

‘GLOBALISATION IS INEVITABLY CHANGING THE WAY STATES PURSUE THEIR SECURITY’. HOW INEVITABLE IS GLOBALISATION AND WHAT IS ITS CONNECTION TO SECURITY?

INTRODUCTION

Singapore’s Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, recently argued that globalisation will change the nature of human society but it is unlikely to change human nature.¹ For Lee Kuan Yew, globalisation will undoubtedly create some tensions for nation-states, though it is unlikely to do away with nationhood altogether. Brigadier-General George Yeo, Singapore’s Trade and Industry Minister and chairman of the Young People’s Action Party, is concerned about another dimension of globalisation, namely, the power of the internet on state citizens.² The mobility of knowledge and capital provided by the internet, he suggests, will allow citizens to escape the demands of the state, the tribe and parents. These two views underline the intrinsic fears of the Singapore government about the inevitability and effects of globalisation. This essay takes these concerns as the starting point for an examination of the meaning and origins of globalisation, its inevitability, and its connections to security. In brief, I will argue that although the origins of globalisation are still debatable, its inevitability and affect on many aspects of security, are less contentious.

GLOBALISATION: ITS MEANING AND ORIGINS

The term globalisation has gained increasing prominence over the last 20 years. However, it is often used imprecisely and frequently interchanged with other ideas, such as ‘international relations’ and the ‘world system’.³ What then is distinct about globalisation? Scholte defines it as a process whereby social relations acquire relatively distanceless and borderless qualities so that human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place.⁴

Equally contested is the origin of globalisation. It can be argued that globalisation was evident as early as 1866 when the first permanent transoceanic telegraph cable came into service.⁵ The use of the telegraph would certainly have reduced the perception of distance and borders. The proliferation of satellite communications, television and other means of mass communication have further contributed to this perception. Interaction between people from different societies is today best personified by the internet - a tool that allows many more people to influence and be influenced by countless other individuals. It is this ‘instantaneous’ nature of interaction that best characterises globalisation today. The instantaneous nature of communications transcends national borders and engenders a supra-territorial effect.⁶

1 Senior Minister Lee was responding to questions on the impact of globalization during a lecture to students of Nanyang Technological Institute in Singapore. See *The Straits Times Interactive: Singapore*, 16 February 2000 at http://straitstimes.asia1.com/singapore/sin8_0216.html.

2 This concern was expressed in an interview at the World Economic Forum at Davos and a full report is available online at *The Straits Times Interactive: Singapore*, 4 February 2000, at http://straitstimes.asia1.com/sin/sin6_0204.html.

3 Jan Aart Scholte, ‘Beyond the Buzzword: Towards a Critical Theory of Globalization,’ in Eleonore Kofman and Gilian Young (eds), *Globalization, Theory and Practice*, London, Biddles Limited, Guildford and King’s Lynn, 1996, p. 45.

4 Jan Aart Scholte, ‘The Globalization of World Politics,’ in Steve Smith and John Baylis (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 14.

5 Scholte, ‘The Globalization of World Politics,’ p. 17.

6 Scholte, *Ibid.* p. 15.

Communications are not the only means by which borders are transcended with growing disregard for territorial boundaries or state control. Increasingly, the policies of organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) have an intrusive affect on many states. State borders are being made more porous by other issues. Environmental phenomena, such as haze from the Indonesian forest fires in 1997 and global warming, can spread their effects across state borders. Transnational companies, such as McDonald's, are increasingly pervasive in many societies.⁷ Perhaps most importantly, financial markets are now seamlessly integrated and the mere movement of stock indices in Wall Street can cause rapid reactions across stock markets around the world. In short, the interconnectivity of the world and the 'evaporation' of historic delineations of territorial boundaries encapsulate the meaning of globalisation.

THE INEVITABILITY OF GLOBALISATION

Although the effects of globalisation are not felt equally in all societies to the same extent or possibly not even felt at all in some societies, it is arguably an inevitable process that is likely to continue. In essence, globalisation describes a world that is irreversibly interconnected such that events in one part of the world affect people and societies in other parts.⁸ According to Gilley,

Many more people have access to the same technology, finance and information than ever before. That means we are all competing in life, love and work with everyone else in the world, a true human race. And since those things are not likely to change, the forces of globalisation are irreversible.⁹

Thomas Friedman correctly argues that, rapidly improving technology facilitates e-commerce and capital mobility on a global scale, and countries do not have a choice but to follow this trend.¹⁰ If countries, such as North Korea, opt to isolate themselves from the 'electronic herd', then they must accept a life of hardship and deprivation.¹¹ For Thomas Friedman, globalisation enables more people to enjoy higher standards of living and it is human nature to aspire to such improvements. Even China, which regards globalisation as a product of Western imperialistic intentions, is coming to terms with its unstoppable nature and acknowledges it as a means of improving its economy, and, ultimately, the wealth and prosperity of all Chinese.¹²

It is difficult to exclude any country or region from the effects of globalisation. Even very poor and under developed countries that do not have electricity, let alone any aspiration to be wired to the internet are gradually being integrated into the world global society. There are many events in the world that can affect these isolated countries. For example, multi-

⁷ For example, China and Taiwan have 225 and 303 McDonald's outlets respectively. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Review Books section, 'Follow the Golden Arches,' available online at http://203.105.48.72/9907_15/p35inreview.html

⁸ Scholte, 'The Globalization of World Politics,' p. 7.

⁹ This conclusion is reached by Bruce Gilley in his review of the book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, by Thomas Friedman for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Available online at http://203.105.48.72/9907_15/p35inreview.html

¹⁰ Jonathon Friedman, 'Class, Hybridity and Ethnification,' *Globalization and the Asia-Pacific*, Kris Olds, Peter Dicken, Philip F. Kelly, Lily Kong and Henry Wai-chung Yeung (eds), London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 186,187.

¹¹ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, London, Harper Collins, 1999, p. 201.

¹² Joseph Fewsmith, 'The Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on China's Political Leaders and Prospects for WTO Accession,' July 1999, p. 2. Available online at <http://www.nbr.org/publications/briefing/fewsmith99/index.html>.

national corporations can exploit them for cheap labour, they can be the recipients of aid through the efforts of non-governmental organisations, and they can suffer the effects of environmental degradation. As such this inter-meshing of the world looks likely to continue unabated.

GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SECURITY

If globalisation is inevitable, then what is its impact on security? According to many scholars, security can refer to individual, national or international security. Barry Buzan, for example, argues that security concerns political, economic, societal and environmental factors, as well as military security.¹³ Dr Tony Tan, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, stated recently that the security challenges to Singapore's sovereignty in the 21st century would no longer be limited to military threats.¹⁴ This suggests that security is no longer the exclusive domain of the state or the military and that globalisation has had a significant effect on the broadening of security beyond the realist view of state and military security.

The impact of globalisation on security is demonstrated by recent events in the Asia-Pacific. The recent economic crisis in Asia can be explained in part by globalisation.¹⁵ The global connectivity, manifest in computer and communications technology, the financial market, and the fluidity of capital were partly responsible for the collapse of what were previously secure, and robust, state-managed economies.¹⁶ Capital flight was such a threat to state economic security that the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, implemented strict capital controls and fixed exchange rates. The political legitimacy of the affected states in the crisis continues to be very much dependent on the health of the economy, which in turn, is largely dependent on today's global financial markets. Hence, globalisation ultimately impacts political and state security.¹⁷

State security is also increasingly influenced by non-state actors and NGOs, such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank. Such organisations have suggested how states should behave and act. Even the once traditional and sacrosanct domain of military spending has not been spared.¹⁸ There were serious suggestions in diplomatic and political circles that further monetary aid to Indonesia be contingent on Indonesia contributing to the \$800 million East Timor aid fund. In this way, the Indonesian government would be partly responsible for the damage caused by the military.¹⁹ Even more intrusive, on broader aspects of security, is the WTO where 134 nation states are willing to 'subordinate policies or democratic practices ...' to the authority of the WTO.²⁰

¹³ John Baylis, 'International Security in the Post-Cold War Era,' in Steve Smith and John Baylis (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics, An Introduction to International Relations*, op. cit. p. 194, citing Barry Buzan 'People, States and Fear,' London, Harvester, 1983.

¹⁴ Dr Tony Tan commenting on Mindef's responses to new security challenges at the launch of a new Ministry of Defence publication, 'Defending Singapore in the 21st Century,' *The Straits Times Interactive: Singapore*. Available online at http://straitstimes.asia1.com/singapore/sin11_0216.html.

¹⁵ See 'IMF Suggests Ways to Cut the Risks of Globalization,' *The Age*, 5 May 1998. Available online at <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/980505/news/news26.html>.

¹⁶ Paul Dibb, David D. Hale and Peter Prince, 'The Strategic Implications of Asia's Economic Crisis,' *Survival*, Vol. 40, No.2, (Summer 1998), pp. 5-26.

¹⁷ Dibb, Hale and Prince, *Ibid.* p. 15.

¹⁸ Jessica T. Matthews, 'Power Shift,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1, January/February 1997, p. 60.

¹⁹ Peter Charlton, 'Only the Beginning,' *Courier Mail*, 24 February 2000, p. 13.

²⁰ This description of the WTO can be found online at <http://www.ifg.org/wto.html>.

Globalisation has an impact on other notions of security, such as environmental security. The Indonesian forest fires in 1997, caused considerable political tension amongst Southeast Asian states because aspects of economic security, such as the reduction in tourist dollars, were affected. Indeed, the ability of the institution of ASEAN to resolve the problem of haze in the region, was seriously challenged. Eventually, there was regional response, which included the sharing of satellite imagery to monitor the likely areas where fires may rekindle, but there was also global pressure from environmentalists to address the wider implications of deforestation. This globalised awareness about environmental security impacts both negatively and positively on states and economic security.

Globalisation has also facilitated other non-traditional security issues: for example transnational crimes including illicit drug trade, smuggling and money laundering.²¹ One of the causal factors for transnational crime has been the globalised nature of financial systems and communications. Large sums of unregulated money are readily accessible and it is impossible for states to keep track of all transactions. This cyber mobility of transactions has made illegal profits easier to circulate.²² The affect of drugs on societal security such as increased crime rate, prostitution and demand on health care services, are clear. More fundamental is the challenge to state security organisations, such as the police force and military, to manage these problems. On the other hand, the private armies of drug lords, and the infiltration and corruption of state organisations and officials, illustrate how in other ways globalisation has indirectly contributed to the erosion of state and societal security.

CONCLUSION

This essay has shown that globalisation is inevitable and impacts on security issues in both negative and positive ways. For example, globalisation has facilitated the drug trade, but at the same time, the globalised nature of communications allows security services in different states to cooperate and share real time intelligence. Likewise, China's likely WTO membership, will subject it to the rules of the organisation, and in the short term, adversely affect the job security provided by many state-owned enterprises. However, in the longer term, China's security will be enhanced.

What is certain for many countries is that there is no backtracking from the inevitable process of globalisation.²³ The key for many countries is not how to stop it, but rather how to manage globalisation to ensure that security, in its most expanded definition, is not compromised.²⁴

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²² Mathews, 'Power Shift,' *op. cit.* p. 58.

²³ See Lee Jr., 'Warns Against Backtracking From Globalization,' available online at <http://singapore/windows.org/81014sc.htm>.

²⁴ According to IMF chief, Mr Michael Camdessus 'attention has naturally shifted from the benefits of globalization to the many ways in which countries can reduce their vulnerability to its risks.' *The Age*, available online at <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/980505/news/news26.html>.

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