1 Postinternational politics

Remapping “political space” is the “new frontier” of global political theory. Like the title voice-over of the television series *Star Trek*, both the task of remapping and the shifting nature of contemporary global politics challenge us to go boldly where no one has gone before. The task of remapping is a critical one, precisely because the “Westphalian moment” is passing. Moreover, it is increasingly obvious that that moment only very gradually and never fully “arrived” and, to the extent that it did, may well have been a historical anomaly. The end of the Cold War, present-day globalizing trends, the undermining of some of the state’s familiar roles, the proliferation of nonstate actors, fears of apocalyptic terrorism, and a host of other developments make much of existing international relations (IR) theory seem hopelessly obsolete. It not only fails to illuminate but also actually obfuscates the main features of present-day global politics. In sum, most of traditional IR theory is bad theory.

Even those like ourselves who have abandoned traditional approaches are keenly aware of how rapidly things are moving and how little we really know. We sense the startling new-ness of the current world as well as how much it resembles the past, not only the European epoch of the Westphalian State but also the vast stretches of human history.


2 Although the emergence of territorial states was a long-term process, we refer to them as Westphalian States because of their association with the 1648 peace of that name that brought an end to the Thirty Years War. That peace, consisting of the Treaties of Osnabrück and Munster, established the right of princes of the Holy Roman Empire to conduct their
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going back to much earlier political forms. T. S. Eliot’s opening lines in his Four Quartets capture the situation exactly and yet (paradoxically, as Eliot would appreciate) leave us to fill in the details: “Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past.”3 And, as the poet suggests, “we shall not cease from exploration.”

This book is part of the authors’ continuing examination of how people organize themselves for political ends and of the dynamics behind the changing nature of political association. Its foundation is our earlier work on nonstate actors and the “polities” framework for analyzing global politics that we developed in the course of research on pre-Westphalian patterns and advanced in our 1996 volume Polities: Authority, Identities, and Change.4 However, it is interesting and significant that our polities approach, generated independently, has nonetheless increasingly converged with the work of James N. Rosenau. Rosenau coined the term “postinternationalism” to describe “an apparent trend in which more and more of the interactions that sustain world politics unfold without the direct involvement of nations and states.”5 He continues to use the words postinternational and postinternationalism but now appears to prefer to describe his own “paradigm” or “worldview” in dynamic terms as one of “turbulence” or “fragmegration.” Our polities model similarly speaks of “integration” and “fragmentation” or “fusion” and “fission.”6 But postinternationalism still seems to us to be the best shorthand characterization of contemporary global politics.7

own foreign affairs and conclude treaties with other rulers. The earlier Peace of Augsburg (1555) declared that Lutheran princes might impose their religion on subjects regardless of the preferences of the Holy Roman Emperor. These agreements together constituted a giant step toward legitimating state sovereignty.

3 Peter Dicken closes the last section of his book on the “global shift” in the world economy with the same lines from Eliot. Dicken, Global Shift: Transforming the World Economy, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford, 1998).
6 Ferguson and Mansbach, Polities, pp. 51–57, 303.
7 See the authors’ separate essays in Hobbs, Pondering Postinternationalism: Richard W. Mansbach, “Changing Understandings of Global Politics: Preinternationalism,
In the chapters that follow, we analyze and describe the gradual appearance of a postinternational world with respect to political forms, identities, economics, war, technology, and collective norms, and we contrast this world with the vanishing international world—as it is usually and significantly termed—of traditional Eurocentric IR theory.

International politics grew out of a tradition of interpretive scholarship dating back at least to Thomas Hobbes and Hugo Grotius that universalized and exaggerated Europe’s post-Westphalian experience by positing that sovereign states and interstate relations are all we need to know about our political universe and that the central problem of that universe is the management of violence and war. Eurocentric IR theorists have viewed the study of interstate war as constituting the core of their tradition. Typical of this tradition is K. J. Holsti’s observation that: “When thinking about war, we usually conjure up the image of two countries arraying their military forces against each other...” And, as he avers, this image “derives from the post-1648 European experience.” These premises reflected the state’s conquest of political rivals and subsequent control of historical meaning.

For several hundred years theorists and practitioners of global politics have been accustomed to regarding the sovereign state as the object of humanity’s highest loyalties, the primary locus of political authority, and the source of important public values. During the epoch of European ascendancy, sovereign states claiming exclusive rights over territory and subjects/citizens within their boundaries, as well as freedom from external interference, “dominated” global politics. That general condition masked the fact that human beings have always lived in a variety of political communities, with varying degrees of autonomy, and had multiple identities and loyalties. In fact, identity hierarchies have been continually changing since the beginning of human association. All we can say without qualification is that the state for one major historical period established a very successful claim to preeminence. If global change has recently been as extensive as we contend, then the ontology or assumed elements of international relations are increasingly misleading. “‘Ontology’,” according to David Dessler, “refers to the...
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concrete referents of an explanatory discourse. A theory’s ontology consists of the real-world structures (things, entities) and processes posited by the theory and invoked in the theory’s explanations." For example, in “classical physics, the ontology consists of space, time, and matter, meaning that all the entities or processes to which a classical explanation refers are embodiments of our relations between space, time, and matter.”10 The state-centric theories and models that continue to prevail in our field, at best, account for only a small part of what happens in the world and, at worst, are edifices built on sand. That ontology relies on an anarchic system consisting of territorial states, whose citizens are united in a quest for security that pits them against the citizens of other states. By contrast, we begin with an ontology that consists largely of polities and identities (individual and collective) driven by interdependent processes of centralization (integration/fusion) and decentralization (disintegration/localization/fission) of political authority.11

To the extent that the territorial polities of Europe and North America extended their cultural, as well as military and political hegemony beyond their original boundaries, it is not surprising that state-centric theories – derived from European versions of concepts such as “power,” “sovereignty,” “territoriality,” and “sovereign frontiers” – acquired global reach. Such concepts not only embodied what European theorists considered to be the most important “real” or structural factors in international politics but also reinforced what those theorists thought ought to be the dominant norms and practices of global life. The current erosion of state authority and capacity signals that the interstate epoch is drawing to a close, and invites us to reexamine old ideas and construct new ones that will both provide a better “fit” with observable reality and a more accurate guide to changing political patterns and attendant norms.

Conflicting stories of global politics: continuity and change, anarchy and order12

From time to time words are co-opted by various schools of theory and their former meaning is transformed in the process. “Story” is one

11 Ferguson and Mansbach, Polities.
such word, “discourse” another, and “contradiction” yet a third. For postmodernists a “story” is always fiction of sorts, because it reflects the myopia and biases of the storyteller. “Discourse” is similarly the language expressing a particular way of seeing the world, almost a catechism, for example, the “discourse of modernity.” “Contradiction” by contrast is not a word favored by postmodernists, ironically because, for extreme relativists, it is inherent in virtually all story telling or discourse. Contradiction had earlier been co-opted by Marxist analysts for whom it carried progressive ideological overtones initially derived from Hegel’s Idealism. However bright the outlook for capitalism at any given time, Marxists always presumed there were inevitable contradictions besetting that economic system that would eventually lead to its instability or even demise and thus to the triumph of socialism.

Although this book tells one essential story about postinternational politics, stories concerning the same subject may differ and more than one may be “true.” Of course, some stories may be false, and not all “true” stories are necessarily equally true partly because of the selection of facts and differences in interpreting their meaning. Discourse should be regarded as a conversation, not a recitation of predetermined ideas and conclusions. Indeed, if there is any discourse in the sense of a conversation relevant to global politics, it is one of sheer complexity involving many voices, many readings of the “facts,” and many normative predilections. Moreover, to begin to understand global politics is necessarily to accept contradictions and ambiguities as part and parcel of that complex “reality.”

Contemporary debates about globalization illustrate some of the problems of getting at truth. Consider economic globalization. First, there are the problems of conceptual consensus and clarity. In measuring economic globalization, it makes a good deal of difference if one is looking strictly at the growth of international trade and investment, which has been advancing in fits and starts for well over a century, at the pace and volume of international currency flows for speculative purposes, or at the proliferation of mergers, alliances, and networks among firms. If we limit “globalization” to the growth of international trade and investment, as does Paul Hirst, we can conclude, as does Hirst,

that such “a process has been going on, punctuated by the interruptions of severe economic crises and wars, for well over a century.” Hirst identifies “three major phases.” The initial phase was “the belle-époque of 1870–1914, when world trade and output grew in parallel at an annual rate of 3.5 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively.” Thus: “By the late nineteenth century, the whole world had become part of a developed and interconnected commercial civilization.” A second period of growth extended from the end of World War II through the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, when trade grew annually at 9.4 percent and output at 5.3 percent. The final phase was 1973–79, when capital movements accelerated because of the deregulation of financial markets and floating exchange rates.16

The agenda behind Hirst’s definition of globalization becomes apparent when he stresses that the first two periods did not “undermine the nation-state” and that, in fact, “many modern nation-states were forged during the belle-époque and sustained by rapid industrial growth.” And he argues that, between 1950 and 1973, supposedly the “heyday of autonomy in national economic policy and of Keynesian demand management,” when governments cooperated, they could exercise a considerable amount of “supranational governance.” So has nothing changed? Hirst acknowledges that direct merchandise trade has become much less significant as capital flows have increased, but he avoids asking whether the vast speculative flows of currency that characterize the present are unprecedented and does not address what impact they and other globalizing trends might have upon state autonomy and capacity. Are current capital flows global in scope? Hirst notes that over 90 percent of foreign direct investment still takes place between and among rich countries, representing just over a quarter of the world’s population. His intention is twofold, first to demonstrate that much investment is not actually global but concentrated and, second, that as long as this is the case, the potential for the relatively small group of affected countries to design joint strategies for regulation remains high. He concludes that “governance [is] possible, given the political will and a measure of international consensus,”17 thereby introducing a powerful qualification of his forecast. The claim that the spatial scope of globalizing trends is limited is also found in observations that much of global economic activity emanates from a few “world cities” or that it is more intense in particular bilateral relationships and/or in certain regions.

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What about the spatial extent of transnational corporations (TNCs)? Are they globalized in terms of scope, structure, and market strategies? Hirst maintains that firms “are still multinational, not transnational; that is, they have a home base in one of the Triad [Europe, Japan, and North America] countries” and “are not footloose capital but are rooted in a major market in one of the three most prosperous regions of the world.”18 Yet TNC’s have spatial characteristics – sales, customers, production facilities, and currency holdings – that distinguish them from national enterprises. Corporate leaders are designing transnational and sometimes global strategies, and production and management structures are increasingly being integrated across vast stretches of the planet. New corporate networks and alliances abound.

For Jan Aart Scholte, globalization is “the spread of ‘supraterritorial’ or ‘transborder relations.’” This definition enables him to reach a very different conclusion than Hirst, even while accepting that relative levels of “cross-border trade, investment and migration a hundred years ago were roughly the same or higher than they are today.” What Scholte finds “distinctive” about contemporary globalization is that it involves “a fundamental transformation of human geography” in which the world has “acquired a (rapidly growing) global dimension alongside the territorial framework of old” that is reflected in spheres such as telecommunications, marketing, and “transworld finance.” As a result, Scholte concludes that “the territorialist assumptions which underpin modern understandings of ‘international relations’ have become untenable.” “[B]orders are not so much crossed as transcended.”19 In sum, the global political and economic worlds are not entirely old or new; they are worlds in transition.

Closer to Scholte than Hirst, still others, including co-authors David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton,20


view globalization as a multidimensional process or set of processes that involves not only the world economy and technology but also additional governance, military, cultural, demographic, human rights, and environmental dimensions. Moreover, whatever may be happening “globally” in any one of these dimensions, many analysts perceive that there are important local, country, regional, subregional, bilateral, city-to-city, and hegemonic patterns in the overall picture as well.

The way in which globalization is conceptualized is, then, evidently central to any assessment of whether the current era is novel historically. There were other periods in ancient history—for example, the ancient Mediterranean at the height of the Roman Empire—when at least a part of the world was highly integrated under a hegemon. During Europe’s Middle Ages, before tribal and ethnic identities had hardened into full-fledged national identities, political boundaries were indistinct, and merchants, artisans, and clerics moved across the continent with little concern about legal frontiers. We might also recall the heyday of the colonial empires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the globe was divided up by a handful of major European powers. Strict mercantilism had given way to the growth of interdependence and international trade, a single gold standard prevailed from 1870 to 1914, and European society and civilization (despite rising nationalism) could with some justification regard itself as a “proud tower.”


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which to measure change\textsuperscript{26} and little agreement regarding the nature of
the contemporary world or even what features of it are most important
to consider. Accounts differ as to how far we need to depart from the
“sovereign” psychology of recent centuries, and the research based on
that psychology,\textsuperscript{27} to redraw our own mental maps to take account of
shifting patterns of governance as well as identities.

Against a muddy background of competing definitions and historical
precedents—and for a further example of that competition—it is useful to
highlight the different stories told by two theorists, Stephen D. Krasner
and Rosenau, whose conclusions regarding the degree of continuity or
change in global politics at the start of the twenty-first century stand in
stark contrast to one another.

Rosenau examines “multiple contradictions” and anomalies in global
politics in his work on “a new and wide political space” that he terms
“the domestic–foreign frontier”:

The international system is less commanding, but it is still powerful.
States are changing, but they are not disappearing. State sovereignty
has been eroded, but it is still vigorously asserted. Governments are
weaker, but they can still throw their weight around. At certain times
publics are more demanding, but at other times they are more pli-
able. Borders still keep out intruders, but they are also more porous.
Landscapes are giving way to ethnoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes,
technoscapes, and finanscapes, but territoriality is still a central preoc-
cupation for many people.\textsuperscript{28}

Given accelerating change, he asks:

How do we assess a world in which the Frontier is continuously
shifting, widening and narrowing, simultaneously undergoing ero-
sion with respect to many issues and reinforcement with respect to
others? How do we reconceptualize political space so that it connotes

\textsuperscript{26} See K. J. Holsti, “The Problem of Change in International Relations,” in Ferguson
and Jones, eds., \textit{Political Space}, pp. 23–43.
\textsuperscript{27} For example, Andreas Osiander argues that the idea that sovereignty was established
during the Thirty Years War is false; he traces it to the nineteenth century and the period of
industrialization. See “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth,”
\textit{International Organization} 55:2 (Spring 2001), pp. 251–287. See also James A. Caporaso,
Order} 2:2 (Summer 2000). Similar dating is used by Eric Helleiner in “Historicizing Ter-
ritorial Currencies: Monetary Space and the Nation-State in North America,” \textit{Political
Geography} 18 (1999), pp. 309–339, as well as by Janice E. Thomson, \textit{Mercenaries, Pirates, and
Sovereigns} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) for state centralization of sovereign
war power.
\textsuperscript{28} Rosenau, \textit{Along the Domestic–Foreign Frontier}, p. 4.
identities and affiliations (say, religious, ethnic, and professional) as well as territorialisations? ... Under what circumstances does authority along the Frontier accrue to like-minded states, to global regimes, to transnational organizations, to subnational entities, or to coalitions of diverse types of actors?29

In contrast to Rosenau’s story of dramatic change, Krasner makes no secret of his fundamentally realist orientation. In Krasner’s story, differences in national power and state interests continue to share star billing in explaining global outcomes. At root, little of fundamental importance has changed, including international institutions: “There are no constitutive rules that preclude rulers from contracting to establish whatever kind of institutional form might serve their needs.” 30 States remain in control as “[t]hose seeking to maintain their own position and promote the interests of their constituents, can choose from among competing principles and, if they command adequate resources, engage in coercion or imposition. In a contested environment in which actors, including the rulers of states, embrace different norms, clubs can always be trump.”31 In Krasner, then, we get the outline of a persuasive story of globalization as the product of rules set by a few developed and developing states that retain the capacity to bring an end to the process if they wish to do so. Krasner’s story is an up-to-date and edited version of the classic realist tale that always begins with “once upon a time in Old Europe,” either with Westphalia (which Krasner downplays as a watershed event) or the end of the Middle Ages. The realist story is one about absolutist divine-right monarchs who gradually succeed in gaining the upper hand over aristocratic rivals at home and external challengers with universalist ambitions. Over time, boundaries are secured and mapped; “hard-shell” territorial states become the dominant polities in global politics; the principle of sovereignty legitimizes the rulers of states and comes to symbolize a claim both to domestic authority and noninterference from abroad; kings monetarize local microeconomies and steadily increase their capacity to tax; national treasuries swell; the money is used to create an administrative bureaucracy and to make war, first usually with hired mercenaries and then a national military; the state provides reasonable security from foreign predators and from upstart nobles and bandits.

29 Ibid., p. 5.