

Reflection essay on the end of the cold war

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



Introduction

The end of the Cold War marked a new beginning for the international security agenda, and the demise of the simple bipolarity brought forward a revised agenda for human rights, international peace and cooperation and stability. The end of the Cold War triggered the rise of new threats and challenges to international security, and the advance of globalization led to the redistribution of power in the international system (Baylis & Smith, 2007; Brown, 2005). In the context of globalization, the capacity of the state was undermined and as a result state-to-state relations dramatically changed (Strange, 2002). Classic wars were gradually transformed into “modern wars” (Kaldor, 1999; Smith, 2006; Shaw, 2005). In this different political environment, the security challenges were no longer existent on a state-to-state level, because of the growing importance of sub-state actors.

This essay will focus on the reorganization of the international system after the end of the Cold War, and will discuss the new challenges to global security, posed by the demise of the bipolar regime. The essay will support the view that with the end of the Cold War, the world became a more dangerous place, because of the multiplicity of actors on the international scene and the changed perceptions of military force, war and security.

Changing perceptions of military force and war

The end of the Cold War brought forward the change of the perceptions of military force in several different aspects. The impact of these changed perceptions upon the international security agenda has been undisputed, and will be discussed in detail. For clarity, the author has chosen to focus

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only on the most important security-related transformations following the Cold War - the new sources of threat such as nuclear weapons and terrorism, and the changing notions of war in the context of globalization. Their features will be discussed in the context of the changed dynamics of the international system.

2. 1 New sources of security threat

The end of the Cold War led to new security challenges, because of changing notions of military force and the new sources of security threat (Smith, 2006; Shaw, 2005). The first one is related to the rise of nuclear power. With the demise of the USSR, the simple bipolarity of the Cold War world was replaced by a multipolar world, where the centrality of power was no longer clearly defined (Brown, 2005; Jackson & Sorensen, 2003). The rise of the Asian economic powers, the advance of nuclear and biological weapons in countries such as Iran, Israel and Iraq challenged the stability of the mutual deterrence principle, comfortably sustained during the Cold War (Hammes, 2005).

Another source of security threat after the Cold War was related to terrorism, and the rise of sub-state actors (Smith, 2006). The War on terror, embedded in the Bush doctrine, was a clear demonstration of the changing nature of war, and the elusive image of the new enemy (Shaw, 2005). After 9/11 it became clear that terrorism was not a war against an enemy, but against tactics (Baylis & Smith, 2007). Its manifestations and capacity to destroy were as much the result of political construction, as of historically embedded perceptions about the East and the West and their manipulation by mass media and policy-makers. After the end of the Cold War non-state actors

such as Al Qaeda and Hamas, became a new source of security threat because of their ability to operate internationally but at the same time to exist inside the state (Shaw, 2005). Also, the controversies, around states labelled as rogue and unable to comply with the international standards for peace and democracy such as Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Syria necessitated new means for meeting the challenges to threat and security. They will be discussed in section 3.

2. 2 Changing notions of war in a global world

Here it is important to mention globalization as a factor, which led to re-examination of the capacity of the state to observe human security and human rights (Strange, 2002). In the context of a borderless world, the international human rights agenda is inevitably revisited, and the main carriers of legal standards are no longer represented solely by state actors, but by the global civil society, comprising of International non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Because of these inevitable transformations, the very perception of security, threat and war changed in several important aspects. As Mary Kaldor famously observes, the end of the Cold War saw the rise of the modern wars, which lack time and space, because they are based on non-quantifiable demands often related to ideology, ethnicity, religion and the social construction of history (1999). The old wars were pushed away by new types of threats and conflicts, such as organized crime, and religious and civil wars. The early 1990s saw the bloody demise of former Yugoslavia, and a series of conflicts in Rwanda, Congo, Sudan and Somalia, triggered by the redefinition of political borders, the struggle over economic resources and ethnic and religious factionalism. In the context of globalization, the

modern wars are interstate conflicts, executed by sub-state actors. In this sense, it is important to mention that the growing presence of the sub-state actors has posed new challenges to the classic perceptions of security, because of non-tangible variables such as perceptions, as opposed to old-time military ambitions related to territorial invasion and economic gain.

Meeting the new security challenges: a revised agenda for peace

In order to meet the new security challenges, identified earlier, the international community had to devise a new agenda in the post-Cold war era.

First, humanitarian intervention became important, and triggered as an effect of the revised agenda, where the security of foreign nationals, whose human rights have been violated by their home state became important (Jackson & Sorensen, 2003). Despite the ongoing political debate about the legality and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention, a norm of intervention was authorized by the UN Security Council in the 1990s, which was followed by operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996 and Kosovo in 1999 (Baylis & Smith, 2007). Despite the criticisms that humanitarian intervention might stop the immediate killing of civilians but is not a reliable strategy for long-term piece, it reveals a shifted emphasis from military to human security in the years following the end of the Cold War. In this relation, another trend in dealing with conflicts became prominent – the imposition of economic sanctions for the purpose of exerting political, rather than military pressure upon non-compliant states and communities.

The post-Cold War agenda for peace also involved the reorganization of military forces, where the deviation from the Clausewitzian concept of war was obvious in the attempt to ameliorate and contain, rather than destroy or simply conquer (Smith, 2006). Examples of such wars of containment are the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition, the role of the global civil society and the growing influence of INGOs as advocates of peace and human rights deserve a mention. The importance of international non-governmental organizations in global policy-making has been undisputed because of the more complicated security agenda in the post-Cold War era. Also, because of the multiplicity of actors in the international system, and the new security needs, states and intergovernmental organizations are unable to deal with international crises without the development programmes and research, provided by the INGOs. Although their political success remains disputed, their role as independent observers and proponents of policy change is growing.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to show the changing nature of the international system after the end of the Cold War. Today the international community faces different security threats based on a new perception of military force. Terrorism and the spread of nuclear power have shunned classic state-to-state conflicts, and as a result a new security agenda for peace and cooperation has been embraced. In the era of globalization, the transition towards collective security as a model of global governance, remains a challenge but also a prerequisite for peace.

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