, and has indeed grown since the disappearance of the Soviet Union twenty years ago, China and to a lesser extent India are emerging, or reemerging, as major powers. Nevertheless, China still has a way to go before it enters the superpower bracket.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wolf, "Facts About American Decline," *Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2011.

The Chinese economy is presently 40 to 60 percent the size of the American, depending on whether one uses market exchange rates or purchasing power parity as methods of comparison. The Indian economy is either 26 percent or 42 percent the size of the Chinese, again depending on which method is used. China has been growing faster than India for decades, but the gap in growth rates is narrowing. A RAND analysis of 27 different expert forecasts finds that the projected average annual GDP growth for the two economies through 2025 is approximately the same, 5.7 percent for China, 5.6 percent for India. Assuming that the American economy grows at about half this rate over the same period, China's GDP will be about half that of America's in 2025 at market exchange rates, while India's will remain less than half of China's.<sup>2</sup>

China has a much healthier and better educated population than India and it spends a good deal more on research and development. China has the world's third highest expenditure on R&D, after the United States and Japan. China commits one percent of its GDP to R&D, versus 0.8 percent for India and 2.6 percent for the United States. Given the different size of the three economies, this means China spends three to five times more on R&D as India, whereas the United States spends four to eight times more than China.

China has sustained its high growth rate longer than did the earlier Asian tigers, but it is about to encounter some severe demographic headwinds. Historically, societies have become rich before they became old, as rising prosperity led to declining birth rates and increased longevity. China's one child policy has greatly accelerated this process, and is about to produce the first aged society that is still relatively poor. By 2025, India's population will equal China's after which China's overall population will begin to fall while India's will continue to grow. More significantly, China's working age population will begin to fall much earlier than that, while India's will continue to

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<sup>2</sup> Data for 2008 from the World Bank, "Country Data," [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org). Detailed analyses of Chinese and Indian economic prospects and projections of their future defense spending can be found in *Indian Defense & Defense Procurement Spending to 2025*, Eric Larson and Meilind Huang, RAND, 2010, and *Chinese Defense & Defense Procurement Spending to 2025*, Keith Crane et al, RAND, 2005. A forthcoming RAND study will provide a comparative assessment of the two countries' development over the next fifteen years.

grow for another twenty years and then decline much more slowly. As China's working age population declines, its elderly population will grow. Dependency ratios will rise, savings rates will decline, and the government will face heightened pressures to increase spending on health care and pensions. These demographic factors are among the chief reasons that Chinese and Indian economic growth rates are likely to converge.

Although much has been written about increases in Chinese defense spending, China has in this regard actually been falling further behind the United States. In 2000 the American defense budget was seven times that of China, in 2010 it was ten times bigger. Of course, China is not fighting any wars, which accounts for much of the American increase.<sup>3</sup>

China and India both spend about 2.5 percent of their GDP on defense, more or less equal to the shares of the United Kingdom or Russia, but about half the current American proportion. RAND economists estimate that China defense spending will be a little more than half that of the United States by 2025, while India's will be a half to a quarter that of China's. China will thus begin to narrow the military gap with the United States over the next fifteen years, while India will remain pretty much its current distance behind China.

As these figures suggest, for another generation, at least, the United States will remain the world's predominant power, albeit less dominant than heretofore. China and India will become more influential actors. China is already the world's second largest economy and will soon be its second largest military power. India will maintain but probably not gain measurably on its current position vis-à-vis China. Europe, Japan and Russia may see their relative positions wane further.

## **The End of History and the Decline of the West**

China and Russia may not themselves be models of democracy, but neither state is seeking to export any alternative ideology. Indeed both China and Russia regularly vote for and fund UN efforts to hold free elections in fragile states around the globe. Only strict Islamists cur-

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<sup>3</sup> Wolf, *op. cit.*

rently offer any systematic alternative to representative democracy, and this ideology has shown only limited appeal in Muslim societies and none whatsoever beyond them. Iran, the sole exemplar, has not had the slightest success exporting its system. Frank Fukuyama may have been somewhat premature in declaring that the collapse of communism represented the end of history, in the sense of competing ideologies, but it is certainly true that history has been moving in this direction for several decades. Only the Arab Middle East has escaped until very recently the democratizing trend that has swept through Europe, Latin America, Asia and even Africa. Thus, since the 1980s the global number of democratic nations has doubled, from under thirty to almost sixty.<sup>4</sup> In the spring of 2011 several Arab societies sought to jump on the democratic bandwagon.

If one defines the West geographically as the United States and Europe, or in Cold War geopolitical terms as the United States, Europe and Japan, then there has already been some relative decline vis-à-vis China, a decline which will likely be accentuated further over the next decade. If, by contrast, the West is conceived ideologically to include all established democracies that are marked by representative governments, the regular alternance in power, civil liberties and free market economies, then nearly all of the world's fastest growing states, with the exception of China, but including India, South Korea, Taiwan, and Brazil, must be counted on the Western side of the global equation. So defined, the "West", far from declining, has seen an extraordinary expansion over the past several decades, its values now almost universally espoused and increasingly widely practiced.

## **New World Disorder**

Americans and Europeans tend to recall the Cold War era as tense and occasionally scary era, but basically stable and peaceful. They contrast this oddly nostalgic image with the much more fluid and uncertain international environment they have experienced, or at least observed over the past twenty years. The immediacy and global reach of modern communications heighten their perception of turbulence and rising violence and intensifies the anxieties that go with it.

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<sup>4</sup> Polity IV Project, University of Maryland.

Contrary to this picture of a peaceful cold war and an increasingly violent aftermath, actual trends have been just the opposite, with rising conflict throughout the duration of the Cold War, and a falling incidence of warfare thereafter. From the 1950s to the early 1990s the number of wars, mostly civil, rose year after year. In the early 1990s, even as the Soviet Union was disappearing into history, the number of conflicts simultaneously underway around the world had risen to over fifty. The social impact of these wars, as measured in casualties, refugees and physical destruction, also rose commensurately throughout this forty year period.<sup>5</sup> The Cold War was certainly peaceful compared to the historically unparalleled half century of bloodletting that preceded it, but it was much more violent than anything that has followed.

As Andrew Mack makes clear in his chapter of this volume, the number of conflicts, the number of battle deaths, and the ancillary consequences of conflict all fell precipitously over the next two decades. There are currently a couple of dozen wars ongoing, all civil, but most recent wars have been smaller, less destructive and shorter in duration than those that preceded them. Indeed, the World Bank has found that mortality rates have been declining of late *even in states in conflict*. Improvements in health care and economic growth have combined to increase longevity in societies around the world, and the pace of this process now exceeds the contrary effects of armed conflict even in most societies experiencing undergoing civil wars.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Mack's *Human Security Report* for 2009/10 comments on this counterintuitive phenomenon, noting that "the reality is simply that today's armed conflicts rarely generate enough fatalities to reverse the long-term downward trend in peacetime mortality that has become the norm for most of the developing world."

Given the growth in global population and the decline in armed conflict, it seems probable that a smaller proportion of humanity is directly affected by warfare today than at any time in human history. This happy situation does not represent the perfection of human nature or even the slow march of civilization. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Figures 10/1 and 10/6, *Human Security Report 2009/10*, Simon Fraser University, Canada.

<sup>6</sup> Syan Chen, Noran Loayza and Marta Reynal-Querol, *World Bank Economic Review*, 2008.

century was, after all, probably the most violent in recorded history. Today's comparatively tranquil international environment is the product of geopolitical circumstances which may not last forever, but show no sign of rapid erosion. All of the world's major powers suffered grievous losses during both World Wars, and became more risk adverse as a result. Nuclear deterrence helped prevent direct conflict between these major powers throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but only at the risk of mutual annihilation. Since the end of the Cold War, the major powers have also ceased to conduct proxy wars against each other. On the contrary, they have routinely collaborated, usually via the United Nations, in settling localized disputes and working to prevent their reoccurrence. Wars, almost all civil in nature, continue to break out, but they tend to be contained, short-lived and not repeated due to international support for conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace building and a growing international willingness to isolate, suppress and punish the worst offenders.

During the Cold War, Americans and, to an even greater extent Europeans were insulated from much of the world's turbulence by the absence of direct conflict among the major powers. In the subsequent two decades, Americans and Europeans have become more exposed to violence elsewhere, at least in a virtual sense, because they have joined with the rest of the international community in trying to stop it. The level of conflict has fallen because the level of international involvement in trying to end such conflicts has risen. Since the early 1990s a new peacekeeping mission has been dispatched, on average, every six months. Cambodia, El Salvador, Namibia, Mozambique, Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and East Timor are at peace today, and most of these societies are currently ruled by freely elected governments because United Nations, NATO, European Union or nationally-led coalitions have intervened to separate the combatants, disarm and demobilize the contending factions, stimulate the economy, promote political and economic reform, oversee free elections and remain long enough to ensure that the resultant governments can take hold. The United States and Europe have paid at least half the costs for all these operations, contributed soldiers and police to many of them, and led several of the largest.

## **America's Role**

As the world's predominant power for another generation at least the United States will continue to assume leadership responsibilities for protecting the global commons, to include freedom of the seas, space and cyberspace. Security challenges during this period will continue to come not from peer competitors, but from rogue regimes, fragile or failed states, and non-state actors.

While continuing to shoulder the burdens of leadership, the United States will seek to share these more broadly. Washington has already begun accommodating itself to the rise of China, India and others by deemphasizing the Eurocentric G-7/8 in favor of the G-20. Over the next decade other such adjustments will be in order. The UN Security Council is likely to be enlarged to include India as well as Japan and Brazil. Within limits, India can be seen as a valuable counterweight to growing Chinese power. Nevertheless, there is no inevitability to conflict with China, and no aspect of Chinese aspirations, as one currently understands them, that necessarily threaten such conflict. Facing no peer, or even near peer competitor well into the next decade, the United States will have no need to build a countervailing alliance, and it should, on the contrary, work to diminish anyone's incentive to form such blocs.

## **NATO's Future**

The continued relevance of the Atlantic Alliance, and its inherent limitations were both reemphasized in the 2011 Libyan crisis. NATO represents the only institutional alternative to nationally led ad-hoc coalitions in conducting peace enforcement or humanitarian operations in non-permissive environments. On the other hand, the Alliance's exclusively trans-Atlantic membership limits its appeal to and entrée into other regions. Its requirement for unanimity, its tolerance for national caveats on the use of their forces and its inability to provide non-member co-combatants an effective voice in directing operations makes it both more cumbersome and more exclusionary than the United Nations, where only five, rather than twenty-five members can exercise veto rights, and all states have at least occasional

seats on the Security Council as well as permanent seats in the General Assembly that controls the purse strings.

Libyan operations also highlight the continued run-down in European military capabilities. Despite that country's proximity to Europe, despite heavy American commitments in both Iraq and Afghanistan and despite everyone's agreement that Europe, rather than the United States should take the lead in this mission, it fell to Americans both to lead and provide the bulk of the forces through the early days. Europe thus remains fully as dependent on American military capabilities today as it did sixteen years ago in the Balkans, despite all of the intervening rhetoric and institutional innovation designed to strengthen Europe's capacity for independent expeditionary warfare.

The Iraqi and Afghan experiences have led to a "never again" reaction among American and European publics, much as Vietnam did nearly four decades ago. In the aftermath of that earlier war the American military consciously turned its back on counterinsurgency for thirty years. As a result, the United States and its allies have had to reacquire these skills belatedly and at great expense in blood and treasure. It will certainly be tempting, as the Iraqi and Afghan missions wind down, to again turn away from this form of warfare. Yet experience also shows that the cost of doing so could be very high, since it is quite impossible to predict where Western forces may become engaged five or ten years hence. Indeed, who would have predicted in January of 2011 that NATO would be fighting in Libya by March.

The recent string of popular uprisings in the Middle East, like the fall of the Berlin wall, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the attacks of 9/11 remind us how rapidly the global security environment can change. Yet one encouraging aspect of the changes underway in the Middle East has been the relatively concerted international response. The United States, Europe and Russia spent the first half of the 1990s at loggerheads over what to do about the Balkan wars. They and the rest of the international community agreed to launch (or in Russia and Germany's case not to block) an intervention in Libya within days of commencement of large scale fighting there.

The current upheaval throughout the Arab world could well change the nature of American and European interaction with the Arab world. Depending on the fate of democratization in Egypt and Tunisia and on the outcome of NATO's engagement in Libya, one may see the evolution toward a more collaborative relationship between Middle Eastern nations and the Atlantic Alliance. Possibilities might include a NATO role in helping preserve an Israeli-Palestinian peace, and in securing the Gulf states against a nuclearizing Iran.

### **Europe's Role**

President Obama's insistence on *not* leading the Libyan campaign any longer than necessary could also presage some larger rebalancing of Western burdens for security. Certainly the Obama administration would seem to favor such a development. But such a move would require that European governments take advantage of the opportunity, halt the decline in their military capabilities and narrow their differences over the use of armed force as an instrument of policy. As of this writing, one would have to assess the chances of that happening over the next decade as less than even. France and Britain have demonstrated their continued willingness to project power and employ armed force, but they have found it easier to carry the United Nations Security Council with them than either NATO or the European Union. Certainly individual European nations will continue to play important roles throughout the Middle East, while the European Union may likely become a more significant partner for the emerging democracies of the region in the economic, political and social spheres. Within the domain of defense and security, however, the most important decisions will continue to be made by national governments even when collective action is taken via NATO, the UN or nationally led coalitions in most circumstances. The European Union seems likely to continue to limit its military expeditions to the least demanding of cases.

### **Interdependence and Vulnerability**

Since the end of the Korean War there has been no armed conflict between any major powers. Since the end of the Cold War, the major

powers have also ceased to fight proxy wars. On the contrary, they have collaborated with the broader international community to end such conflicts and prevent their reoccurrence. As a result the world has become more peaceful. It has also, as a result, become more interdependent. The prosperity, if not the physical safety of Americans and Europeans depends on what happens on the other side of the globe, and on the reliability of the links which deliver people, goods services and information from great distances. Small groups of individuals or otherwise weak and insignificant states can wreak disproportionate damage by attacking these links. Piracy at sea is hardly a new phenomenon, but its recent revival is a reminder of the cost the entire world economy bears when a small and desolate portion of the globe is left ungoverned for any length of time. Airplane hijacking is also a familiar threat, made more dangerous when the planes themselves are turned into weapons of mass destruction. The internet represents the latest frontier of interdependence and consequent vulnerability, an exposure to risk from which geography offers no safety whatsoever.

Interdependence also brings heightened vulnerability to natural phenomenon. In 2010 more people died in Haiti's earthquake than in all the worlds' wars put together, yet Haiti was not deeply embedded in the global economy and its catastrophe had little larger effect. The following year far fewer people were immediately affected by Japan's earthquake, yet factories in American and Europe almost immediately slowed as essential parts threatened to become scarce. Global warming will affect different parts of the world differently, but its costs will be distributed universally, if not uniformly. Societal resilience will emerge as an important component of long term security, offering recovery from disasters which cannot be prevented.

Assuming continued collective action to reduce the scope and frequency of armed conflict, most of the world's population will find the weather to be more of a threat than any foreign or domestic enemy. Collaboration to address these less traditional security challenges is likely to take place largely outside NATO or the UN Security Council and to involve elements of national governments other than foreign and defense ministries. It is in these non-traditional security spheres that the European Union has most to offer its members and its external partners and it is into these areas that transatlantic collaboration will be increasingly moving over the coming decade.

