

# GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

## 9/11 and Global (In) Security

**Events:** On the morning of 11 September 2001, a coordinated series of terrorist attacks were launched against the United States using four hijacked passenger jet airliners (the events subsequently became known as '9/11'). Two airliners crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, leading to the collapse first of the North Tower and then the South Tower. The third airliner crashed into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the US Department of Defence in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington DC. The fourth airliner, believed to be heading towards either the White House or the US Capitol, both in Washington DC, crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, apparently following passenger action to stop the attack. There were no survivors from any of the flights. A total of 2,995 people were killed in these attacks, mainly in New York City. In a videotape released in October 2001, responsibility for the attacks was claimed by Osama bin Laden, head of the al-Qaeda organization, who praised his followers as the 'vanguards of Islam'.

**Significance:** 9/11 has sometimes been described as 'the day the world changed'. This certainly applied in terms of its consequences, notably the unfolding 'war on terror' and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and their ramifications. It also marked a dramatic shift in global security, signalling the end of a period during which globalization and the cessation of superpower rivalry appeared to have been associated with a diminishing propensity for international conflict. Globalization appeared to have ushered in new security threats and new forms of conflict. For example, 9/11 demonstrated how fragile national borders had become in a technological age. If the world's greatest power could be dealt such a devastating blow to its largest city and its national capital, what chance did other states have? Further, the 'external' threat in this case came not from another state but from a terrorist organization, and one, moreover, that operated more as a global network than a nationally based organization. The motivations behind the attacks were also not conventional ones. Instead of seeking to conquer territory or acquire control over resources, the 9/11 attacks were carried out in the name of a religiously inspired ideology, and revenge for US foreign policy outside the West, and aimed at exerting a symbolic, even psychic, blow against the cultural, political, and ideological domination of the West.



**Shortly before their collapse, smoke billows from the World Trade Center's 'Twin Towers' in New York City, which were struck by two hijacked airliners on 11 September 2001**

*Source: Robert Giroux/Getty Images*

However, rather than marking the beginning of a new era in global security, 9/11 may have indicated more a return to 'business as normal'. In particular, the advent of a globalized world appeared to underline the vital importance of 'national' security, rather than 'international' or 'global' security. The emergence of new security challenges, and especially transnational terrorism, re-emphasized the core role of the state in protecting its citizens from external attack. Instead of becoming progressively less important, 9/11 gave the state a renewed significance. The United States, for example, responded to 9/11 by undertaking a substantial build-up of state power, both at home (through strengthened 'homeland security') and abroad (through increased military spending and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq). A unilateralist tendency also became more pronounced in its foreign policy, as the United States became, for a period at least, less concerned about working with or through international organizations of various kinds. Other states affected by terrorism have also exhibited similar tendencies, marking a renewed emphasis on national security sometimes at the expense of considerations such as civil liberties and political freedom. In other words, 9/11 may demonstrate that state-based power politics is alive and kicking.

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### Fall of the Berlin Wall

**Events:** On 9 November 1989, a weary East German government spokesman announced that travel restrictions would be lifted. Flustered and subjected to further questioning, he then stated that this would take effect ‘immediately’. The effect of the announcement was electric. Inspired by the heady excitement that had been generated by the collapse of communist regimes in Poland and Hungary and by weekly mass demonstrations in Leipzig and, on a smaller scale, in other major East German cities, West and East Berliners rushed to the Wall. A euphoric party atmosphere rapidly developed, with people dancing on top of the Wall and helping each other over in both directions. By the morning of 10 November, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the chief symbol of the Cold War era, had begun. Over the following days and weeks, the borders between the two Germanies and the two parts of Berlin were increasingly opened up. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall had been inspired by events elsewhere in Eastern Europe, it, in turn, proved to be a source of inspiration. Communist rule collapsed in Czechoslovakia in December, and in Romania rioting first forced the Communist leader Ceauşescu and his wife Elena to flee by helicopter, before they were captured and summarily executed on Christmas Day.

**Significance:** The fall of the Berlin Wall was the iconic moment in the momentous year of 1989, which witnessed the Eastern Europe Revolutions that effectively rolled back the boundaries of communism to the borders of the Soviet Union and ignited a process of reform that affected the entire communist world. The year 1989 is widely, and with justification, viewed as one of the most significant dates in world history, ranking alongside 1648 (the birth of the European state system), 1789 (the French Revolution), 1914 (the outbreak of the First World War), and 1945 (the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War). The momentum generated in 1989 led directly to a series of world-historical events. First, Germany was reunified in 1990, starting a process through which Europe would be reunified through the subsequent eastward expansion of the EU and, to some extent, NATO. Also in 1990,



Source: GERARD MALIE/Getty Images

representatives of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, the military faces of East–West confrontation, met in Paris formally to declare an end to hostilities, officially closing the book on the Cold War. Finally, in December 1991, the world’s first communist state, the Soviet Union, was officially disbanded.

For Francis Fukuyama (1989) the year 1989 marked the ‘end of history’, in that the collapse of Marxism–Leninism as a world-historical force meant that liberal democracy had emerged as the sole viable economic and political system worldwide (for a fuller discussion of the ‘end of history’ thesis, see p. 127). For Philip Bobbitt (2002), the events precipitated by 1989 marked the end of the ‘long war’ between liberalism, fascism, and communism to define the constitutional form of the nation state. Nevertheless, some have questioned the historical significance of 1989, as represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall. This has been done in two ways. First, it is possible to argue that there is significant continuity between the pre- and post-1989 periods, in that both are characterized by the hegemonic position enjoyed by the United States. Indeed, 1989 may simply mark a further step in the United States’ long rise to hegemony. Second, 1989–91 may have marked only a temporary weakening of Russian power, which, as Russia emerged from the crisis years of the 1990s and started to reassert its influence under Putin, led to the resumption of Cold War-like rivalry with the United States.

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## Paris Peace Conference 1919–20

**Events:** In the aftermath of the First World War, representatives of the Allies (the leading figures were President Wilson [see p. 552] of the United States, Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France, and Lloyd George, the UK Prime Minister) met in Paris in January 1919 to arrange a peace treaty with Germany. The result of this was the Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919, with a further series of treaties later being signed with the other defeated powers. Two main motivations lay behind these treaties. The first, articulated by Wilson and set out in his Fourteen Points (a peace programme announced in a speech to Congress in January 1918) was the desire to institute a new international order, achieved through a ‘just peace’ that would banish power politics for ever. This resulted in the redrawing of the map of Central and Eastern Europe in line with the principle of national self-determination, leading to the creation of new states such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Wilson’s major contribution to the Versailles conference, though, was the creation of the League of Nations. However, the other major motivation, expressed in particular by Clemenceau, was to punish Germany and strengthen French security. This led to the large-scale disarmament of Germany, the loss of German territory and the distribution of its colonies as ‘mandates’ to various Allied powers, and the imposition of the ‘war guilt’ clause.

**Significance:** Just twenty years after the Paris Peace Conference, the world was plunged once again into total warfare, the Second World War bringing even greater carnage and suffering than the First World War. What had gone wrong? Why had the ‘just peace’ failed? These questions have deeply divided generations of international relations theorists. Taking their lead from E. H. Carr, realist theorists have often linked the outbreak of war in 1939 to the ‘idealist’ or ‘utopian’ ideas of the Paris peacemakers. By believing that the First World War had been caused by an ‘old order’ of rampant militarism and multinational empires, they placed their faith in democracy, self-determination, and international organizations. In particular, they had failed to recognize that power politics is not the cause of war but the major way in which war can be prevented.



**Delegates to the Paris Peace Conference meet at Versailles, 1919**

*Source: Photo 12/Getty Images*

When Germany, blamed (with dubious fairness) for the outbreak of the First World War, re-emerged as a major and ambitious military power, breaking, in the process, many of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations stood by powerless to stop it. Liberal statesmen and theorists had ignored the most basic fact of international relations: as all states are ultimately driven by self-interest, only power can be a constraint on power; a reliance on law, morality, and international institutions will be of no avail. The wider acceptance of such an analysis in the aftermath of the Second World War helped to assure the growing ascendancy of realist theories over liberal theories within the discipline of international relations.

On the other hand, liberal internationalists have pointed to the inconsistent application of liberal principles at the Paris Peace Conference. The Treaty of Versailles was never properly a ‘liberal peace’. This was both because it left many nationalistic conflicts unresolved, and sometimes worsened (especially through the loss of German land to France and Czechoslovakia), and because, in important respects, the desire to punish and permanently weaken Germany took precedence over the quest for a just peace. Arguably, the seeds of the Second World War were thus sowed not by a reliance on

'utopian' principles but by the fact that Versailles was in many ways a 'victors' peace'. The 'mistreatment' of the defeated stored up massive grievances that could only, over time, help to fuel hostile and aggressive foreign policies. What is more, the much vaunted League of Nations never lived up to its name, not least

because of the refusal of the world's most powerful state, the United States, to enter. In that sense, the Paris Peace Conference produced the worst of all worlds: it strengthened the currents of power politics in Europe while persuading the victorious powers that power politics had been abolished.



# GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

## The West in an Age of Debt and Austerity

**Events:** The events of September 2008 precipitated the steepest declines in global economic output since the 1930s. Although the world economy returned to modest growth in 2009, renewed economic problems emerged across the West during 2010, in the form of escalating sovereign debt (sometimes called ‘national debt’ or ‘government debt’). In some cases, this brought the creditworthiness of a country into question, as concerns over its ability to repay its loans sent interest rates soaring, necessitating external intervention. Sovereign debt crises, often linked to banking crises, were most acute in the eurozone, where bail-outs were negotiated by the EU, the IMF, and the European Central Bank for Greece (in 2010 and again in 2012), Ireland (in 2010), Portugal (in 2011), Spain (in 2012), and Cyprus (in 2013). Elsewhere, low growth and rising debt meant that states lost their prized AAA creditworthiness status; this happened to the United States in 2011, France in 2012, and the UK in 2013. Either because of conditions attached to bail-outs or because of wider anxieties about debt, many Western states shifted economic policy away from fiscal stimulus and toward ‘fiscal retrenchment’ (reduced public spending or increased taxes), helping to initiate an ‘age of austerity’.

**Significance:** The structural weaknesses of many Western economies may have been exposed by the Great Recession, but they had deeper causes. These include a tendency, sometimes going back to the 1980s, to bring about growth by ever-higher levels of consumer borrowing (in the form of mortgages, bank loans, credit cards, and so on), made possible by an inflated and under-regulated banking and financial sector. Moreover, some thirty years of growth in the world economy had allowed Western governments to become complacent about sovereign debt, confident in the belief that growth would continue. This assumption was brutally destroyed by the Great Recession: as output plummeted, so did tax revenues, throwing the public finances into chaos with a resulting explosion of borrowing.

However, there is major debate about how the blight of debt should be addressed, and especially about the link between debt and austerity. The austerity approach, adopted across much of Europe, is based on the belief that if chronic indebtedness is the problem, the solution must be debt reduction, achieved, in particular, by



Source: Pacific Press/Getty Images

cutting public spending. A failure to take the ‘austerity medicine’ risks passing on an escalating debt burden to future generations. Austerity, nevertheless, brings with it the problem that spending cuts and/or increased taxes take demand out of the economy, and so threatens to result in economic stagnation. A solution that makes sense for a family in debt may thus be self-defeating if applied to the economy as a whole and disastrous (because of its impact on exports) if applied to a range of linked economies.

Austerity measures also triggered widespread protest movements and even civil unrest and were linked to the rise of both new ‘radical’ left and democratic socialist movements on the one hand – including the Syriza government in Greece, the rise of Podemos in Spain, and the achievements of veteran democratic socialist Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the United States – and the resurgence of the far right (see p. 252) on the other.

An alternative to both austerity and democratic socialist solutions is a neo-Keynesian strategy that, whilst accepting the long-term goal of a balanced budget, maintains spending in the short and perhaps medium term on infrastructure programmes in particular. This, broadly, was the approach adopted by the Obama administration in the United States. In such a strategy, the justification for continued or increased borrowing is that it will boost growth and, in due course, tax revenues, allowing the debt problem to be resolved as the economy revives.

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### The Palestinian Quest for Statehood

**Events:** In September 2011, Mahmoud Abbas, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), submitted a formal request for Palestine's admittance as a full member state into the United Nations. The following month, the executive committee of UNESCO backed this bid in a 107–14 vote. In November 2012, the General Assembly of the UN voted overwhelmingly to recognize Palestine as a 'non-member observer state', giving Palestine access to other UN bodies, including the International Criminal Court. The emergence of a national consciousness amongst Palestinian Arabs can be traced back to a pre-First World War reaction against increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine (then loosely part of the Ottoman Empire), which was strengthened during the First World War by British encouragement for Arab nationalism. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 meant that the majority of Arab Palestinians became refugees, a problem exacerbated by the 1967 Six-Day War, after which Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights were occupied by Israel. The Oslo Accords of 1993, the first face-to-face meeting between the PLO and the government of Israel, prepared the way for the establishment in 1996 of the Palestinian National Authority, which assumed governmental authority, but not sovereignty, for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

**Significance:** The Palestinian quest for statehood has both legal and political dimensions. The legal status of Palestine is a matter of controversy and some confusion. The founding of the PLO in 1964, uniting a disparate collection of Palestinian Arab groups, did much to strengthen the notion of the Palestinians as a nation or people, separate from the larger Arab people and from existing states, such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. However, it was not until the establishment of the Palestinian Authority that the Palestinians could be said to have a defined territory and an effective government, albeit one that lacked *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty. The status of Palestine crucially underlines the role of the UN in establishing statehood through formal recognition. Palestine's transition from being a 'non-state entity' with an observer status in the UN General Assembly (granted in 1974) to being a 'non-member observer state' has not been endorsed by the UN Security Council and



Source: Uriel Sinai/Getty Images

falls short of full membership of the UN, and thus full statehood. Nevertheless, as of April 2022, 138 of the UN's 193 members had recognized the existence of the state of Palestine.

The political dimension of Palestinian statehood is substantially more important, however. The 'Palestinian problem' lies at the heart of the Arab–Israeli conflict and has poisoned the politics of the Middle East for decades. It is thus difficult to imagine meaningful progress in building mutual respect and understanding between the West and the Arab world, without improved relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Those who support Palestine's quest for statehood usually view the so-called 'two-state' solution as the only viable solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In this view, the continuing denial of the Palestinians' right to sovereign independence can only strengthen political extremism, hostility towards Israel and, probably, violence. However, the creation of a Palestinian state may be difficult to achieve in practical terms. Not only is the Palestinian Authority divided territorially and politically ( Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, controls the Gaza Strip, while the Fatah wing of the PLO governs the West Bank), but if a Palestinian state were constructed in line with the 1967 borders, this would mean that some 500,000 Israelis would be defined as living in another country. Many in Israel, nevertheless, have deeper reservations about the 'two-state' solution. For them, implacable Palestinian hatred of the state of Israel would mean that a sovereign Palestinian state would pose an ongoing, and intolerable, threat to the security and survival of Israel itself.

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### NGOs and the International Criminal Court

**Events:** The International Criminal Court (ICC) came into operation in 2002, when the minimum required sixty states ratified the 1998 Rome Statute. NGOs played an unprecedented role in helping to bring the ICC into existence, doing much to set the international political agenda over the prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, and participating in drafting the Rome Statute. This was accomplished largely through the Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC), formed in 1995, which has come to have a membership of over 2,500 NGOs worldwide. Some 235 NGOs attended the Rome Conference, larger ones such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sending more delegates than most countries, and with the World Federalist Movement's delegation of sixty experts exceeding even the largest government delegation. Once the Rome Statute was approved, the CICC mounted a huge lobbying campaign designed to pressure UN member states into signing and ratifying the treaty. By 2019, 154 countries had signed the treaty, 123 having also ratified it. NGOs also play a significant and ongoing role in supporting the workings of the Court. Amongst other things, they provide support for victims and witnesses in giving evidence and submit legal analyses and policy arguments through so-called *Amicus Curiae* ('Friend of the Court') briefs.

**Significance:** The uniquely influential role played by NGOs in the establishment of the ICC can be explained in at least three ways. First, the CICC was highly effective in bringing together and coordinating diverse NGOs with different goals and focus areas (such as gender justice, victims, children), enabling them to act in a cohesive manner to achieve set ends. Second, NGO influence was closely linked to their expertise and, sometimes, political skills. Governments were keen to utilize reports and documents prepared by NGOs, benefiting both from their legal expertise and their ability to supply services, including translating and interpreting services. During the Rome Conference's five weeks of negotiations, the CICC not only ensured that government delegates were adequately informed but also helped to broker compromises when difficulties emerged. Third, NGOs took full advantage of the UN's willingness, dating back to the early 1990s, to encourage non-governmental as well as governmental participation



Source: SOPA Images/Getty Images

in global policy-making. Over this issue, policy was therefore made through a process of international cooperation, structured around diverse global networks of NGOs in collaboration with governments and the UN.

Some commentators have viewed the establishment of the ICC as a crucial stage in the emergence of global civil society, marking the point in which NGOs, acting as the 'conscience of humanity', were first able to place constraints on the state-centric politics of old. Certainly, the CICC had injected an urgency into the campaign for an ICC just as the support of governments started to falter, the creation of ad hoc UN-backed tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda having created a fear that the ICC might come for them one day. Moreover, the ICC moves significantly beyond the principles enshrined in the International Court of Justice, in that the ICC may, potentially, breach state sovereignty by prosecuting citizens of states that have not ratified the Rome Statute. The notion that NGOs are in the process of superseding states is, nevertheless, misleading. Although NGOs undoubtedly provided much-needed encouragement for states to sign and ratify the Rome Statute, they did not, and could not, force reluctant governments to act against their perceived interests. The simple fact is that humanitarian sensibilities have not only underpinned the growth of NGOs but also, in many cases, led to adjustments in state behaviour. Finally, for all the energies expended in the establishment of the ICC, its impact continues to be restricted, not least by the refusal of many of the world's most powerful states, including the United States, China, India, and Russia, to sign the Rome Statute.

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## A Migration 'Crisis' in Europe?

**Events:** Armed conflict and political-economic destabilization following the 'Arab Spring' uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (see p. 278) have been a major cause of migration since 2011. Long-term civil war in Syria and the collapse of the state's monopoly on violence (see p. 171) in Libya have been especially significant drivers. While the Syria conflict has rendered more than 12 million people refugees or internally displaced, Libya has been both a destination and a 'transit country' for migrants and refugees from neighbouring African states, because of expected employment opportunities and its location on the southern side of the Mediterranean Sea. Of the 597,611 migrants and 41,404 refugees the UN reported as residing in Libya in 2021, many may ultimately make the dangerous sea crossing to Italy, Greece, and the wider European Union, in search of better economic conditions and an escape from war. Meanwhile, many Afghans, Iraqis, Kurds, and others displaced by conflicts predating the Arab Spring continued to seek asylum and employment in Western Europe. By 2014, the scale of migration to Europe, and in particular the number of small boat crossings of the Mediterranean, led European politicians and media to declare a 'crisis'. That year, the OECD (see p. 459) reported that 630,000 asylum requests were registered in EU states, 'a number last reached during the conflict between Bosnia and Serbia in 1992' (OECD 2015).

**Significance:** Politicians and media outlets in Europe, as well as many international organizations, framed this increase in migration as a 'crisis'. Depending on where these groups and individuals stand on the political spectrum, they named the perceived crisis slightly differently. Nationalists on the political right tend to refer to a 'migrant crisis', framing the people seeking refuge as themselves the problem. The crisis is represented, in this sense, as a crisis of *national identity*, as state borders are rendered less effective at enforcing exclusions. Many on the political left, meanwhile, have pushed back against this narrative by opting for 'refugee crisis', emphasizing that people are travelling out of necessity rather than choice. Organizations seeking a more 'neutral' framing tend to opt for 'migration crisis'. But is there really a crisis at all? And if so, a crisis for whom?

While European nationalists have sounded alarm over migration in recent years, the overwhelming majority of



**Near the Italian island of Lampedusa, a boat from the NGO Open Arms rescues a boat with seventy passengers, that set sail from Tunisia in September 2021**

Source: Europa Press News/Getty Images

all people forcibly displaced from their homes, whether internally or as international refugees, are residing in developing countries – 86 per cent according to the UNHCR in 2020. Turkey alone hosted 3.7 million refugees that year, 92 per cent of whom were seeking refuge from the conflict in neighbouring Syria. In contrast to this, the vastly wealthier UK – with a national GDP almost four times that of Turkey's, and a somewhat smaller population – admitted only 20,000 Syrian refugees through its 2015–20 Syria Resettlement Programme.

Some scholars of migration have questioned the very framing of the issue as a 'crisis' for Europe (Crawley 2016). If there is indeed a crisis, it might be better understood as a *humanitarian* crisis for the people forced to flee their homes and countries of residence, rather than a national identity crisis for Europe. The dangers are stark. From 2014 to 2022, the UN's Missing Migrants Project reported that 23,936 people died or went missing in the Mediterranean Sea, while conditions in migrant detention centres in Libya – and even in some host countries, such as the UK – are often reported to be dire and violent. Nevertheless, xenophobic (see p. 240) discourses about crises in relation to migrants and other outsiders have historically proved politically useful to nationalist movements, and are likely to persist.



## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### The Arab Spring and Its Legacy

**Events:** On 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian market trader who lived in Sidi Bouzid, some 300 kilometres south of the capital Tunis, set fire to himself in protest against the confiscation of his cart and produce and his treatment by the police. Bouazizi died on 4 January 2011. This incident is often credited with having sparked the wave of protests in Tunisia which, on 14 January, led to the removal of President Ben Ali, after twenty-four years in power. Inspired by events in Tunisia, Egyptian demonstrators took to the streets on 25 January, calling for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak. Under growing pressure from the Egyptian military, and as protests escalated, Mubarak resigned on 11 February. In Libya, demonstrations quickly led to an armed uprising and a civil war, in which rebel forces were supported by NATO aerial attacks, the capture and killing of Muammar Gaddafi on 22 October effectively signalling the collapse of his regime. The following month, Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to step down as Yemeni president, formerly ceding power in February 2012. In Syria, protests that started in March 2011 against President Bashar Assad developed, over succeeding months, into a highly complex and intractable civil war.

**Significance:** The protest movements that swept through much of North Africa and parts of the Middle East in 2011 were quickly dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’. These rebellions have nevertheless unleashed a complex range of forces, meaning that debate about the significance of the Arab Spring may continue for many years. At least four interpretations have been advanced, although none is likely to be persuasive on its own. In the first, the Arab Spring is seen as the ‘Arab world’s 1989’, the beginning of its transition from authoritarianism to sustainable democracy. The overthrow of at least four dictators and the holding of the Arab world’s first free and fair elections, in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco in late 2011 and early 2012, help to support this view. However, democratization requires a process of consolidation through which key groups and interests (including those linked to the old regime) are reconciled to the new, democratic ‘rules of the game’. In the case of the Arab Spring, this applies particularly to the military and the Muslim Brotherhood (in whatever form), and, as Mohamed Morsi’s short and controversial



Source: MOHAMMED HUWAI/Getty Images

presidency in Egypt demonstrated, the reconciliation of neither group can be taken for granted.

In the second interpretation, the Arab Spring has sparked a resurgence of political Islam. Despite their initial marginalization, Brotherhood-linked groups were bolstered by the Arab Spring, both because it led to the lifting of restrictions on their political activities and because the introduction of elections provided them, by virtue of their level of organization and the appeal of religion, with a sure route to power. However, as once again shown by developments in Morsi’s Egypt, attempts by Brotherhood-linked parties to advance an Islamist agenda may weaken their public support and leave them politically vulnerable.

In the third interpretation, the Arab Spring has been seen as a brief interlude before the (inevitable) return of dictatorship to the Arab world. In this view, the divisions and instability provoked by the Arab Spring have merely underlined the importance of the military as the only reliable source of political order, and created opportunities for it to re-enter politics sooner or later, claiming to be the ‘nation’s saviour’. In the fourth interpretation, the Arab Spring has significantly strengthened divisions in the Arab and wider Muslim world between Sunni and Shi’a forms of Islam. Although the flames of this conflict were lit in Iraq, they have burned most fiercely during the Syrian civil war, which can be seen as a ‘proxy war’ between Sunni Muslims and Shi’a Muslims, ultimately for control of the Middle East.



# GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

## Sino-US Relations in the Twenty-First Century

**Events:** During November 2012, the world's two biggest powers, the United States and China, made important decisions about the shape of their senior political leadership within days of one another. On 6 November, the US presidential election was won by the Democratic incumbent, President Barack Obama. On the day after the US elections, the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began, charged with carrying out China's once-in-a-decade renewal of its political leadership. Xi Jinping was appointed General Secretary of the CCP. Four years later, in November 2017, the US presidential election saw Donald Trump – an entrepreneur and TV host with no political background – elected, while 2018 saw the end of term limits in China, meaning that Xi could effectively rule 'for life'.

**Significance:** The significance of individual political leaders, or, for that matter, of the nature of a political regime, for foreign policy remains a key issue of debate. While liberals argue that the internal organization of political power may have profound implications for a state's external behaviour, realists and critical theorists are much more likely to explain foreign policy in terms of structural factors, such as the balance of power, global capitalism, or patriarchy. Neorealists have issued dark warnings about the implications of a power transition, when an 'old' hegemon is challenged by a rising or 'new' hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001, 2006). This is because, confronted by a rising or major power, other states tend to 'balance' (oppose or challenge that power for fear of leaving themselves exposed), rather than 'bandwagon' (side with that power by 'jumping on the bandwagon'). China will therefore adopt an increasingly assertive, if not aggressive, foreign-policy stance, as its growing economic strength creates an appetite for political and strategic power. This has, for example, been reflected in increased conflict with Japan and other states over disputed islands in the East and South China Seas. The United States, for its part, has acted to constrain rising China, and, in the process, to consolidate its own hegemonic position, through its 'pivot' to Asia, announced by the Obama administration in 2010. Under this, the United States has bolstered its defence ties across Asia and expanded its naval presence in the Pacific.



Source: AFP Contributor/Getty Images

This pessimistic image of intensifying great-power rivalry, as a stubborn United States confronts an ever-more ambitious China, was not entirely borne out during the Obama administrations, as the two countries' different focuses – the United States being militarily more powerful, while China remained concerned more with economic growth – allowed them to coexist peacefully. Donald Trump, however, was elected in part on the basis of his economic promises, including taking a tougher, more protectionist line on global trade, and bringing back manufacturing jobs that had been outsourced from the United States to countries such as China and Mexico as part of the economic globalization of previous decades. In office, Trump's 'America first' economic plan has included the imposition of tariffs, first on the import of Chinese-made solar panels and washing machines, and later on a raft of other goods. The years 2018 and 2019 saw a series of retaliatory tariffs introduced between the two countries, in what was widely labelled a 'trade war', as well as specific restrictions on the operation of Chinese technology giant Huawei in the United States. A presidential executive order issued under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the National Emergencies Act in May 2019 was used to prevent US firms from buying Huawei telecommunications technology on 'national security' grounds. In this new environment, and with China increasing its military assertiveness over its semi-autonomous regions, especially Hong Kong, the future for Sino-US relations is much less certain.

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## The War in Afghanistan As a ‘Just War’

**Events:** In October 2001, the United States and its NATO allies attacked Afghanistan with the specific intention of overthrowing the Taliban regime on the grounds that it provided a base and support for al-Qaeda terrorists. With the support of Afghan warlords and tribal leaders, notably the Northern Alliance, the Taliban regime was toppled by December 2001 with the bulk of al-Qaeda terrorists being killed or forced to flee to the border regions of Pakistan. However, a protracted counter-insurgency war then ensued against remnants of the Taliban regime, other religious militants and forces opposed to the newly established pro-Western government in Kabul, whose strongholds were in Helmand province and neighbouring provinces in the south of Afghanistan.

**Significance:** In a number of respects, the Afghan War can be viewed as a ‘just war’. In the first place, the war can be justified on the basis of self-defence, as a way of protecting the United States in particular and the West in general from the threat of terrorism, as demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. Commentators such as Elshtain (2003) argued that the ‘war on terror’, of which the Afghan War was a crucial part, was just in that it was fought against the genocidal threat of ‘apocalyptic terrorism’, a form of warfare that posed a potential threat to all Americans and Jewish people and made no distinction between combatants and non-combatants. The 2001 attack on Afghanistan also had a clear, and clearly stated, goal: the removal of a Taliban regime whose links to al-Qaeda were clearly established and undisputed. Furthermore, the United States and its allies acted as a legitimate authority, in that they were backed by NATO and enjoyed wide international support, including from Russia and China. Finally, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks could not have been reliably neutralized by diplomacy or non-violent pressure. The UN, for example, lacked the capability, authority, and will to respond to the threat posed to global security by Islamist terrorism.

However, critics have portrayed the war as unjust and unjustifiable. Their arguments have included the following. First, the purpose of the war and the intentions with which it has been fought, may be unjust to the extent that the United States was motivated by a desire to consolidate its global hegemony, or by a wish to strengthen control of oil resources in the Middle East. In this respect, the attack



**US troops use a robot and metal detectors to sweep for landmines or improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Afghanistan, July 2002**

*Source: Patrick AVENTURIER/Getty Images*

on Afghanistan amounted to unwarranted aggression. Second, the United States and its allies could not be considered as legitimate authorities in that, unlike the 1991 Gulf War, the Afghan War had not been authorized by a specific UN resolution. Third, although the chances of success in toppling the Taliban regime were high, the likelihood of defeating Islamist terrorists through the Afghan War was much more questionable. This was because of the probability that an invasion would inflame and radicalize Muslim opinion and also because of the dubious benefits of technological superiority in fighting a counter-insurgency war against an enemy using guerrilla tactics. Fourth, the United States violated accepted conventions of warfare through its treatment of prisoners of war (who were despatched to Guantánamo Bay and subjected to forms of torture) and in launching strikes against al-Qaeda and Taliban bases that often resulted in civilian deaths. Fifth, ‘Islamists’ would argue that justice was on the side of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not the invading forces, as they were engaged in a *jihad* – in this case, literally a ‘holy war’ – to protect Islam and expel foreign influence from the Muslim world. Finally, the withdrawal of all US troops and the Taliban’s swift return to power in 2021 rendered the primary goal of the war in terms of justice – the removal of an unjust regime – a complete failure in the final analysis. Can twenty years of war and the loss of 241,000 lives (according to the US-based Watson Institute) be justified if the war failed in its most fundamental mission?

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### Iran and the Bomb

**Events:** Iran's pursuit of civil nuclear power dates back to the 1950s, when it took place with the support of the United States and under the UN's 'Atoms for Peace' programme. After Iran's 1979 'Islamic Revolution', a clandestine nuclear programme was disbanded, although small-scale research into nuclear weapons may have been restarted during the Iran–Iraq War. The 'exposure' in 2002 of Iranian nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak convinced many in the United States, Israel, and elsewhere that Iran's civil nuclear programme was being used as a cover for the development of nuclear weapons. Less than full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) inspection regime also led to escalating economic sanctions being imposed on Iran. The launching in 2009 of Iran's first domestically made satellite into orbit not only gave Iran an official presence in space but also provoked concerns about the possible development of long-range ballistic missiles. In 2010, Iran announced that it had become a 'nuclear state', based on the ability to produce uranium enriched up to 20 per cent, intended for medical usages.

**Significance:** The possibility of Iran building nuclear weapons continues to be at the forefront of debates about global security. But what would be the consequences of Iran getting the Bomb? Does the prospect of Iran becoming the world's tenth nuclear power pose profound and unacceptable risks to regional and global security? At least three major concerns have been raised about Iran 'going nuclear'. In the first place, a nuclear Iran would constitute a threat to the very existence of Israel. It is claimed that this is because the politico-religious nature of the Iranian regime makes it both an implacable enemy of Israel and immune to the conventional logic of nuclear deterrence. A first-strike nuclear attack by Iran on Israel, almost regardless of its consequences, can therefore not be ruled out. Short of a full-scale attack, Iran may pass on nuclear weapons to groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which could be used against Israel. Second, the advent of a nuclear Iran would deeply upset regional stability, transforming the balance of power in the Middle East and encouraging states such as Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons to prevent Iran becoming the regional hegemon. Third, a nuclear Iran would pose a threat to the United States, either through the possibility



**The Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, on Iran's Persian Gulf coast, which was completed in 2009 with the help of Russian technology and support**

*Source: STR/Stringer/Getty Images*

of an intercontinental ballistic strike, or through the support an emboldened Iran may give to anti-American terrorism around the world.

On the other hand, it can be argued that such fears are either greatly exaggerated or based on fundamental misunderstandings. Instead of seeking nuclear weapons for offensive purposes, Iran may be motivated more by a fear of both Israel (which has enjoyed a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East, probably since the 1960s) and the United States, underpinned by a history of adverse treatment by Western powers (especially the United Kingdom) dating back to the nineteenth century. Moreover, Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons may improve, rather than inflame, relations with Israel, as a nuclear balance of power tends to engender more responsible and risk-averse behaviour by all parties. Similarly, it is by no means clear that a nuclear Iran would spark a nuclear arms race across the Middle East, since states such as Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia did not initiate nuclear weapons programmes while Israel stood as the region's sole nuclear power; and, anyway, if regional nuclear proliferation did occur, it may generate greater stability rather than instability (Waltz 2012). Finally, if the logic of nuclear deterrence effectively rules out an Iranian attack (whether conventional or nuclear) on Israel, such an attack on the enormously more powerful United States is surely unthinkable.

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### The Killing of Osama bin Laden

**Events:** On 2 May 2011, Osama bin Laden was killed in a US special forces operation in Abbottabad in north-western Pakistan. This brought to an end a more than fifteen-year campaign by the United States to capture or kill bin Laden, dating back to the establishment in 1996 of a CIA unit to plan operations against the Saudi Islamist leader. These efforts were radically intensified after 9/11, with President George W. Bush declaring that bin Laden was ‘wanted dead or alive’. Bin Laden survived the massive bombing campaign against al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan in October 2001, retreating to the Tora Bora mountains in eastern Afghanistan, and then over the border into Pakistan. Bin Laden is believed to have lived mainly in the north-western region of Waziristan, moving frequently and accompanied by a small group of bodyguards. He had possibly lived in the large, custom-built walled compound in Abbottabad from as early as 2005.

**Significance:** The United States justified the attack squarely on the basis of the right to national self-defence, a position that assumed that, almost ten years after 9/11, bin Laden continued to pose a threat to the United States (either through his leadership of al-Qaeda or his symbolic capacity to inspire *jihadi* militancy). The notion that bin Laden was a ‘lawful military target’ was based both on Article 51 of the UN Charter, which establishes the ‘inherent right of individual or collective self-defence’, and Resolutions 1368 and 1373, adopted by the UN Security Council in the aftermath of 9/11. These recognized the attack as a threat to international peace and security. Critics have, nevertheless, portrayed the death of bin Laden as an extra-judicial killing, part of a global assassination policy that the United States was using to remove those perceived to be causing it trouble. The fact that bin Laden was shot dead (rather than captured) and his body allegedly thrown into the sea contributed to this perception. The raid was, without doubt, a violation of Pakistan’s national sovereignty (Pakistan had not been given prior warning of the attack), and, arguably, an opportunity was missed to arrest bin Laden and hand him over to an international court.

How did the killing of bin Laden affect al-Qaeda and the wider campaign against Islamist militancy? The belief that bin Laden’s death would deal a major blow to al-Qaeda is based on the assumption that, aside from his continuing operational significance, bin Laden was a uniquely charismatic leader and the chief symbol of Islamist resistance to the United States and the West in general.



**President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, with other US security officials, watch a livestream of a US special forces unit locating and killing Osama bin Laden, May 2011**

*Source: The White House/Getty Images*

Such an analysis may, however, misunderstand the nature of the al-Qaeda movement. If al-Qaeda consists, as many argue, of an essentially leaderless network, then bin Laden’s importance was always largely symbolic, and there is no reason why his mythic influence should end with his death. It has therefore been argued that the killing was primarily of significance in helping to restore a sense of national honour in the United States and boosting President Obama’s chances of winning re-election. However, bin Laden’s death also raised questions about the value of ‘decapitation’ (the removal by capture or killing of senior figures) as a counter-terrorism strategy. The aim of ‘decapitation’ is both to undermine the cohesion and operational effectiveness of an organization and to deliver a moral blow to its members and supporters. The fact that it can be achieved at a relatively low human and economic cost (relying, as it does, on intelligence operations and the use of drones or special forces, rather than large-scale armies) also adds to its appeal. On the other hand, in line with other force-based counter-terrorism strategies, the record of ‘decapitations’ is that they are generally ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. This is because they may either precipitate a violent backlash or generate deep local resentment, especially when they also result in civilian casualties. As events unfolded, while al-Qaeda’s significance as a global actor declined massively after bin Laden’s death, the network’s global role was largely filled by ISIS (see p. 390) and its affiliates from 2014 onward.



## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

### Humanitarian Intervention in Libya

**Events:** On 19 March 2011, a US-led coalition began a campaign of air and missile strikes against Libyan forces loyal to President Gaddafi. This took place in a context of an emerging civil war, and particularly as pro-Gaddafi troops moved on the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, threatening to cause ‘violence on a horrific scale’, as President Obama put it. In accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973, the strikes were intended to enforce an arms embargo on Libya, establish a no-fly zone, and use ‘all necessary measures’ to protect Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas. Within days, and as planned, command and control responsibility for the military operation passed from the United States to NATO. NATO intervention effectively neutralized Libya’s air force and severely reduced the effectiveness of its heavy weapons, helping, possibly decisively, to tip the balance of the conflict in favour of the Libyan opposition. By early October, the Libyan National Transitional Council had secured control over the entire country and rebels had captured and killed Gaddafi. The NATO operation ended on 31 October, 222 days after it had begun (Daalder and Stavridis 2012). Three years later, Libya was plunged into a second civil war, from which it is yet to escape.

**Significance:** The first intervention explicitly tied to ‘R2P’ (see p. 424), the 2011 US-led NATO intervention in Libya raised important questions about the theory and practice of humanitarian intervention. Did Libya mark revived support for humanitarian intervention, or was it an aberration? As no major humanitarian interventions had occurred since those in Kosovo and East Timor in 1999, and in Sierra Leone in 2000, some had concluded that the era of humanitarian intervention was over, and that it had essentially been a reflection of the unusual circumstances that prevailed during the early post-Cold War period – notably, a strengthened belief that world politics should be guided by moral principles and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole superpower. Humanitarian interventions appeared to have ended both because of the United States’ declining appetite for military involvement abroad (in the light of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) and because the rise of Russia and China meant that the United States was



**Young Libyans celebrate the tenth anniversary of the ousting of Gaddafi at the Martyrs’ Square in Tripoli, 2021**

*Source: AFP/Getty Images*

less likely to have a free hand in such matters. And yet, Libya proved that humanitarian interventions can still take place, and so cannot be ruled out in the future.

Motivations for the intervention were, as usual, controversial and contested. While President Obama, French President Sarkozy, and UK Prime Minister Cameron all invoked humanitarian principles, critics suggested oil and economic interests were also at play. This view may be supported by US Secretary of State Clinton’s unannounced visit to Libya in October 2011, a few days before Gaddafi was killed, where she focused on ‘building ties between Libyan and American businesses, and helping to integrate Libya more closely into regional and global markets’. Material conditions, though, were ripe for intervention. Significant international and regional support appeared to give intervention a sound legal basis. Authorization by the UN Security Council and backing for intervention from key regional bodies, notably the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, was made possible by the fact that Gaddafi’s Libya had few reliable friends and no close ties to Russia or China. NATO forces also gained greater legitimacy through the participation of partners such as Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Morocco. The operation was also deemed to be militarily feasible. Libya’s relatively weak air and missile defences and an



emphasis on aerial and military strikes promised to keep NATO casualties to a minimum (in the event, there were no NATO casualties) and meant that a 'boots-on-the-ground' war could be avoided. Finally, military and political assessments at the time were optimistic about

the likely outcomes of intervention. While this optimism was initially supported by facts on the ground, by 2014 a new civil war suggested that there may have been 'unintended consequences' to the intervention in terms of destabilization.

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### Charles Taylor's Conviction for War Crimes

**Events:** In April 2012, Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, was convicted on eleven charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The following month, he was sentenced to fifty years in jail. Taylor had been president of Liberia from 1997 until 2003, when he went into exile in Nigeria. However, his crimes relate to the part he played in the bloody civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, 1991–2002. Although the Court rejected the claim that Taylor had ordered atrocities, it found that he had given 'sustained and significant support' to the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which had committed serious violations of international humanitarian law. These included the crimes against humanity of murder, rape, sexual slavery, enslavement, and other inhumane acts, as well as the war crimes of murdering civilians, hacking off civilians' limbs with machetes, and conscripting (and drugging) child soldiers. In return for assisting the RUF, Taylor had received a steady stream of what became known as 'blood diamonds'.

**Significance:** As he was the first head of state to be convicted of war crimes since the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War, the verdict against Charles Taylor was historic. However, it was also part of a larger trend favouring the prosecution of political leaders for crimes committed while they were in power. Between 1990 and 2009, some sixty-five former heads of state or government were prosecuted for serious human rights or financial crimes, high-profile examples including Augusto Pinochet (Chile), Alberto Fujimori (Peru), Slobodan Milošević (former Yugoslavia), and Saddam Hussein (Iraq). The conviction of Taylor thereby highlighted a major development in the enforcement of international humanitarian law. The key justification for Taylor's prosecution, as well as the larger trend, is that they serve as a warning to despots and dictators across the globe. By demonstrating that political leaders are not above the law, such examples are intended to deter those currently in office from engaging in war crimes and crimes against humanity. Enforcing the rule of humanitarian law in such a public way



**Charles Taylor – the former Liberian president who was convicted in 2012 of eleven counts of aiding and abetting war crimes**

Source: PASCAL GUYOT/Getty Images

should therefore reduce the number and severity of atrocities carried out worldwide. International courts and tribunals may thus prevent tyranny and abuse in circumstances where institutional checks and balances and forms of public accountability do not operate.

Such developments have, nevertheless, also been criticized. For one thing, there is the danger that if the rationale for such prosecutions is to 'make an example' of prominent figures, less prominent, but, perhaps, equally culpable figures may receive less attention. In the case of the civil war in Sierra Leone, some have suggested that Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader (who died in 2003, while awaiting trial), was significantly more culpable for

the atrocities than was Charles Taylor. Furthermore, Taylor's prosecution has been seen as a form of neocolonialism, an accusation that has also been levelled at international criminal tribunals and courts generally, and especially the International Criminal Court (ICC). Not only has international humanitarian law been viewed as culturally biased because it is founded on Western, liberal values (notably about human rights), but international criminal tribunals and courts may also perpetuate the belief that the Western world still needs to intervene to 'save' the developing world from chaos and barbarity (as of 2019

every person indicted by the ICC under the Rome Statute had been African). Finally, prosecuting heads of government or state for human rights violations may place an undue emphasis on individual culpability and the role of political leadership, ignoring other, maybe deeper, explanations. For example, the origins of the Sierra Leone civil war include widespread corruption and mismanagement, the spread of routine violence, and the collapse of the educational system, which date back at least to the 1960s and may have their roots in the colonial period, to say nothing of the 'resource curse' of diamonds (see p. 519).

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals

**Events:** From 2000 to 2015, the United Nations, its member states, and its various organs and agencies, were committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs focused on reducing or eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and child mortality, and on promoting universal primary education, gender equality, maternal health, and environmental sustainability, while also forging a new ‘global partnership for development’. Most goals were, at best, only partially met by 2015. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) noted that in 2018, 5.3 million children under five died worldwide. While this represents a global reduction from 76.4 children per 1,000 when the MDGs were set in 2000 to 38.6 per 1,000 in 2018, the WHO points out that change has been uneven. Sub-Saharan African countries in particular still have much higher child mortality rates (77.5 per 1,000 in 2018) than, for example, European Union members (4 per 1,000), or the United States (6.5 per 1,000). From 2012 to 2015 the UN used the ‘Post-2015 Development Agenda’ to develop a replacement for the MDGs. The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced from 2016.

**Significance:** The SDGs are intended to guide global development until 2030, and, as the name suggests, they have a stronger emphasis on environmental sustainability than the original MDGs. In the early part of the twentieth century, the explosive economic growth of China led it to become the second-largest economy in the world – quickly overtaking long-standing economic giants, including neighbouring Japan. But at the same time, it overtook the United States as the world’s biggest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> gas; saw the Yangtze River dolphin become the first species of dolphin driven to extinction by human activity, including water pollution; hugely increased populations and air pollution in megacities such as Beijing; and created new, polluting industrial megacities such



**British Prime Minister David Cameron and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the Post-2015 Development Agenda Panel, at the UN in May 2013**

*Source: AFP/Getty Images*

as Shenzhen. The SDGs are clearly intended to signal a change of direction: economic development cannot continue to come at the cost of extreme environmental degradation and climate change. But political and social ‘sustainability’ are also captured by the goals, such as the aim of developing ‘strong institutions’ (SDG 16). The SDGs have been subject to much of the same criticism that the MDGs were. Some critics say that they are lofty and admirable, but given the self-interest and power struggles at the heart of international politics, will not be prioritized by states and other key actors. And, like the MDGs, there remains a moral question over whether an international organization such as the UN, founded in the West and arguably in the interests of the West, has a right to make demands of ‘developing’ economies, given that their previous ‘underdevelopment’ is directly attributable to the rapacious colonialism of Western states, who never had to restrict their own developmental activity in the name of protecting the global commons (the air, the oceans, the soil, and so on). Since the SDGs are still relatively new, time will tell as to any successes in achieving the goals by 2030.

# GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

## The Paris Agreement

**Events:** In 2015, representatives of 196 countries met at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 21 in Paris, France, to negotiate a new UNFCCC agreement on climate change to replace the Kyoto Protocol. On 12 December, all participating countries approved the terms of an agreement, and on 22 April 2016, 174 of those countries signed the agreement at the UN's New York City headquarters. The Paris Agreement, which entered into force on 4 November 2016, when the threshold of sufficient national ratifications was reached, commits signatories to: keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees, and to increase the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change, while also making international finance flows consistent with lowering greenhouse gas emissions and building 'climate resilience'.

**Significance:** The United States – the second biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after China, but an even greater emitter per capita – controversially never ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Much of the debate that followed focused on the weakness of an agreement that lacked US participation. As such, American buy-in to the Paris Agreement was widely viewed as a major achievement. However, while the Obama administration embraced the negotiations, the agreement was signed in its last year. Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2017 on a platform that included a commitment to 'cancel' the deal. Trump has publicly called climate change in general and global warming in particular a 'hoax', and suggested on Twitter in 2012 that the 'concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive', while scepticism about the existence of climate change (along with opposition to Muslims and other racialized minorities, immigration, feminism, and transgender people) has been a key plank of the



**Then Secretary of State of the USA, John Kerry, signs the Paris Agreement with his granddaughter present to highlight the anticipated significance of the treaty for future generations**

*Source: Spencer Platt/Getty Images*

so-called 'alt right', or far right, cultural politics that brought him to power. In office, Trump submitted formal notice of US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in November 2019, and the United States formally left the agreement a year later. Just a few months after formal withdrawal, however, Joe Biden was sworn-in as US President, in January 2021, and immediately re-signed the agreement on his first day in office. In any case, it is now far less clear that the Paris Agreement is adequate to significantly slow or stop an unfolding climate catastrophe. In 2022, the UN determined that even if the parties to the agreement were to meet all of their pledges, they would likely only limit the rise in world temperatures to 2.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, where a limit of 1.5 degrees would be necessary to meaningfully tackle the worst effects of climate change. Consequently, while no major new agreements have been signed since Paris, further rounds of COP negotiations, and environmental social movements, have taken on renewed urgency in recent years.



## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### Gendered Violence in Anti-Muslim Riots in Gujarat

**Events:** On 28 February 2002, communal rioting broke out in the Indian province of Gujarat. The pretext for these riots was the horrific killing, the previous day, of fifty-eight mainly militant Hindu volunteers who had been burnt alive on a train returning from Ayodhya. The communal riots in Gujarat continued until 3 March, after which there was a hiatus followed by a new round of violence from 15 March. Estimates of the numbers killed in the riots range from below 1,000 to over 2,000, with Muslim deaths outnumbering Hindu deaths by a ratio of 15:1. Over 500 mosques and *dargahs* (shrines) were destroyed and enormous numbers of Muslims in Gujarat were displaced: by mid-April, nearly 150,000 people were living in some 104 relief camps. There was, furthermore, evidence of the complicity of the authorities in the Gujarat violence as well as of precision and planning, linked to the family of organizations associated with the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), which preaches a creed of 'India for the Hindus'. One of the most notable features of the anti-Muslim riots was the use of the sexual subjugation of women as an instrument of violence. At least 250 young girls and women were brutally raped and burnt alive. Other atrocities included the stripping naked of groups of women who were then made to run for miles, the insertion of objects into women's bodies and the carving of religious symbols onto their bodies. What is more, women who were raped by Hindu zealots saw no action taken against their aggressors, as the police were generally unwilling to take their complaints seriously.

**Significance:** Hindu-Muslim violence has been a recurring feature of politics in India for three-quarters of a century or more. Although they are often portrayed as a manifestation of spontaneous hostility between the Hindus and Muslims, the deep involvement of the organizations of militant Hindu nationalism have given rise to 'institutionalized riot systems' (Brass 2003). However, why was gendered violence so prominent in the Gujarat riots of 2002, as, indeed, it has been in much of the communal rioting that has spasmodically gripped India?



**Gendered violence in anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat**

Source: RAVEENDRAN/Getty Images

The answer appears to be that a crisis of identity, linked to the desire to reassert or purify the Hinduva identity in the face of a perceived threat from Islam, has become entangled with a crisis of masculinity. Young males, organized on paramilitary lines, have conflated Hindu nationalism with masculinity and violence. This is evident not only in the emphasis within Hindu nationalist literature on the image of 'the man as warrior', but also in the fact that the political goals of Hindu nationalism are commonly expressed in sexual terms. Stress, for instance, is often placed on the 'threat' posed to Hindu identity by the generally higher fertility rates of Muslim communities. Hostility towards Muslims therefore tends to be expressed in the desire to dehumanize Muslim women, who are then viewed, and treated, primarily as sexual objects. Hindu nationalists thus rape and otherwise attack minority women to destroy not only their bodies but also the integrity and identity of Muslim society, viewed as the 'enemy other' (Chenoy 2002). In that sense, the sexual violence against Muslim women that marked the 2002 Gujarat riots was very much a public act. Attacking Muslim women sexually served two purposes: it brutalized Muslim women and denigrated Muslim men for failing to protect their women. It was therefore an attempt to terrorize Muslims and drive them out of 'Hindu India' by violating their communal honour (Anand 2007).

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

### The Backlash Against International Organizations

**Events:** International organizations have always faced criticism – the UN for its failure to prevent genocide in Rwanda in 1994, for example, or NATO for worsening security situations in already tense countries and regions such as Libya in 2011 – but in recent years this has intensified. Specifically, political leaders and movements *within* the powerful Western states that led the creation of key international organizations, and which critics identified as the controlling force behind them, have turned against such organizations. The rise of a new anti-globalist political right (see p. 13) has been especially important. In the course of his 2016 US presidential election campaign, Donald Trump hit out at ‘globalism’ and the negative impacts of globalization on lower-income US citizens. He also made it clear that he saw international organizations as the leading institutions of a globalist agenda that was damaging to the interests of ordinary Americans. In 2016 Trump variously mooted leaving, dramatically overhauling, or cutting funding to international organizations such as NATO (which he called ‘obsolete’) and the UN (‘a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time’).

**Significance:** Like most incoming presidents, many of Trump’s bolder campaign promises failed to materialize upon taking office. However, the shift in foreign policy discourse alone – coming from the state widely viewed as, for better or worse, *the* key driver of international organizations – is significant in itself. And in office, Trump has certainly sought to shake up international organizations, often through threatened or actual withdrawal of US financial support. In 2017, the Trump administration proposed that the United States – the single biggest financier of the UN, providing 22 per cent of its core funding and 28.5 per cent of its peacekeeping budget – would slash its contributions by \$19 billion. The Secretary-General’s office responded that this ‘would simply make it impossible for the UN to continue all of its essential work advancing peace, development, human rights and humanitarian assistance’. While the United States has yet to make such vast cuts, it did pull back its UN spending to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, partly in retaliation for a 2017 General



Source: Handout/Getty Images

Assembly vote where 128 countries voted in favour of (and just eight against) a resolution condemning the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Trump’s combative approach to multilateral institutions including the UN, NATO, and the G7, alongside the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union (following the rise of a similarly anti-globalist movement in that country) suggest that the backlash against international organizations is more than a rhetorical foreign policy stance, and may have serious long-term impacts, although the advent of Joe Biden’s presidency from 2021 suggests a potential realignment on this issue. The significant role of international organizations in coordinating the response to the global Coronavirus pandemic (see p. 20), meanwhile, has been a cause of both optimism and pessimism for their future. On the one hand, the World Health Organization and the UN took on key roles in disseminating information around the world on how to combat the spread of the virus, on what methods were proving most effective in limiting its impacts on health, and on what symptoms to look out in relation to the changing viral variants. On the other hand, many within the Trumpian movement against international organization often rejected this work, in some cases resorting to conspiracy theories – often informed by the sharing of ‘fake news’ stories (see p. 119) – that suggested these organizations were either exaggerating the threat of the virus, or even that they were seeking to spread it in order to cause harm.

# GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

## Post-Crash Global Economic Governance

**Events:** At the height of the global financial crisis in September 2008, as banking crises erupted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, and stock markets went into freefall worldwide, business and consumer confidence collapsed, giving rise to the most severe global recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. During 2008–9, in what was later dubbed the ‘Great Recession’, most developed economies contracted and growth rates fell significantly across the developing world. The International Labour Organization estimated that global unemployment increased by 14 million people in 2008 alone. The G20 (see p. 177) quickly became the leading mechanism through which the international community attempted to manage its response. In Washington in November 2008, and at their April 2009 London Summit, the G20 countries committed themselves to an integrated strategy, which involved substantial and speedy cuts in interest rates (monetary stimulus), the boosting of domestic demand by economically advanced states (fiscal stimulus), and an agreement to resist pressure to increase tariffs and return to economic nationalism. In Seoul in November 2010, the G20 pledged to reform the IMF, both by strengthening the voice and representation of the developing world within the organization and by tightening the IMF’s surveillance of national and global economic circumstances.

**Significance:** For many, the 2007–9 global financial crisis highlighted the spectacular failure of global economic governance, whose key institutions had, because of their commitment to neoliberal economics, presided over an inadequate system of banking and financial regulation. Similarly, the Great Recession has demonstrated that the world lacks an appropriate and effective mechanism for responding to crises. The consensus over macroeconomic policy that had been fashioned at Washington and London broke down at the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit, as a growing number of countries, concerned about rising debt levels, embraced austerity policies rather than sustained fiscal and monetary expansion, as



Source: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/Getty Images

advocated by Obama and the United States. From 2011 onwards, a new phase in the crisis also emerged through an escalating sovereign debt crisis in Europe. Although the IMF and the EU jointly shared responsibility for international bail-outs to Greece, Portugal, Spain, and other countries, it showed both a lack of leadership and an inability to come up with fresh ideas (particularly about how to address debt challenges without damaging growth), allowing the response to the eurozone crisis to be largely dictated by a German-dominated EU. Furthermore, not only has the much-vaunted reform of the IMF failed to materialize beyond a minor adjustment of quota shares and increased funding, but the organization is increasingly looking like an irrelevant Euro-Atlantic body in a global economy in which power is shifting to China and other emerging states.

While macroeconomic recovery – in terms of increases in GDP and international trade – was achieved after 2008, and sooner than after the Wall Street Crash of 1929, some market volatility has remained, and post-crash austerity measures have been linked to political instabilities and a shift away from liberal thinking on global governance. The twin Anglo-American forces of Trumpism and Brexit have been widely interpreted as a response to economic decline in ‘core’ Western societies,

focusing on an anti-immigration and anti-globalism political agenda. Donald Trump called the WTO 'a disaster' during his 2016 presidential campaign, suggesting he would reform it as President. Leading Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage, meanwhile, tweeted in 2017 that 'the revolution against global governance will continue across Europe'. While governments and the institutions of global economic governance may have worked relatively effectively to end the Great Recession, there was arguably a lack of attention to the microeconomic and microsocial – many of the biggest businesses were saved, but high streets

entered seemingly terminal decline, while individuals suffered from cuts to public spending. A 'populist' turn against global governance was then easy to induce for interested political players such as Trump and Farage. The global economic slowdown and various national 'lockdowns' caused by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, meanwhile, also drew criticism from the political right in many contexts, with the World Health Organization attracting the ire of those who viewed the pandemic response as excessive.

## GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION ...

### The EU Expands to the East

**Events:** On 1 May 2004, the EU carried out an enlargement on a scale totally unprecedented in its history. Whereas previous enlargements had led, at most, to three new members joining, this enlargement involved ten new members, turning an EU of fifteen states into one with twenty-five members. What was also notable was that, with the exception of Malta and Cyprus, these new members were former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. Three of them – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – had been former Soviet republics, while the other five – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – had been part of the Soviet bloc (in the Soviet era, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had formed a single country, Czechoslovakia, and Slovenia had been a republic of Yugoslavia). This process was taken further on 1 January 2007, when two other former Soviet bloc states, Bulgaria and Romania, joined. Croatia's accession in 2013 brought the membership of the EU to twenty-eight (the number dropped to twenty-seven again with the UK's exit in 2020).

**Significance:** The EU's expansion into Eastern Europe has been significant for a variety of reasons. In the first place, it had a profound impact on the geopolitical restructuring of Europe. It completed the process initiated by the collapse of communism through the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989–91, by bringing about the reunification of Europe after decades of division by the Iron Curtain. In so doing, EU membership played an important role in supporting the politico-economic transformation of Eastern Europe. By fulfilling the 'Copenhagen criteria', established in 1993 for any new members of the EU, the accession states of Central and Eastern Europe demonstrated their support for democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities, whilst also committing themselves to market economics and accepting the established EU aims of political, economic, and monetary union. After 2004–2007, then, the spread of liberal democracy into Eastern Europe became an unstoppable process. Second, eastward expansion also affected the balances within the EU



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and its general orientation. In particular, the EU has been less able to function as a 'West European club', dominated by the Franco-German axis and with large states generally able to push through their preferences. Instead, the voice of smaller states has greatly increased, meaning, in part, that the EU has placed greater emphasis on providing support for economic and social development. In some senses, the centre of gravity of the EU has shifted eastwards, as attention has been given to further eastward expansion, with Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine being amongst the countries interested in joining, and the relationship between the EU and Russia has become an issue of increasing importance.

Third, eastward expansion has had an effect on the economic performance of the EU. On the one hand, by increasing the population of the EU by 20 per cent, it has created a larger internal market, providing an economic boost for all member states, which will increase as new members become economically successful. On the other hand, large differences in living standards and economic performance between existing members (the EU-15) and the accession states, and the fact that the transition from central planning to market economics is still an ongoing process, have created economic challenges for the EU. For instance, eastward expansion only increased the EU's GDP by 5 per cent, and it placed considerable pressures on the EU-15, which have provided about 90 per



cent of revenues for the EU as a whole since 2007. Finally, expansion has had a significant impact on the decision-making processes of the EU. Quite simply, the wider the range of national and political interests that have to be satisfied, the more difficult it is for the EU to make decisions and to pursue coherent strategies. For many, the widening of the EU has placed substantial restrictions on its deepening. This led to attempts to establish more streamlined, centralized decision-making processes through a proposed EU Constitution. Nevertheless, this proved to be impossible to introduce in a more

decentralized and, in certain respects, more divided EU, the Constitutional Treaty being withdrawn after its rejection by the Netherlands and France, and replaced by the more modest Lisbon Treaty. Some therefore argue that expansion has rendered the original goal of 'an ever closer union' impossible. Meanwhile, Russia has, under Vladimir Putin (see p. 186), tended to view the EU's eastern expansion as a threat to its sphere of influence, and both EU and NATO expansionism were cited as causes of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (which had applied for EU membership).