

An examination of the extent to which globalization has influenced the upsurge of...

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Globalization is a powerful real aspect of the new world system, and it represents one of the most influential forces in determining the future course of the planet.

It has many dimensions: technological, economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, security, and others. The focus here will be on the concept of “ globalization” as understood by different people and how globalization is or has influenced the upsurge of conflicts in the international system. This concept is one that has different interpretations to different people. Partly as a result of these different interpretations, there are very different reactions to “ globalization,” with some seeing it as a serious danger to the world economic system while others see it as advancing the world economy.

Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space (Giddens, 1990: 64). Joseph S. Nye

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defined globalization as a “ worldwide networks of interdependence” (Nye 2003, 186). Interdependence is often a fuzzy term used in a variety of conflicting ways. For the purpose of this paper, it refers to situations in which actors or events in different parts of a system affect each other. Simply put, it means mutual dependence. Such a situation is neither good nor bad in itself, and there can be more or less of it. Interdependence among nations sometimes means richer, sometimes poorer, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse as in personal relationships such as the marriage vow.

These international networks according to Nye are increasingly becoming complex and their effects are increasingly unpredictable. Moreover, as in all human systems, people are often hard at work trying to outwit each other, to gain an economic, social or military advantage by acting in an unpredictable way . As a result, globalization is accompanied by pervasive uncertainty as there is continual competition between increased complexity and uncertainty on the one hand and efforts by governments, corporations and others to comprehend and manipulate to their benefit these increasingly complex interconnected systems.

While globalization has been going on for centuries, its contemporary form is, according to Nye, “ thicker and quicker” . Globalization today is different from the nineteenth century when European imperialism provided much of its political structure, and higher transport and communication costs meant fewer people were involved directly with people and ideas from other cultures.

Many of the important differences are closely related to the increment in interconnectedness as a result of the information revolution, the liberalization and expansion of international trade, decreased role of governments in business and finance, and the ease with which technology has assisted the transfer of funds across borders. Thomas Friedman therefore argues, “contemporary globalization goes farther, faster, cheaper, and deeper” (Friedman 1999, 7). Globalization has made national boundaries more porous but not irrelevant.

It has also implied the shrinking of distances, but those distances have shrunk at different rates for different people, and on different issues. The common theme that runs through these definitions is interdependence, interaction, and interconnectedness. It is noteworthy also that the new globalization is a post cold war syndrome, when states of the former Soviet Union and East Europe discontinued with economic autarkic policies and opened up their economies to the rest of the world, and when the relative loss of control of these states by the governments led to the export and proliferation of weaponry, especially small arms, to other parts of the world. The primary question of this paper is whether globalization has exacerbated conflicts in the international system. In effect, this paper will reveal that increased interdependence or interconnectedness as a result of the information revolution, and the liberalization and expansion of international trade and finance, has increased the level and intensity of armed violence in the international system.

It is important to stress that while some parts of the world have latent conflicts, such as those relating to leadership, identity, participation and legitimacy, where these conflicts have exploded into armed violence the level and intensity has been exacerbated by one or more aspects of globalization such as the increased liberalization of trade, porous borders, the media and the internet. I must say that this paper is not meant to condemn trade liberalization, neither is it meant to support anti globalization activism.

Globalization has its positive sides but its consequences on the development of a more peaceful world remain a subject of debate. As in all human endeavors, there are downsides to every phenomenon and indeed there are those countries that loose out, fall off and become more vulnerable. Poverty is one of the factors that have destabilized many parts of the world especially sub Saharan Africa politically. This may be so because where there has always been mass poverty, people in some societies find liberation in violence.

Physical aggression, it is said, is a part of human beings and that it is when people attain a certain economic, educational and cultural standard that this trait is tranquilized. This is an arguable assertion though, but the fact still remains that people who have no hope in the future easily fall prey to relatively wealthier persons with deceitful and sometimes violent political agendas, and get them indoctrinated to do things they ordinarily will not do.

Ali Mazrui (2005) asserts that in the light of the fact that 95 percent of the earth's population growth will be in the poorest areas of the globe, the question is not whether there will be conflicts or wars, but what kind of wars, and who will fight those. In other words, what will be the fate of African countries or other underdeveloped parts of the world if globalization has indeed exacerbated armed conflicts around the world? Since it is a phenomenon that has come to stay, will the international community continue to fight each other in the light of the poverty that continues to afflict many parts of the world? In his book "Understanding International Conflicts, an Introduction to Theory and History", Joseph S. Nye identifies various dimensions or forms of globalization noting that these have significant effects on the day to day lives of people around the world in different ways. He noted that climatic change, and other environmental fallouts from economic activities, as some of the negative effects of globalization.

He was of the opinion that rising inequality was a major cause of the political reactions that halted an earlier wave of economic globalization early in the twentieth century. The recent period of globalization has also been associated with increasing inequality among and within some countries. The ratio of incomes of the twenty percent of people in the world living in the richest countries have increased from 30: 1 in 1960 to 74: 1 in 1997. By comparison, it increased between 1870 and 1913 from 7: 1 to 11: 1 (Nye 2003, 188).

The result is a " lot of angry young people, to whom new information technologies have given the means to threaten the stability of the societies

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they live in and even to threaten the social stability in countries of the wealthy zone” As increasing flows of information make people more aware of inequality, it is not surprising that some choose to fight as that in the case of the Niger Delta situation, Burma, and even countries in the middle-east portrays.

It is also easy to say that globalisation especially with regards to international trade has heightened tension in some parts of Africa since international focus on diamonds is increasing. perhaps you will agree with me that the international focus on diamonds is the root cause of the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Angola. Unfortunately, despite international awareness on this issue, there is an “ inappropriate international response and ill-defined solutions in managing and the these civil wars” (Boafo, A. K. 1998.).

Boafo had been studying the new asymmetrical warfare in some countries of the world and argues that the consequences of globalization have weakened the governance capacity of some states and in extreme cases have led to the collapse of the state apparatus and the privatization of security (ibid). In these circumstances, those states have been unable to serve as the primary provider of security, a phenomenon which has led to prolonged conflicts. It is worthy of note that many poor countries especially in Africa are heading into near economic strangulation and political chaos against the backdrop of expansion and liberalization of world trade. Many Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) have “ acted as economic predators in Africa and indeed some parts of Asia and the middle-east, gobbling up national resources, distorting national economic policies, exploiting and changing labor relations,

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committing environmental despoliation and manipulating governments and the media" (ibid). In order to ensure uninterrupted access to resources, some MNCs have supported repressive leaders and warlords.

The economic interests of MNCs such as De Beers Diamond Conglomerate and Royal Dutch Shell have thus served as catalysts for conflicts and impeded prospects for development and peace. Duffield (2000) was of the opinion that while globalization optimists maintain that global capital has served as a dynamic engine of growth, and opened the windows for economic opportunities such as Ireland which has experienced phenomenal economic growth, in the case of Africa and indeed other countries some of the opposite is sometimes true.

At least in the last decade, some of the conflicts can be traced to the expansion of commercial networks that link to the global market. This is especially true in states that have extractive resources with global appeal, value or markets. While the state's interest in generating revenue from these resources coincides with those of interested companies, the latter's interest in maximizing profits conflicts with the concerns of the citizens of the area. These include environmental and health concerns, which is at the core of the conflict in the oil producing Niger-Delta region.

The revolution that has taken place in communications technology, Internet access, cellular telephones, and instantaneous media broadcasts of unfolding events have changed forever the way in which people interact and relate to each other around the world. A simple survey of the use of

acronyms by media illustrates this change. Terms such as WMD and CIA, MI-5 now occur more frequently than WTO and IMF. When was the last time that protests against WTO and IMF, or anything about these institutions made the headlines?

As it is today a lot of people cannot even recall the names of the Presidents of the World Bank or the IMF but can now name places like Tikrit, Baghdad (Iraq) and Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) Kabul, Kandahar, Torabora (Afghanistan) Serbia, Bahrain, Egypt, Sirth (Libya) the Niger-delta region, Bauchi, Jos and Maiduguri (Nigeria) where bombs explode regularly. The fear that soft borders created by globalization facilitate the mobility of terrorists, their finances and their ideas, is pressuring states towards reconstructing the boundaries and the borders that globalization was subverting.

The fear that porous borders allow terrorists to enter target countries is leading to new rules about border patrol, visa regulations, and monitoring of foreign travelers. New security measures at airports have already raised the costs of travel and are affecting the profitability of the airline industry. Extensive customs and increased regulations on imports are slowing international trade. Higher cost, as a result of all the above is reducing profits and may dampen the incentive to seek foreign markets.

It is ironic that global terrorism, the phenomenon of terrorists operating in and against several nations simultaneously, was facilitated by globalization and now it has become the biggest challenge to globalization. CONCLUSION Whether one sees globalization as a negative or as a positive development,

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it must be understood that it has clearly changed the world system and that it poses both opportunities and challenges. It is also clear that the above technological, policy, institutional, ideological, and cultural developments that have led to globalization are still very active.

The effects of globalization in the entire world have been of both economic and military nature. It has led to the internationalization of conflicts and wars which otherwise would have remained local. It has undermined the power of the state. The spread and acceleration of globalization is generating change on an unprecedented scale. This study shows that globalization is inherently disruptive in some countries, and that an increasing incidence of conflict is an inevitable byproduct of it.

The ever-widening interdependence of publics, economics, societies and politics generated by the liberalization of trade and the micro electronic revolution that has collapsed time and space has also rendered instabilities in several parts of the world. The overall conclusion is that globalization is undermining the two cornerstones of thinking about war and peace; that war and peace are essentially a matter of relations between states. States are no more the most significant actors in the arena of actors. Transnational actors working across state boundaries have become major players that determine war and peace.

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