

ISSN-0972-9445

Emerging Trends in Development Research

Vol. 32, No. 1&2, 2025, 3-10

www.grefiglobal.org/journals

The Future of Nation-State and the Changing World Order

Virendra P. Singh*

Abstract

The notion of nation-states is closely related to the project of modernity that began in the 14th and 15th centuries in Europe and spilled over to Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the post-colonial period. The developing societies adopted the process of modernization (convergence thesis) for their development based on the experiences of European societies. However, they could not achieve much success in achieving the goals of modernity. Two dominant paradigms, socialistic and capitalistic models, of development advocate for a centrally administered nation-state and a federal structure of states within this. In the last few decades, the project of modernity has faced a crisis, particularly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union into 15 new nation-states. The capitalist countries of Europe and the American continent have also faced an economic crisis in the form of recession and initiated a new economic policy of liberalization, privatization, and globalization and a new global economy came into existence in the first decade of the 21st century with the rise of internet-based new communication technologies which intensified the globalization, beyond the economy and added cultural, social, political and environmental dimensions. A set of globalization theorists, particularly hyperglobalists, argue that nation-states have become weak and a new epoch of human history has begun with globalization. They also claimed the end of the modernity project. However, neo-Marxists and Sceptics denied their claims and argued that nation-states are as strong as ever, and globalization is just confined to trading that is also at the regional level, and rejects the notion of globalization. The present paper aims to analyze the future of nation-states in the era of globalization, in which the world order is transforming from a unipolar world to a multi-polar world.

Keywords: *Globalization, Nation-State, The Project of Modernity and World Order*

The concept of nation-states is closely linked with the project of modernity, which began in the 14th and 15th centuries in Europe and spread to Asia, Africa, and Latin America during the

*Virendra P. Singh is Former Professor of Globalization and Development Studies (UOA) Prayagraj & Chairman, Global Research and Educational Foundation India (GREFI) , Raj Nagar Extension, Ghaziabad-201017, INDIA; ORCID ID-<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6579-9998>

post-colonial period. In traditional civilizations, the political authorities (monarchs and emperors) had little direct influence on the customs and habits of most of their subjects, who lived in fairly self-contained local villages. With industrialization, transportation and communication became much more rapid, making for a more integrated 'national' community. Thus, the industrial societies were the first nation-states to come into existence. "Nation-states are political communities, divided from each other by clearly delimited borders rather than the vague frontier areas that separated traditional states (Giddens and Sutton 2017: 121). "The state is coterminous with the nation in most modern societies. Most contemporary states have military and administrative powers to unify the disparate elements of their population within well-defined borders and to give a sense of national cultural, linguistic, and perhaps, religious identity. . National governments have extensive powers over many aspects of citizens' lives, framing laws that apply to all those within their borders. Virtually all societies in the world are nation-states of this kind. *In recent history, the stability of the nation-state has been fundamental to world order or disorder* (Abercrombie et al. 2010).

Nation, Nationalism, and Nation-State

The concept of *nation state* is closely interlinked with the concepts of the 'nation' and 'nationalism'. According to Gellner (1983), 'nationalism', the 'nation', and the 'nation-state' are all products of modern development, whose origin lies in the French and industrial Revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Nationalism and the feelings associated with it do not have deep roots in *human nature*. Rather, they are products of new large-scale societies that industrialism creates. According to Gellner (1983), nationalism is unknown in previous forms of society. Several features of modern societies have led to the emergence of national phenomena. First, a modern industrial society is associated with rapid economic development and a complex division of labor. Modern industrialism, thus, creates the need for a much more effective system of state and government than before (*functional perspective*). Second. In a modern state, individuals must interact with strangers all the time, since the basis of society is no longer the local village or town but a much larger unit. Mass education, based on an 'official language' taught in the schools, is the main means whereby a large-scale society can be organized and kept unified (Gellner 1983).

This functional explanation of Gellner emphasizes the function of education in producing social unity, has been criticized on various grounds as it tends to underestimate the role of education in producing conflicts and divisions. It also does not explain the passions that nationalism can, and often does, arouse.

The power of nationalism is probably related not just to education but also to its capacity to create an identity for people, something that individuals cannot live without. Thus, the perceived threats to national interests can also be understood as threats to the integrity of people's self-identity. *The need for identity is certainly not born with the emergence of modern, industrialized societies*, as Gellner claims.

Thus, nation and nationalism cannot be strongly separated from pre-modern times. Nationalism, which emerged with modern society, is in some ways quite modern or different from such tendencies found in pre-modern societies.

Nations tend to have direct lines of continuity with earlier ethnic communities or what Smith calls '*ethnie*'. An *ethnie* is a group that shares ideas of **common ancestry, common cultural identity, and a link with a specific homeland**. Many nations do have pre-modern continuities, and at previous periods of history, there have been ethnic communities that resemble nations. (Example: Jews and Israel).

Nations have followed divergent patterns of development in relation to ethnies. In some, a single *ethnie* expanded so as to push out earlier rivals. In France, up to the 19th century, several other languages were spoken, to which different ethnic histories were linked. The French state forced school children to learn French and by early 20th century, French became the dominant language, and most of the rival languages largely disappeared. Yet remnants of these persisted, and many are officially encouraged again (Example: the Basque language and the demand for a separate nation, East Timor or Chechnya in Southern Europe).

Nations without states or sub-nationalism

The persistence of well-defined ethnies within a nation leads to the phenomenon of ***nations without states***. In these situations, many of the established characteristics of the nation are present, but those who comprise the nation lack an independent political community. ***Separatist movements***, as well as those in many other areas of the world, are driven to set up an autonomous, self-governing state.

Nations and Nationalism in Developing Countries

In most of the developing world, the course followed by nationalism, the nation, and the nation-state has been different from that of industrial society. States were imposed externally on areas that often had no prior cultural or ethnic unity, sometimes resulting in civil war after independence. This can be observed in many of the countries of Asia and Africa after independence, including India. Modern nations have arisen most effectively either in areas that were never fully colonized or where there was already a great deal of cultural unity, such as Japan, China, Korea, or Thailand.

Nation-state, National Identities and Human Rights

How globalization affects nationalism and national identity is discussed by Pilkington (2002), who argues that nationalism is actually quite a recent phenomenon, even though many nationalists claim their nations have histories stretching back into the mists of time. Until relatively recently in historical terms, humans survived in small settlements, largely unaware of what went on outside their own groups, and the idea of being members of a larger nation would have seemed alien. Only later, from the 18th century onwards, with the development of mass communications and media, did the idea of a national community develop and spread. It was during this period that national identities were constructed.

Crucial in developing a sense of *nationhood* was the existence of some “other”, against which a national identity was formed (British (protestant) vs France (catholic)), spread downwards from elite to masses with the spread of literacy level throughout. ***If national identity is socially constructed, then it is possible that it will change and develop, and one of the main factors in changing national identity today is globalization.***

Globalization and national identity

*Globalization produces conflicting pressures between centralization and decentralization, and as a result, brings about a dual threat to national identity.: **Centralization** creates pressure from above, for example, in the case of European countries, the European Union from above, and **Decentralization** creates pressure from below, through the strengthening of ethnic identities. (Giddens: 2017: 966).*

A parallel response is also found in some members of ethnic minority groups who, feeling excluded from national identity, strengthen their local identities and assert their differences from other ethnic groups.

*A second response to globalization is a healthier one, to accept that there are multiple identities- to argue, for example, that it is possible to be English, British, and European all at the same time. Such ‘**hybrid identities**’ are found among ethnic minority groups in the UK, such as British Asians and other ‘**hyphenated identities**’ (Irish Americans, Asian-Americans).*

Human Rights- Universal and Particular

It may appear obvious that the concept of individual human rights stands in opposition to organized violence such as war, genocide, and terrorism, but historically, this is not the case. Demand for the recognition of basic (human) rights first emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries in the context of intra-Christian conflicts and discrimination against Jewish people in Poland. But it was the French and American revolutions that led to the establishment of formal documents setting out human rights (United States Declaration of Independence, Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776); and the French Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789).

A global concept of human rights took root in the wake of the Second World War, prompted by the mass destruction of life and the deliberate targeting of civilian populations. This was set out in 1948 by the UN in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document ran to thirty Articles covering fundamental principles such as the right to life, liberty, privacy, and security alongside specific issues such as slavery, torture, cruelty, arrest, and detention, marriage, and property (UN 1948). It is important to note that this modern conception of human rights applies to everyone by virtue of being human, and in this sense, it has universal application.

Nation-states and the Universal human rights of the individual

Citizenship rights are provided and secured by the nation-states to their citizens, but there exists no similar global body or set of institutions that is capable of enforcing human rights

around the world, and human rights are not linked to any corresponding duties or obligations on the part of individuals.

However, some sociologists argue that human rights are socially constructed, locally developed, and achieved by communities, not imposed 'from above'. All ideas of universal human rights that are immediately applicable across cultures and societies are maintainable and unrealistic. It seems likely that the idea of universal human rights is an active utopia (Bauman 1982), like other hard-to-pin-down concepts such as socialism or sustainable development.

Despite these limitations, the process of working towards it is more important in establishing what real and practically achievable rights can be enjoyed by humans (Giddens and Sutton 2017).

War, Genocide, and Peace Processes

War as a normal social process: Marxist and Weberian scholars view conflict from the perspective of social classes, gender relations, and ethnic conflicts. Sociology as a discipline has not given prominence to the study of war and violent conflicts and has preferred to leave the subject to historians and military theorists. (reason normal state of affairs/abnormal state).

From a global perspective, the existence of wars is normal in human affairs, while real peace has been quite rare. The massive loss of life and human suffering demand that sociologists explore the causes and consequences of war.

If we fail to take into account of war, we can understand neither the constitution of modernity through the nation-states nor many of the social and cultural changes that have occurred in the modern age.

Theorizing War and Genocide: War is defined as "the clash of two organized armed forces that seek to destroy each other's power and especially their will to resist, principally by killing members of the opposing force". Organized killing is central to the actual practice of war. (Two World Wars in the 20th century). The central aim of war is to destroy the enemy's power, thus rendering it unable to resist.

Political leaders play an important role in the success of war by making important decisions. They require economic resources and play on real or created cultural differences in order to mobilize the population emotionally.

Historically, those killed in war have tended to be armed combatants rather than civilians, which shows that war was not simply chaotic, random killing – hence the idea of the "Rules of War" that regulates what opposing forces can legitimately do in combat and afterwards. However, at many times, these rules were violated in order to pressure the enemy. (Japanese massacres of more than 260000 Chinese in 1937; British fire-bombing of German cities in 1943; and American nuclear bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945). War is, therefore, a social phenomenon whose nature has changed over time.

The Changing Nature of War

Before the 20th century, most wars made extensive use of mercenary armies or men conscripted into armed forces. Weaponry consisted of swords and, latterly, firearms, and military transport was based on horses, horse-drawn carriages, and sailing boats. During First World War (1914-18), horses remained a major form of transport. By the time of the Second World War, weaponry and transport had changed considerably. Machine guns, tanks, chemical weapons, and aeroplanes make it much easier for armies to engage in the mass killing that characterizes war today. Use of drone strikes and massive air strikes, however, changed the scenario of the war in recent years. When the civilian population is intentionally targeted in war, the question of whether 'genocide' has been committed is now commonly raised (Examples: Gaza and Ukraine).

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such:

1. Killing of members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

(UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide - Article 2)

This definition of genocide was formulated in the context of Nazi Germany when a genocide of Jews had taken place during the Second World War and it was seen as separate from war. While killings in war can be legitimate (if the rules of war are not broken), genocide is, by definition, wrong. The US definition makes the intention to exterminate a particular group central to genocide. However, Shaw rejects the separation of genocide and war and notes that most genocides occur within interstate or civil wars. In most historic cases of genocide, states were the perpetrators, state armies, police forces, and party organizations carried them out, and they took place within the context of war. Hence, it may be more accurate to define genocide as a form of war in which social groups are the enemies. And it raises the question of whether the dominant form of war is changing.

Old and New Wars

Warfare is always based on the available resources, social organizations, and level of technological development of societies. Whereas old wars were fought by nation-states against each other, new warfare threatens to undermine the nation-state as the primary survival unit that guarantees the safety and security of individual citizens by challenging one of its basic characteristics: the state monopoly of organized violence.

The transnational connections involved in new wars challenge the state monopoly 'from above' while the 'privatization of violence' in paramilitary groups and the involvement of organized

crime threaten the state monopoly 'from below'. Low-intensity conflicts in Asia and Africa can be put in this category of war.

New war also erodes the boundaries between warfare among states, organized crime, and violation of basic human rights, as these have become linked.

The end of the Cold War is one factor in the rise of a new war. But more significant is the increasing process of globalization that began in the 1970s, carried along on the wave of new communication technologies. Globalization lies in the heart of new wars.

Centripetal forces were in an ascending role as the means of violence in the formation of nation-states. However, since the late 20th century, centrifugal forces have been gaining the upper hand as the means of violence become distributed more widely among populations. This kind of warfare may destabilize societies and peace processes.

Terrorism

Terrorism is a new form of war in the last few decades, which is different from insurgency. Insurgency is a kind of rebellion within a state who tend separatism from the existing state, based on a certain ideology or ethnicity. Terrorism is, however, a kind of proxy war through non-state actors against a nation-state sponsored by another state or its agencies. In certain cases, a network of different foreign agencies is active to provide logistical, financial, and weaponry support to these non-state actors against their enemy country (nation-state). Both the revolutionary and anti-revolutionary forces may be involved in the act of terrorism. The rise of *Taliban*, al-Qaeda, *ISIS* groups, *Jesh-e-Mohammad*, Laskar-e-Tuba, are some of the examples of terrorist groups. The Taliban became successful in overthrowing the existing government in 2021. Iran has also created several proxy war groups against Israel, particularly *Hamas* in Gaza, *Hezbollah* in Lebanon, and *Houthis* in Yemen.

New Terrorism is a phenomenon of Anti-modernism

A fundamental distinction can be made between old- and new-Style terrorism. The old-style terrorism has often had an external international component, drawing on external support, and campaigning for strength, but its ambitions are decidedly local or national. New terrorism is made possible by the digital revolution that has also driven globalization (Giddens and Sutton 2017: 983). This type of terrorism has become intimately associated with the fundamental Islamist networks of al-Qaeda and the social media presence of the Islamic State. However, it is by no means limited to these groups. The new terrorism also differs in its organizational structures, driven by a sense of mission and commitment that allows a fairly loose global organization to flourish (Glasius et al. 2002). New terrorism, although it has many similarities with new social movements (NSMs), differs significantly from them in the sense that while NSMs have made use of symbolic, non-violent direct actions, al-Qaeda has used symbolic violence to further its cause (Giddens and Sutton 2017: 984). There is a characteristic tension between modernism and anti-modernism in the worldview of al-Qaeda and similar groups. In attempting to re-establish the

Islamic dominance of large parts of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, they make great use of digital media to criticize modernity and adopt violence to reverse 'the project of modernity'. They also differ from the old terrorism in the scale of violence. The old terrorism has had a limited level of violence, while organizations like al-Qaeda emphasize large-scale violence to kill both civilians and military people at a large scale to achieve their targets.

Conclusion

The claim of hyper-globalizers that nation-states are losing power as a result of the globalization process is partially true. The modern nation-states are challenged and facing different kinds of social movements, low-intensity military conflict in the form of proxy wars, terrorism, and, in some cases, genocides by the states, political parties, or by some specific social groups. Ethnicity is an important factor that determines the social and cultural identity of individuals and social groups, even in the modern and globalized world. It plays an important role in the formation of new nations in the contemporary globalized world. Religious ideologies also challenged modernism and globalization in the last few decades. The world order is under a process of transformation, and the fate of nation-states is also uncertain. The warfare between Russia and Ukraine for more than the last four years, between Israel and Iran, and its radical outfits, has disrupted the world order. The international institutions created after World War II, like the UN and the WHO, are today powerless and have failed to play an important role in crises. It seems that we are now moving from a unipolar world (post-Cold War) to a multipolar world, and the future of nation-states today is uncertain.

References

- Abercombie, N., Hill, S., Turner, B. S. 2010: Dictionary of Sociology, Harmondsworth; Penguin Books.
- Bauman, Z. 1982: Memories of Class: The Pre-History and After-Life of Class, London" Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gellner, E. 1983: Nations and Nationalism, Oxford; Blackwell
- Giddens, A. and Sutton, P.W. 2017: *Sociology* (8th edition), Polity: Cambridge.
- Glasius, M., Kaldor, M., and Anheier, H. 2002; *Global Civil Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pilkington, A. 2002: 'Cultural Representation and Changing Ethnic Identities in a Global Age', In m. Holborn (ed.) *Developments in Sociology*, Ormskirk: Causeway Press.