GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT:
AN INTRODUCTION

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─── ABSTRACT ───

The United States has been at war continuously since 2001. Whereas the ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq reflected aspects of traditional warfare, the "war on terror" and the means for combatting it – including private security contractors, special operations forces, and new technologies such as armed drones – introduced many novel elements. Meanwhile, humanitarian justifications for war, invoked since the end of the Cold War in places such as former Yugoslavia, experienced continued degradation as the UN-authorized intervention in Libya turned into a war of regime change and Russia sought to justify its intervention in Ukraine on humanitarian grounds. These issues were addressed at a conference on Globalization and International Conflict held to explore elements of change and continuity in war during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. This introduction offers a guide to the articles written on the basis of the conference presentations, pointing particularly to areas of overlap and disagreement between the authors.

The United States has been at war continuously since the terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets in New York, Pennsylvania, and the Washington DC area in September 2001. The al-Qaeda group, drawn mainly from recruits in Saudi Arabia, but based in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban, epitomized the global phenomenon of transnational terrorism. The G.W. Bush administration, for its part, contributed to the globalization of the conflict by declaring a "global war on terror"

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of seemingly endless scope and duration. Because it entailed an air and ground war in Afghanistan, launched in October 2001, and a subsequent "war of choice" against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in March 2003, the conflict reflected many elements of traditional warfare. Yet the elusive and globally dispersed nature of the enemy ("terrorism") and the means for combatting it – including private security contractors, special operations forces, and new technologies such as armed drones – introduced many novel elements as well.

Aside from the war on terror, the period following the end of the Cold War had already witnessed a change in the nature of armed conflict, represented by the ethnicized civil wars and genocidal violence in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, for example. In response to these catastrophes, the notion of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) arose to challenge the sovereignty of states that carried out or allowed massive crimes against their own citizens. The United Nations and individual states or coalitions were considered to have a responsibility to intervene in such situations, even to the point of using military force for what became known as "humanitarian interventions". A precedent was set with the intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in March 1999 – NATO's first war ever – in the form of a 78-day campaign of aerial bombardment against Serbia to prevent further abuses against Albanian citizens in the province of Kosovo. The Kosovo war, carried out illegally without the authorization of the UN Security Council, opened the way for future wars justified – with diminishing levels of credibility – on humanitarian grounds. These included the US-led war against Iraq in the interest of "regime change" and Russia's war against Georgia in 2008, launched with the ostensibly humanitarian goal to protect supporters of the secessionist aspirations of South Ossetia, a breakaway province under pressure from the Georgian government to remain within the state.

The humanitarian justifications for war experienced continued degradation as the UN-authorized intervention in Libya in 2011 turned into another war of regime change with the overthrow and murder of Muammar al-Gaddafi. The anarchic situation that followed made Gaddifi's enormous stocks of weapons available to unscrupulous arms dealers and helped fuel the civil war in Syria and the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), a new terrorist organization with pretentions to territorial control. Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent annexation of Crimea – also justified on humanitarian grounds – brought untold harm to civilians, as state forces and paramilitary groups on both sides terrorized the local populations. The wars of the second decade of the second millennium fused terrorism and counterterrorism with increasingly implausible humanitarian justifications masking traditional great-power machinations and the self-interested involvement of regional actors.

As part of its research program on the West in Globalization, the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi held a conference on Globalization and International Conflict in June 2018 to explore elements of change and continuity in warfare and armed conflict during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It consisted of presentations by Neta Crawford and Jennifer Welsh, and commentaries by Fabio Armao, Marco Boggero, and Elisabetta Brighi. All of the participants have developed their presentations into original articles, published in this symposium. The symposium as a whole and the individual articles draw on a range of disciplinary perspectives, including law, ethics, politics, history, and economics, and thus are particularly suited to publication in the *Annals*, with its emphasis on interdisciplinarity. This brief introduction offers a guide to what follows, pointing particularly to areas of overlap and disagreement between the authors.

Jennifer Welsh starts off the symposium with an overview of the wide-ranging project she has directed on Individualisation of War. Many of the changes outlined above can be attributed to transformation of norms governing attitudes toward individuals. Welsh and her colleagues highlight three elements related to the changing status of individuals, both as agents and subjects: *protection*, *liability*, and *accountability*. Many of the changes reflect a paradoxical element. For example, the emphasis on making individuals – such as irregular fighters suspected of engaging in terrorist activity – liable for attack rests uneasily with the commitment to protect the unarmed individuals among whom the suspected terrorists might be living. At stake is the principle in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) of distinction between civilian and military objects. Under the element of accountability, the *agents* of the use of armed force against individuals liable for attack could themselves become the *subjects* of criminal investigation if that use of force results in disproportionate harm to civilians (a violation of IHL's principle of proportionality). In addition to offering a myriad of insights into the influence of individualization on armed conflict, Welsh's project makes a broader theoretical contribution by calling into question the "progress narrative" underlying much of the discussion of the expansion of human rights since the end of World War II. The project reports both good news and bad news, so to speak, but, in Welsh's words, it casts doubt on "linear, teleological models of normative change".

In contrast to Welsh's focus on individuals, Neta Crawford's contribution, "The globalization of American war in the 21st Century", with its attention to the United States, is appropriately "state-centric". The United States wields more military and economic power than any state in history and exerts enormous influence on the nature of the international system and of warfare. Yet she does not necessarily disagree with Welsh, whose

project claims a decline in the role of collective entities such as states. Crawford argues that US relative power is on the wane, and that its confidence in and propensity to resort to military force to achieve its foreign-policy objectives – a key component of what she defines as *militarism* – dooms it to decline and failure. Among the challenges the United States faces are not only competing powers, including a China still evidently on the rise. As the other authors point out, the role of *non-state actors* has grown over the course of the "war on terror". Most obvious is the proliferation of terrorist groups themselves, including some, such as ISIS, that did not even exist when the United States launched its global war on terror in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but also the phenomenon of "lone-wolf" terrorism, a particular focus of Elisabetta Brighi's work.

Brighi's article, "Globalisation, individualisation and the changing politics of (in)security", shares Welsh's assessment of several aspects of the changing nature of war. In particular, Brighi endorses the claim of a decline in the role of sovereign states and their traditional monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. She points to a blurring between war and peace, as a variety of non-state actors pursue armed conflict, and states from the United States and Russia to Israel and Saudi Arabia employ armed force in situations short of large-scale war. Yet, in pointing out that war accounts for only ten percent of the world's violence, Brighi highlights another blurring of distinctions – between the private and the public wielders of violence – and what she calls the *insecurity continuum*.

Much of Fabio Armao's discussion in "Militarism and hegemonic (in)stability in the age of private wars" also takes as its starting point the breakdown of the traditional roles of the public and private sectors in the conduct of wars. He sees the "retreat of the state" in the regulation of the economy and wellbeing of its citizens of a piece with the privatization of warfare and what he calls "the triumph of the global market of war". This result of neoliberalism and globalization has produced the further paradoxical effect of focusing conflict at the local level. Armao is particularly drawn to the role of armed gangs, mafia groups, and other violent non-state actors contesting the control of urban spaces.

In his contribution, "Complex norms and technological transition: reflections on the Responsibility to Protect and norms governing private military and security companies", Marco Boggero directs much of his attention to elements of individualization that concern RtoP. His consideration of the role of new technologies includes social media. He uses the case of Syria's illegal use of sarin gas as an example of how civil society actors can provide evidence of atrocities and perhaps help bring perpetrators to account. Boggero also cites the common wisdom that suggests the use of social media by individuals poses a threat to authoritarian governments and

contributes to the decline of the state that Welsh's project documents. On the other hand, he points out, state actors have become adept at countering that influence by controlling information and monitoring citizens with the aid of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies, and they may be able to stem the state's apparent decline.

Although focusing on the role of non-state actors in contrast to Crawford's preoccupation with the militarism of the preeminent state actor – the United States – the other authors agree with Crawford on several key points. Armao shares Crawford's pessimism about the prospects of democracy under current militarized conditions. Brighi points to the historically small proportion of the US population directly involved in its wars as soldiers, and the fact that funding wars through deficit spending makes their political impact on society and the economy hardly noticeable. Armao likewise points to the importance of the gradual abandonment of universal (male) conscription (the "draft"), and, like Crawford, he finds Harold Lasswell's notion of the "garrison state" useful for understanding a new wave of "urban militarism" represented by a "permanent global civil war" and a new world of "garrison cities".

The sum of these articles offers a disconcerting picture of changes in the nature of society and international conflict, many driven by the processes of globalization. Not all elements are negative, as the impetus for individualization of warfare, for example, stems from norms promoting human rights and probably has led to fewer deaths than in past wars. Yet the impact on domestic societies, including democracies, of the global dispersion of armed conflict across time and space commands our attention and further research.