Towards a Global Civil Peace

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The Problem

The foundations of a peaceful world – peace between nations and the absence of terrorism – ultimately depend on achieving domestic civil peace in the countries of the world, a 'global civil peace'. A global civil peace offers a negation of organized violence. Such violence takes many different forms: *international war* (between states), *civil war* (between a state and an organized opposition), *communal violence* (within a state, between groups), *politicide* (between a state and unorganized victims, including genocide against a particular ethnic group), and *terrorism* (violence against individuals but aimed at a state). We argue here for a unified perspective on international action to reduce violence. Achieving a global civil peace rests on *both* social justice (i.e., democracy) and economic well-being.

For several decades, civil wars have outnumbered international wars, as shown in Figure 1. The largest international wars dwarf most of the civil wars in terms of direct battle-deaths, but many civil wars have very large numbers of indirect, war-related deaths stemming from the starvation and disease that often follow in their wake.

Figure 1. Number of Wars by Type, 1946–2002
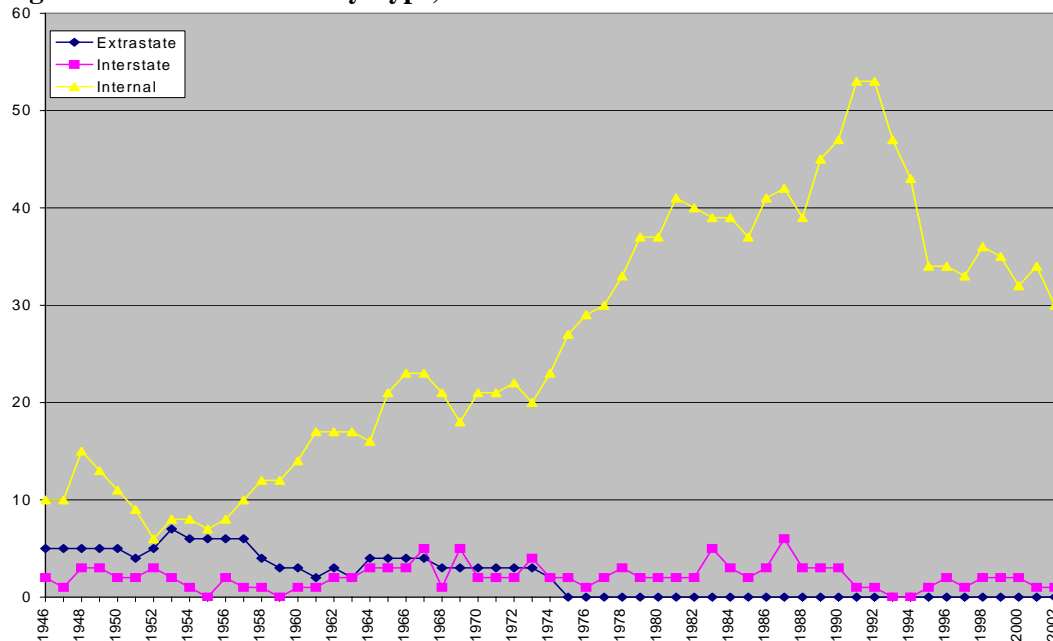
Politicide is at least as common as civil war. In the 20th century, the human cost of politicide probably exceeded the cost of war. Communal conflict is also very common, although the international accounting of it is much poorer.

Finally, while individual terrorist acts are very common, extensive terrorism is a major problem in relatively few countries. Terrorist victims are relatively few compared with victims of civil war or politicide. But the deliberate targeting of civilians breeds fear and countermeasures that have an impact far beyond the direct loss of human life.

In the past, these various forms of violence have been dealt with in a fragmented way, for historical and legal reasons. Interstate war was the first to be regulated by international law and by international mediation and the use of peacekeeping forces. Civil war was traditionally viewed as falling within nations' rights to self-determination. It is only recently that international mediation and peacekeeping (and even peace-enforcement missions) have been undertaken to reduce intrastate violence.

The international community has been even more passive with regard to politicide. Genocide has been an international crime since shortly after World War II. But nations can get away with murderous practices as long as they do not target particular ethnic or religious groups. While there has been widespread international condemnation of the excesses of dictatorial governments, the practices of such governments have been challenged in international tribunals it only a few cases: Japan, Germany, former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda. (After his capture in December 2003, Saddam Hussein is expected to be tried for his crimes – including widespread killings.) Communal conflict has basically been left alone. International terrorism, while severely condemned, has not resulted in a unified international policy response.

We argue in this note that these various forms of violence should not be viewed as mutually exclusive categories. Ambiguous boundaries distinguish one form of armed violence from another. Moreover, one form of violence frequently leads to another. They also tend to have the same causes. These various threats to security – interstate war, cross-national terrorism, civil war, communal conflict, and genocide – are inherently interrelated. The conditions that lead to the onset of one condition are also associated with other conditions. Conditions of regional or domestic political instability and intrastate conflict are often associated with the onset of interstate war, in the guise of either foreign intervention or outright invasion. Moreover, the general political and economic environment that supports global terrorism resembles the conditions associated with the onset of civil war. It could be argued that the only difference between genocide and civil war is that in one case, only the state is killing civilians, while in the other, there are two armies killing civilians. So to achieve a more secure world, peace must be attained globally at the regional and domestic levels. What is required is a global civil peace.

What Can Be Done?

Is the foundation for a global civil peace social justice founded in democratic rule? Yes: fully consolidated democracies are in general peaceful internally and amongst themselves. They are better able to reduce endemic poverty, grant rights to minorities, reduce the stakes of the contest for political power, and maintain the institutions within which negotiations between conflicting social groups can be carried out. Ultimately, what is important is a strong state governed by democratic institutions. Consolidated autocratic states avoid civil war, but they do not avoid politicide. In fact, almost all strong state autocracies have engaged in politicide. The terror induced by politicide is part of their social control. Legitimate consolidated democracies have no need to rely on terror. Legitimacy stems from democratic institutions that ensure social justice. Nonetheless, several caveats about the relationship between democracy and civil peace should be noted: consolidating democracy in poor countries is difficult; semi-democracies (inconsistent democracies) are weak and prone to back-sliding to autocracy and have a high risk of civil war; new (unconsolidated) democracies are also unstable; poor democracies are more prone to civil war than wealthier ones, and are no more peaceful than poor autocracies; and ineffective democracies are no better than autocracies at providing the policy outcomes that guarantee a domestic peace.

Is economic well-being also part of the foundation of a global civil peace? Yes: rich and upper-middle income countries tend to avoid civil war, since their governments are sufficiently powerful and organized to deter organized domestic opposition that might turn violent. Citizens of these countries also are more likely to have alternative sources of income, which makes rebel recruitment harder. Two caveats follow: Economies largely based on natural resources are more likely to experience civil war as competing groups try to gain control of the state and capture the wealth associated with the natural resource or try to capture the territory where the resource is located and secede. As citizens acquire more wealth, they tend to demand greater influence in policymaking. Indeed, the pressures for democratization increase with higher income. This democratization process, in turn, may turn violent. Such problems of economic dislocation are going to be most severe in the poorest countries lacking the social and political institutions to address these grievances.

Hence, both social justice and well-being are required for a civil peace. Civil peace requires more than the absence of war. It describes a condition of enduring social, economic, and political stability, such that the thought of taking up arms against one's government becomes inconceivable. To move from a condition of war to a state of peace depends essentially on the laying down of arms. Yet, obtaining a ceasefire or the signing of a peace treaty may not be enough to ensure peace. Without addressing the economic, social, and political conditions that led to the conflict, armed conflict is likely to erupt again and again. Any policy response by the international community necessitates attention to both conflict resolution and long-term peacebuilding. Conflict resolution depends on getting the incentives right so that the belligerents will sit down together at the negotiating table and agree to a peace treaty. Peacebuilding is a long-

term enterprise, featuring the development of institutions that can serve to mitigate or supplant the conditions that cause and sustain armed civil conflict.

Peacebuilding

So far we have argued that the key to global peace is to secure civil peace globally. Civil peace, in turn, depends on addressing issues of both social justice and economic development. Consolidated democracies have the political institutions better suited to address problems of social injustice. Economic development is associated with state development and economic opportunity. Peacebuilding thus entails both the consolidation of democratic governance and economic development.

How can democratic consolidation be promoted? Increase education levels, especially at the primary and secondary levels. Promote growth and economic diversification. Support competence-building in bureaucracies. Curb corruption and promote transparency. Avoid inconsistent institutions. A full transition to democracy is better than a half-way transition. Nothing is to be gained by gradual democratization; on the contrary, it takes longer to get through the danger zone of semi-democracy. If full transition is impossible, it may be better to concentrate attention on the 'prerequisites' of democracy (growth, education, etc.), encourage the positive aspects of current institutions, strengthen administrative aspects, and postpone the democratic transition. Using force to instill democracy, particularly semi-democracy, is especially ill advised. (Note that none of these suggestions are likely to be detrimental to growth.)

How can economic well-being be promoted? The state of the labor market, the rate of economic growth per capita, and the secondary school enrolment rate all matter in this regard. The greater the economic opportunities, the more difficult it will be to recruit soldiers to rebel armies. With regard to general levels of economic development, strong evidence indicates that there is a curvilinear relationship between GNP per capita and internal conflict, supporting the proposition that rich economies exhibit less violence, but that economic development causes dislocation and leads to increased violence in very poor economies.

The Role of the UN and Other International Organizations

What can the UN and other international organizations do to promote these policies? To a large extent they are doing a great deal already, especially with regard to economic development. Nevertheless, there is much more to be done, particularly towards encouraging the consolidation of democracy. International organizations devoted to economic development should be focusing more on the role of civil conflict - though this too this is already happening. A recent World Bank report, which one of us coauthored, is entitled *Breaking the Conflict Trap*. Aside from addressing the relationship between conflict and development, the UN and other international organizations

should focus on working to increase primary and secondary education rates, promoting economic diversification, curbing corruption, and promoting other policies that support state development and the consolidation of democratic institutions. At a minimum, governments should be required to respect their own constitutions.

Aside from helping support the policies that promote a global civil peace, the UN should prioritize the monitoring of conflict and democracy. Issues of governance monitoring may be more complicated, but certain organizations such as the Stockholm based IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), have made some good progress on this front. More could be done however. UN organizations play a major role in monitoring economic development and health, but they do not globally monitor conflict and security.

The UN could also cooperate with a number of NGOs engaged in conflict monitoring and intervention, such as FEWER (http://www.fewer.org/), International Alert, Transcend, and Green Cross (http://www.gci.ch/) with Mikhail Gorbachev as President. The Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict Data (these data were used to construct Figure 1) also provide a global overview of conflict with annual assessments. The UN could help disseminate this information to a broader policy audience. Conflict should be one of the Millennium goals.

The world seems to be a more insecure place today. Yet, a look at Figure 1 indicates that in terms of war, the numbers of interstate and intrastate wars have been declining since peaking in 1992. Particularly evident is the decline in the number of civil wars. In this period the world has become more democratic. Moreover, a number of transitional democracies have become consolidated. These trends are interrelated. To further this trend towards a global civil peace, we must address the fundamental issues of economic well-being and social justice through the development of consolidated democratic institutions.