



# The World We Live In. Megatrends in Global Security, Economy and Governance

Cesare Merlini

## Abstract

The widespread perception is that we live in an unstable and dangerous world. But quantitative data concerning security and warfare, economy and society, governance and the rule of law over the time span from the end of WWII to date, and in particular during the last two decades, tells us that violence has declined, development has spread and international institutions have played a modest but increasing role. The fragility and reversibility of these apparently positive trends are acknowledged and the discrepancies between perceptions and realities discussed. However there seems to be consistency between the short- and medium-term transitions and those visible over the millennia in human history. Moreover, the simultaneity of the three trends is of significance, with the normative one potentially encompassing and consolidating them all.

**Keywords:** *Armed conflicts / Global economy / Economic and social indicators / Governance / Human development / Globalization*

## The World We Live In. Megatrends in Global Security, Economy and Governance

by Cesare Merlini\*

### Introduction

Are we living in a dangerous era and in an unstable world? Or are we “the better angels of our nature” enjoying “the golden age of humanity”?<sup>1</sup> Both horns of this radical dilemma seem justified in light of the current public discourse at both the academic and the public opinion level. The purpose of this Working Paper is to discuss the alternatives from three different angles of human behaviour: a) security and warfare, b) economy and society, c) norms and governance. For each of these, the trends in history will be summarily analysed in quantitative terms wherever possible, knowing that numbers inevitably entail oversimplification.

Looking at trends implies choosing time spans. Two will be considered here: a medium time span that separates us from the end of the Second World War and a shorter one that covers the last two decades after the fall of the Berlin wall and that happens to correspond to the transition from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, indeed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. The former time span may appropriately be framed in an even longer term if we speak about ages of humanity. However the millennial reference will only be briefly hinted at in these introductory remarks. To this end, reference is made to two recent books on human history since the Stone Age, both with a prevalently sociological approach.

The first is the monumental and densely documented work by Stephen Pinker, a Canadian American psychology professor at Harvard, whose title refers to the “angelical” status of human beings today mentioned above. The vast survey tries to answer the question “why violence has declined” over the centuries, as the second part of the title states. In fact, despite significant ups and downs, there has been a consistent decline in warfare, as well as other forms of violent killing, torture, rape, etc in human relations since the Stone Age. Pinker identifies six trends in this general phenomenon. The first only manifests itself on the millennia scale as it deals with the transition from hunting to agriculture to urbanization. The second trend is somewhat shorter and concerns the consolidation of feudal territories into larger kingdoms. The impact of the European enlightenment is at the origin of the third transition, while the fourth is related to the apparent demise of war among great powers after World War II. The decline of civil conflicts, genocides, terrorist acts and unrestricted repression since the end of the Cold War characterizes the fifth trend. Finally, “the postwar era, symbolically inaugurated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, [which] has seen a growing revulsion against aggression on smaller scales, including violence against ethnic minorities, women, children, homosexuals, and animals” is the sixth. The last three of Pinker’s transitions correspond to the medium- and short-term

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<sup>1</sup> On the first quote see Stephen Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature. Why violence has declined*, New York, Viking, 2011. The second is taken from Robert Kagan’s, *The World America Made*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 2012, p. 135.

trends we have chosen to examine in this paper. The reader will thus be in a position to see the degree of consistency between the two analyses.

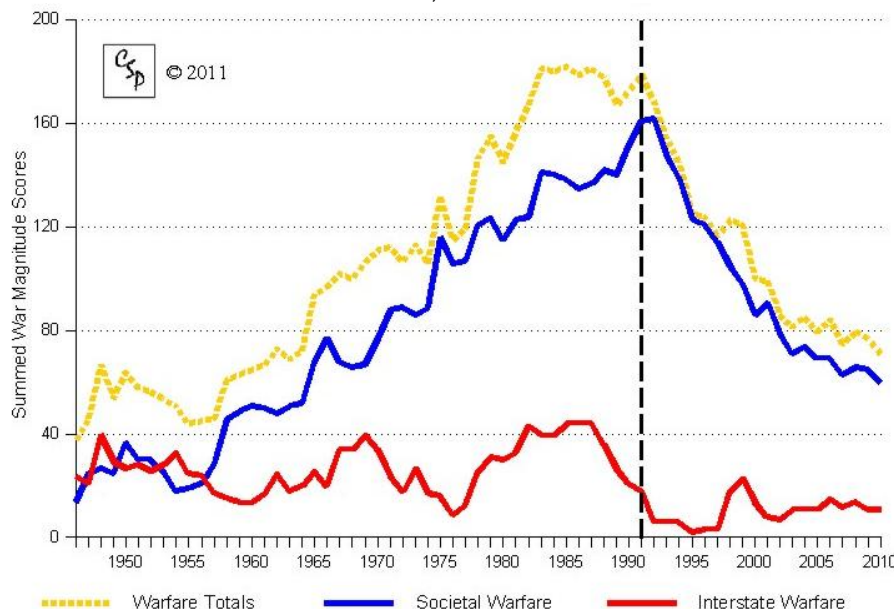
The second book, by Ian Morris, a classical historian and archaeologist at Stanford, is about the relative prevalence of the East and the West following the great global warming that allowed, first, the development of human life and, then, the increasingly organized forms of civil society in the temperate strip of Earth ranging from the Iberian peninsula to the Yellow Sea.<sup>2</sup> The eye is of course on today's emerging China. However, what is of interest here is the elaboration and quantification of an "index of social development" based on four traits: energy capture, urbanism, information process and war-making capacity. When the scope is limited to the Current Era, Morris finds that the index stays almost constant from Annus Domini one to around year 1800, when it suddenly starts to rise steeply in the West, i.e. Europe and then America, to be followed almost a century later by the East, up to the current values roughly twenty times higher than those of a couple of centuries ago - a staggering increase indeed. The medium term considered here is thus the last quarter of the now bicentennial, highly dynamic phase of Morris' index of social development.

Having put matters into these longer-term perspectives, let us now turn to our global trends as they have developed in the chosen time spans. The evolution of the international system is looked at through a number of relevant broad tendencies visible in world affairs. Matters of war and peace will be dealt with first.

## 1. Security

The word "war" needs qualification. The Center for Systemic Peace (CSP) conducted an in-depth analysis of "armed conflicts", distinguishing traditional inter-state wars from "societal warfare", the latter defined as revolutionary and ethnic wars.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1.** Global trends in armed conflict, 1946-2010



Source: Center for Systemic Peace, *Global Conflict Trends*

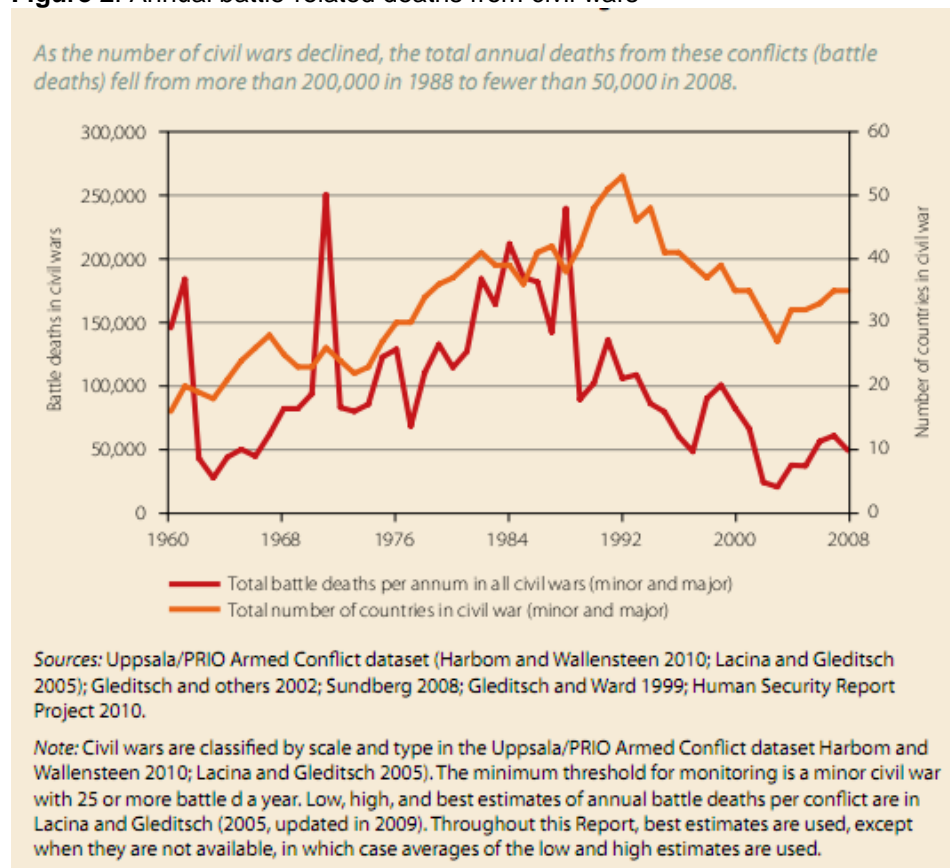
<sup>2</sup> Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules - For Now. The Patterns of History and What they Reveal about the Future*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Systemic Peace, *Global Conflict Trends. Measuring Systemic Peace*, updated 30 September 2011, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflict.htm>.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, from the 1950s through the 1980s, inter-state conflicts, including all wars of independence from the colonial systems, were relatively few in number per year, whereas civil warfare increased dramatically, though mostly due to the protractedness of existing conflicts rather than the emergence of new ones. With the end of the Cold War, inter-state warfare fell further, down to approximately one third of its previous level; while societal warfare, after reaching a peak, began a downward trend equally as dramatic. This continued until 2010, when the summed magnitude reached approximately the same level as in the mid-1960s, though with a lower share of inter-state conflicts.

Looking at Fig. 2, taken from data provided by the World Bank's *World Development Report* (WDR) 2011 on conflicts security and development,<sup>4</sup> the annual number of human casualties from civil wars, which oscillated wildly from the 1960s to the peak in 1988, has decreased substantially since then. The number of battle-related deaths from civil wars in 2008 has been estimated at 50,000, approximately one third the average between 1960 and 1989, while the world population has more or less tripled in the meantime.

**Figure 2.** Annual battle-related deaths from civil wars



Source: World Bank, *World Development Report* 2011, p. 3

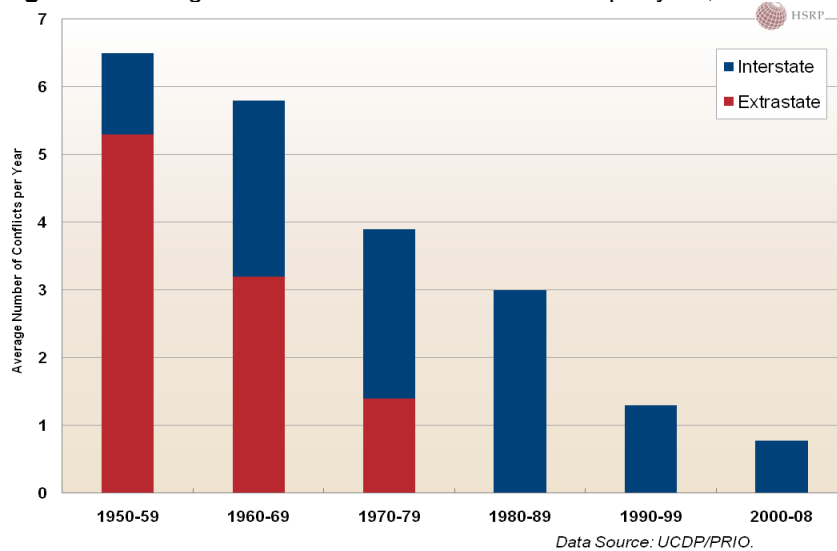
Turning to inter-state wars, Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, taken from the *Human Security Report* (HSR) 2009/10,<sup>5</sup> show the marked decline since the middle of the last century in both the number of inter-state conflicts per year (including anti-colonial ones), and the number of lives lost per conflict. The combined effect of the two trends is a drop from

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, 2011, p. 3 (Overview), <http://wdr2011.worldbank.org>.

<sup>5</sup> Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010. The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, <http://www.hsrproject.org/human-security-reports/20092010/text.aspx>.

more than 60,000 battle-related deaths per year in the 1950s to less than 1,000 per year in the first decade of this century. A second useful piece of information found in the HSR, in agreement with the main thrust of the mentioned WDR, is the clear correlation between the risk of an armed conflict occurring within a 5-year interval and per capita income, plotted in Fig. 5.

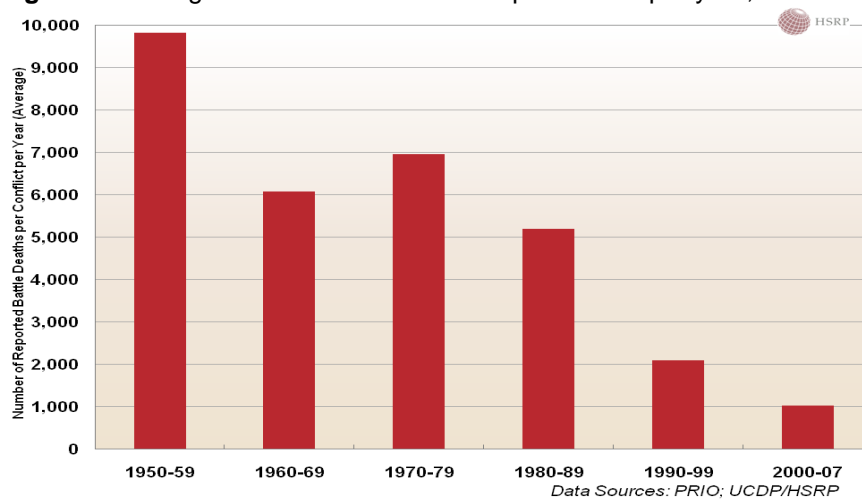
**Figure 3.** Average number of international conflicts per year, 1950-2008



“There has been a steady decline in the number of international conflicts - defined here to include interstate and extrastate conflicts around the world. Extrastate, or anticolonial conflicts, ended in the 1970s.”

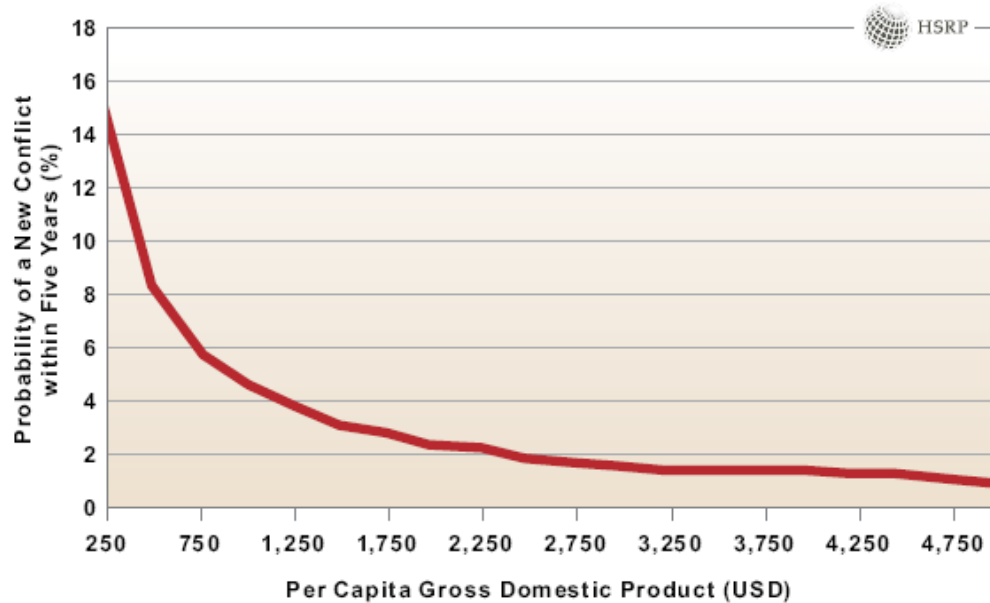
Source: Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, p. 22

**Figure 4.** Average number of battle deaths per conflict per year, 1950-2007



“There has been a clear, though far from constant, decline in the deadliness of armed conflict since the end of the Korean War. In the 1950s, the average armed conflict killed nearly 10,000 people a year; by the new millennium, the average had fallen to just over 1,000.”

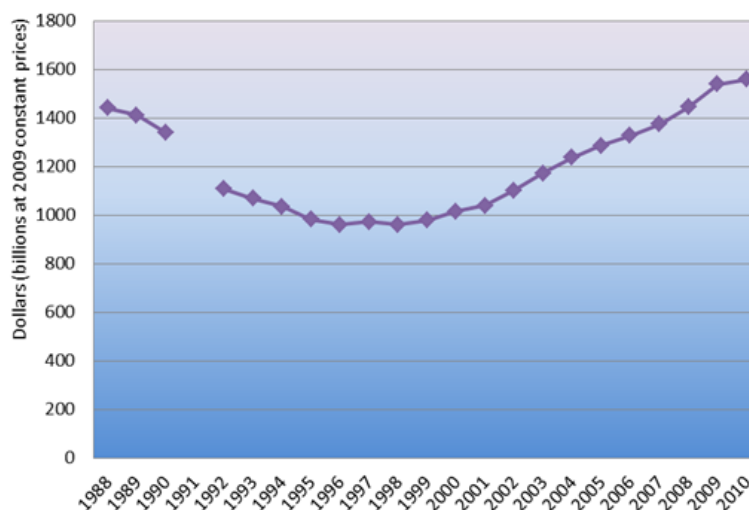
Source: Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, p. 121

**Figure 5.** Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the risk of armed conflict

“There is a strong association between levels of economic development and the risk of armed conflict: the poorer the country, the greater the risk.”

Source: Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, p. 51

Even if conflicts of various kinds have gone down in number and lethality, there is still the risk of war inherent in continuing social and ethnic clashes, such as in Syria, Nigeria and other countries, in the slow but gradual nuclear proliferation and in the competition for scarce food and natural resources. Indicative of this risk is the trend in global military expenditure. As indicated in an article on world military spending from *Global Issues* website,<sup>6</sup> during the late 1980s and early 1990s the cumulative amount worldwide seemed to follow the above trend in hostilities, descending from a peak reached around 1985. But after leveling off at the turn of the century, it began to rise again to reach and recently surpass that peak (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6.** World military expenditure, 1988-2010

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2011, <http://milexdata.sipri.org>

Source: Anup Shah, “World Military Spending”, in *Globalissues.org*

<sup>6</sup> Anup Shah, “World Military Spending”, in *Globalissues.org*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending>.

Looking at the specific contributions that make up the cumulative data would go beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to underline the huge share of the United States in absolute terms, and of the People's Republic of China in terms of yearly increase. Thanks largely to the latter, but also to the current budget declines in the European Union (EU), Asian defense spending is likely to outstrip that of Europe, in nominal terms, during this year, 2012.

## 2. Economy, technology and society

The historical period under consideration shows a similarly interesting tendency as far as the economy and society are concerned, with a significant geo-economic shift taking place during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a pattern of long-term growth interspersed with instabilities, prosperity was at first the privilege of the West, with Japan as its Asian appendix, from the 1950s through the 1980s. Then the world's stage was stolen by the "emerging economies", basically in two acts: first by Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia until the Asian financial crisis of 1997-99; secondly by China, India and Brazil from the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization had taken off.

Per capita income has shown a correspondingly unprecedented growth pattern, despite the constant increase in global population (never to be neglected). In particular, the outlook for what was called the Third World only a few decades ago has changed dramatically, especially in recent years. From 2005 to 2010, half a million people escaped absolute poverty, defined as an income of less than \$1.25 per day. Three quarters of these people live in China or India, but the poverty rate of Sub-Saharan Africa has also fallen below 50%. In 2010, the number of those defined as "poor" had already fallen below 878 million people worldwide,<sup>7</sup> below Paul Collier's *Bottom Billion*, a work which was published a few years earlier.<sup>8</sup> That means that one of the most important Millennium Development Goals set in 2000 by the UN, i.e. to halve the 1990 global poverty rate by 2015, may have been reached five years in advance. As the Brookings Institution's *Poverty in Numbers* states, "never before have so many people been lifted out of poverty over such a brief period of time".<sup>9</sup>

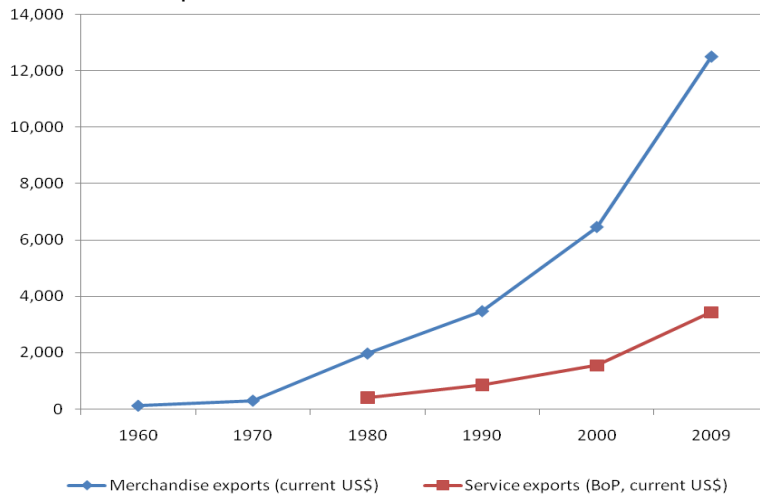
The main engines of globalization are trade expansion and investment liberalization, which have seen impressive growth over the last two decades. Both the merchandise component and service component of the former are visible in Fig. 7. Moreover, Fig. 8 shows how foreign direct investment in developing countries has increased since the early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> Of course, neither trade nor FDI, their exponential growth notwithstanding, ensure fair distribution of wealth, but the overall consequence has been an unprecedented build-up of interdependence among states, as said before. This global development has taken place under a Western and above all US influence, and to a certain extent in keeping with the framework of the international institutions set up at Bretton Woods at the end of WWII. Since then, functional groups such as the G20 - offspring of the G7, again a Western creature that came into being during the 1970s to deal with economic instability - have provided the potential framework for the much hoped for global governance.

<sup>7</sup> Laurence Chandy and Geoffrey Gertz, "Poverty in Numbers: The Changing State of Global Poverty from 2005 to 2015", in *Global Views*, No. 18 (January 2011), p. 4, [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/01\\_global\\_poverty\\_chandy.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/01_global_poverty_chandy.aspx).

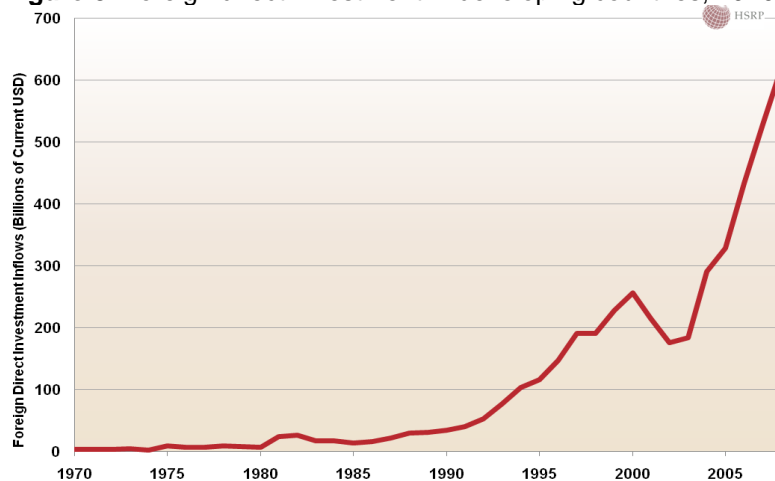
<sup>8</sup> Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion. Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Laurence Chandy and Geoffrey Gertz, "Poverty in Numbers ...", *cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> The Human Security Report Project, "Human Security Report 2009/10", *cit.*, p. 29.

**Figure 7.** World export in billion US \$, 1960-2009

Source: Elaboration of World Bank data

**Figure 8.** Foreign direct investment in developing countries, 1970-2008

Data Source: UNCTAD.

Source: Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, p. 29

This economic blossoming in a large part of the globe has been accompanied by a metamorphosis of the human experience, in a mutual and profound cause-effect relationship. Of the many related transformations, three appear to be of primary importance: the spreading of education and literacy, now visible over two generations or more; the emancipation of women, particularly during the last three decades; and the explosion of the internet since the beginning of this century. The last development is evident in Fig. 9, which shows the incredibly rapid spread of the internet from the end of 2000 to the end of 2011. Ever since the first webpage was added to the already rapidly expanding sphere of telecommunications in 1991, the geographic distance separating individuals and nations has been losing importance.<sup>11</sup>

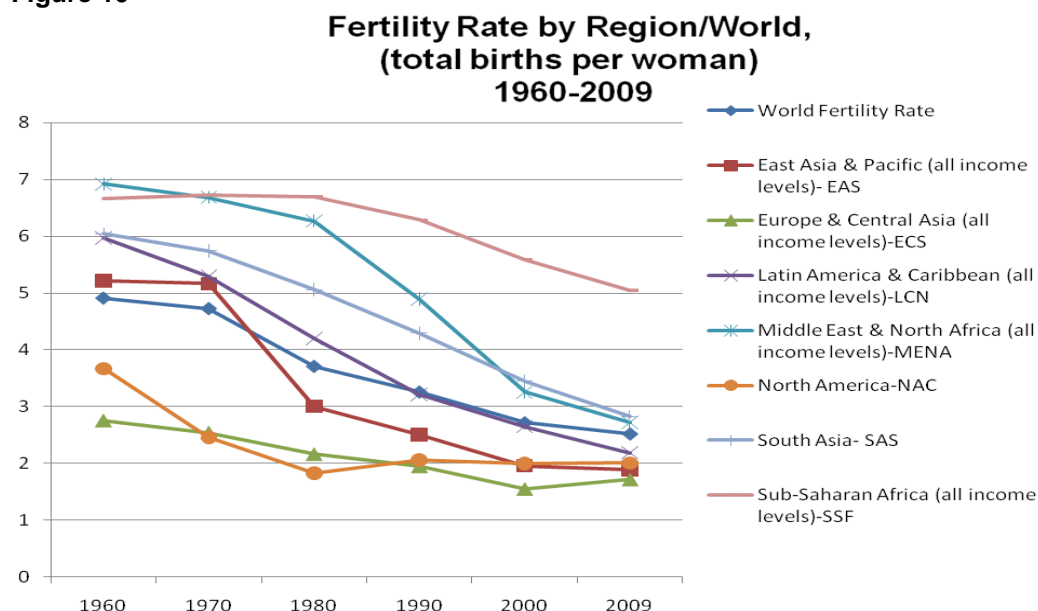
<sup>11</sup> Miniwatts Marketing Group, *Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics*, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>.



**Figure 9.** World internet users and population, 2000-2011

World Regions	Population (2011 Est.)	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2000	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2011	Penetration % Population	% Growth 2000-2011
<b>Africa</b>	1,037,524,058	4,514,400	<b>139,875,242</b>	13.5	2,988.4
<b>Asia</b>	3,879,740,877	114,304,000	<b>1,016,799,076</b>	26.2	789.6
<b>Europe</b>	816,426,346	105,096,093	<b>500,723,686</b>	61.3	376.4
<b>Middle East</b>	216,258,843	3,284,800	<b>77,020,995</b>	35.6	2,244.8
<b>North America</b>	347,394,870	108,096,800	<b>273,067,546</b>	78.6	152.6
<b>Latin America</b>	597,283,165	18,068,919	<b>235,819,740</b>	39.5	1,205.1
<b>Oceania</b>	35,426,995	7,620,480	<b>23,927,457</b>	67.5	214.0
<b>World Total</b>	<b>6,930,055,154</b>	<b>360,985,492</b>	<b>2,267,233,742</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>528.1</b>

As for the changing role of women in society, the decrease in fertility rates and its consequences on the size of the family are just one indicator, but are a very relevant factor in the new form human society is taking. For example, it took 180 years for the British average family to go from five to two children, while the same evolution required 50 years in South Korea and only 20 in Iran. The total number of births per woman and their distribution worldwide over the last forty years can be seen in Fig. 10. Major differences remain of course but, with the sole exception of Sub-Saharan Africa, there seems to be an overall convergence towards a not so distant zero-growth rate of 2.1 children per woman: with Europe increasing its birth rate towards this level, and everywhere else decreasing towards it.<sup>12</sup> Added to this is the increase in life expectancy, another important and positive factor of change in global society (the average Mexican lives longer now than the average Briton in 1955). The demography bomb, in this world that became seven billion strong in October 2011, may be less powerful than we thought not long ago - but still ticking.

**Figure 10**

Source: Elaboration of World Bank data

Yet these trends must be approached with caution. At least three major possible developments could alter them substantially. First, the current, mainly Western,

<sup>12</sup> Elaboration based on 2011 World Bank data.

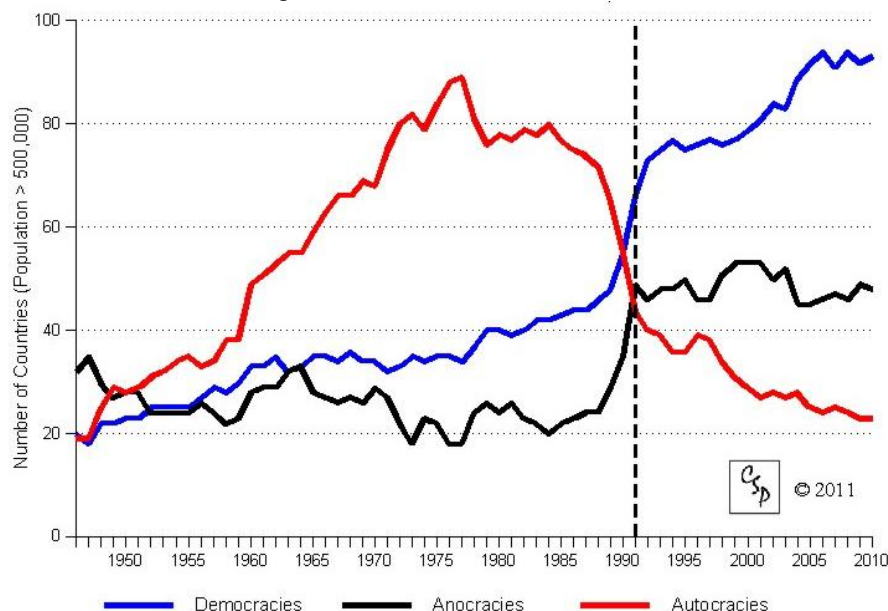
economic crisis seems to be affecting other parts of the world, including the most dynamic, with the risk of generating a Great Global Recession whose depth, duration and consequences would be hard to predict. The second factor for reversal is partly situational, partly structural and consists of the widening income disparity, which is no longer limited to emerging economies and/or authoritarian regimes, but now also affects advanced and democratic countries, first and foremost the United States. The third factor is mainly structural and derives from the development model that has dominated over the last half century and has been spreading with few or no corrections: that is the unequal distribution and/or potential shortage of resources, such as raw materials, drinking water and clean air. All three, whether separate or in conjunction with the demography bomb, could lead to destabilization.

### 3. Governance

Historically, advancing human communities have sought ways to develop civil society and set up forms of government to exert power, enhance security and administer justice. The present changing, increasingly interconnected and interdependent world cannot escape this basic rule. Thus it may be of interest to look at few examples of institutional evolution both in states and in their international relations.

The first example regards the nature of national institutions. Reference is made here to the aforementioned study by the Center for Systemic Peace, which adopts a distinction between democracies, autocracies and “anocracies”, i.e. “states with incoherent or inconsistent authority patterns: partly liberal, partly authoritarian”.<sup>13</sup> The evolution of the number of world countries seen to belong to each of the three groups over the same period considered above for conflicts (1945-2010), can be seen in Fig. 11.

**Figure 11.** Global trends in governance, 1956-2010



Source: Center for Systemic Peace (CSP), *Global Conflict Trends*

The respective trends seem to indicate, once again, a rather evident shift in the 1980s-1990s transition, with a marked decrease in the number of autocracies, only some of which however have turned into democracies. There is a favorable trend in the spread

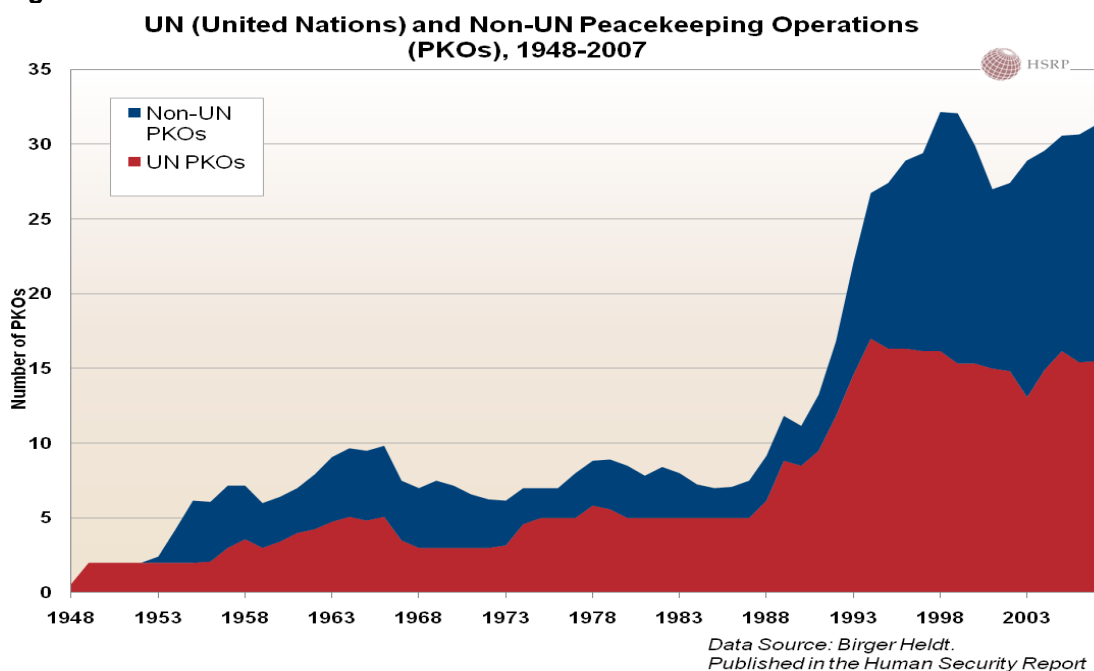
<sup>13</sup> Center for Systemic Peace (CSP), *Global Conflict Trends*, 2011, *cit.*

of democracy during the past two decades. The CSP study includes a breakdown by mega-regions, including Europe, whose important contribution following the fall of the Berlin Wall is to be expected. The lagging behind of regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, and at least until the recent so-called Arab Spring, the Middle East and North Africa, is not unexpected either.

A second case-study concerns the practice of capital punishment. In 1995, as many as 41 nations carried out judicial executions, but that figure gradually decreased to 23 in 2010. The number of people executed varies largely from country to country: China alone carried out thousands of executions (exact figures are unknown) in 2010, that is more than the rest of the world put together. Over a similar time span, however, the number of countries that are “abolitionist for all crimes” increased steadily, to double exactly from 48 in 1991 to 96 in 2010.<sup>14</sup>

A third example is the number of peace-keeping operations undertaken by the international community. Fig. 12, taken from HSR, once again shows a steep surge after 1989 both in UN and non-UN operations, then a pause - which was accompanied by a difficult reappraisal - leading to a slight increase at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, UN Security Council resolution 1973 concerning Libya contemplated a military intervention by the international community based on the principle of the UN responsibility to protect civilians - a first for the so-called R2P.

**Figure 12**



Source: Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, p. 70

The final example is the International Criminal Court, the first such treaty-based body, established in the UN framework to help put an end to the impunity of the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. Governed by the Rome Statute, which entered into force on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 after ratification by 60 countries, it has now been adhered to by 120 states, not including China and Russia, nor indeed the United States, originally a sponsor of the concept. Thirteen cases have

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, “Facts and Figures”, in *Death Sentences and Executions in 2010, 2011*, [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_21366.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_21366.pdf). The huge number of executions in the People’s Republic of China suggests that a change in that country, following the alleged beginning of a domestic discussion of the issue, would have a huge impact globally.

been handled by the ICC so far and the option of deferral to it seems to have become increasingly accepted internationally, including the recent case of Gaddafi and associates, upon the initiative of a non-party such as the current US administration. The impact may be more profound than the number of cases tells us. "Time is running out for former government officials accused of murder, genocide and crimes against humanity," writes Kathryn Sikkink of the University of Minnesota. "From the final Nuremburg trials in 1949 until the 1970s, there was virtually no chance that heads of state and government officials would be held to account for human rights violations. But in the last two decades, the likelihood of punishment has increased ...".<sup>15</sup>

However, none of these partial signs of spreading democracy and respect for human life as well as embryonic forms of global governance and rule of law can be termed systematic or irreversible. States remain the dominant actors on the world scene and, whether failed or robust, they claim full sovereignty and reject interference from outside. Both claims however seem to be subject to increased scrutiny on the grounds not only of shared values, but possibly also of shared interests.

#### 4. Perceptions and realities

The author of this paper was in elementary school during the Second World War, and wore the Balilla uniform on Saturdays as prescribed by the fascist regime. He was not aware then of the fact that, on average, every single day of that naturally carefree life of his was witnessing, throughout the world but particularly on his same continent, the violent passing away of nearly thirty thousand human beings - combatants, civilians (including several of his age), concentration camp inmates and others.

A generation later, while his children were going to school, he met a couple who had decided not to have children because they did not want to generate potential victims of the nuclear holocaust that they - and many like them - deemed probable, in a scenario that would make the massacres of WWII pale in comparison. Happily for all of us, mutual deterrence did work and spared us a nuclear World War Three. However, many killings were perpetrated and many conflicts took place in the shadow of the Cold War, from the last phase of the gulags in the Soviet Union and the revolution in China, to the wars of independence against decaying colonial powers and proxy wars involving the two superpowers, not to mention the many bloody repressions by tyrants, in Latin America and Africa for example, or the civil and military wars in non-aligned countries. Overall, as we have seen above, international conflicts have dramatically diminished since the 1950s, but "societal warfare" increased during the 1945-89 period. Consequently the share of civilian casualties kept growing until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The 1989-91 transition, seen in retrospect and in light of the above, was much more than just the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, the last of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century empires - a quick and peaceful demise, so different from its illustrious predecessors. A great variety of fields were affected. Globalization was made possible by the end of East-West divide and an unprecedented degree of interdependence developed, affecting not only markets and stock markets, but also people, contributing to the advent of what has been called a fluid society. Even authoritarian regimes, in Beijing as well as in Cairo, have allowed or even encouraged access to education and the use of technology - with constraints, of course. Societies have been undergoing profound transformations, the aforementioned changing role of women possibly being the most outstanding case.

<sup>15</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, "Making Tyrants Do Time", in *The New York Times*, 16 September 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/opinion/making-tyrants-do-time.html>.

9/11 was a great shock for everybody, but above all for Americans, hit by the enemy as they were for the first time in history in their own land. The immediate and widespread claim that world security would never again be the same seemed to find support in the subsequent terror killings in Madrid and London. But the following years failed to provide confirmation and last year's tenth anniversary celebrations, rich as they were in images and emotion, did not conceal the fact that the complex picture of global security has not been dramatically altered.

Now that it is the turn of the author's grandchildren to attend school, the world continues to be seen as a dangerous place.<sup>16</sup> Words such as instability, anxiety, threat, even apocalypse enjoy widespread popularity, notwithstanding the sheer fact that the yearly toll of violent conflicts relative to the global population is often well below the average *daily* one during WWII. Why is that so? One explanation is that today's conflicts are almost always watched worldwide in detail and in real time, wherever they occur. Wars, sometimes just skirmishes, with houses in flames and corpses on the pavement are brought to our living or dining rooms almost daily - not to speak of the collapsing Twin Towers. The changing typology of violence may also have some impact, with increased cowardly killings of numerous innocent civilians by fanatics or criminals, while war fighting seems to have become more precise, despite frequent reports of "collateral" killings. In a way, child suicide bombers, in their unthinking state, and remotely guided drones, can be seen as epitomizing the two extremes of a new spectrum of means of delivering death that share the feature of seeming to come out of nowhere.

Non-conflict generated human loss of life, such as that brought about by the apparent intensification and proliferation of natural disasters worldwide, as well as by epidemics, may contribute to the perception of an unsafe world, even though in some instances of the latter, as in the case of HIV, the current state of affairs seems to be less tragic than was predicted not long ago.

Then came the financial crisis in 2008 which has turned into today's potential Great World Depression. Will it turn matters sour? Will it stay within the economic realm or will it extend to the social one, as conjectured above? Will it spread even to the geopolitical realm because of the consequent drop in the perceived advantage of interdependence and a relatively cooperative approach to international relations predominant so far, as some authors suggest?<sup>17</sup> However important such hypotheses of change may be, they remain largely speculative at this stage. The focus here is on the widespread perception of instability that was already with us before 2008, even while the broad trends in the fields of security, economy and governance did not seem to justify it.

### Closing remarks

Thus the positive horn of the dilemma referred to at the beginning of this paper seem to be closer to present realities than the negative one. However, some related questions of a political and philosophical nature need to be addressed, albeit summarily, in these concluding remarks. From the political angle, it would obviously be naïve to assume that the consistency of the present developments with a long-term trend in human

<sup>16</sup> Christopher J. Fettweis, *Dangerous Times? The International Politics of Great Power Peace*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Gideon Rachman, for instance, says that the current "positive sum" game on the global chessboard is bound to be replaced by a "zero sum" one. See Gideon Rachman, *Zero-Sum World: Politics, Power and Prosperity After the Crash*, London, Atlantic Books, 2010.

behaviour makes them stable. The weaknesses of the current system in the various areas considered and the fact that trends can easily be reversed have already been pointed out. As Ian Morris reminds us “short-term accidents” can be in contradiction with the “long-term lock ins”. The question is thus, what makes transitions less vulnerable?

A look at the “five historical forces” Stephen Pinker believes have influenced the trends he detected in human history as mentioned in the introduction may help find an answer.<sup>18</sup> They are in order of importance: 1) The Leviathan, as a state and judiciary with a monopoly over the legitimate use of force; 2) Commerce, as a positive-sum game, helped by technology; 3) the increasing respect for the interests and values of women, called Feminization; 4) the forces of Cosmopolitanism such as literacy, mobility and mass media; and 5) an intensifying application of knowledge and rationality to human affairs defined as the Escalator of Reason. The trends taken as indicators in the previous pages seem to be broadly consistent with Pinker’s historical forces. In particular, the attention given to governance and the rule of law fits with historical force number one, that is the Leviathan - today’s Leviathan. In a hypothetical modern revival, it would be extended to the globalized and interdependent world from the domain of those nation-states that were emerging after Thomas Hobbes. As Jean Monnet said, nothing is possible without men, nothing is lasting without institutions. Here lies the answer to the stability question - essentially a political one. It is given with all due awareness that tragic “short-term accidents” will continue to mark our lifetime.

There remains the philosophical question. In very sketchy terms it can be formulated as follows: whether “angels” or not, are we better than our ancestors? Any attempt to look for an answer presupposes an in-depth discussion of the meaning and the implications of the word “better”. It is highly improbable, for instance, that this allegedly “golden age of humanity” will be able to produce a Buddha, a Socrates, a Michelangelo, or a Thomas Moore, all masters of human uplifting who happened to live in epochs and societies in which those forms of violence and cruelty that most - but not necessarily all - of us consider disgusting and unacceptable were ordinary and daily practice, along with poverty, famine and pandemics. That matter, however, is vast and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature*, cit., p. xxv.

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