# GLOBAL SECURITY IN 2020

*by Daniel Keohane*

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Perhaps surprisingly, the number of wars fought in the world has fallen since the 1970s. There has been a sharp rise in the number of conflicts within, rather than between, states. Intra-state wars now vastly outnumber inter-state wars, although sometimes a war within one state can spill over into its neighbours generating a regional conflict, such as the Great Lakes conflict in Africa. As a result, the number of UN peacekeeping missions has grown dramatically in recent years. In 1998 the UN deployed 14,000 peacekeepers worldwide; in 2005 the figure was over 60,000. Only three years since its first peacekeeping mission, the EU is already carrying out a dozen 'state-building' operations,

having deployed peacekeepers, policemen, border monitors and judges to places as diverse as Aceh, Darfur, Congo, Gaza, Moldova, Georgia and the Balkans. Including Iraq and Afghanistan, the 25 EU governments have roughly 60,000 peacekeepers deployed around the world – double the figure from a decade ago.

The EU will surely be occupied with intra-state conflicts over the coming decades. But there are many other challenges ahead, and the world will almost certainly be a more dangerous place in 2020 than in 2006. Global security is currently experiencing a period of great flux, but a number of trends are likely to solidify by 2020. These include the spread of weapons-of-mass-destruction (WMD); the collapse of failing states; and the possibility of a major inter-state war. In addition, military interventions in the future may be driven by energy needs, such as protecting oil pipelines from terrorist attacks in weak states, or assisting in the aftermath of natural disasters, like the Katrina hurricane in the US and the South Asian Tsunami. Some environmentalists and health experts caution that global pandemics, like SARS and birdflu will continue to be a real threat to human security for the foreseeable future. And even if wars between countries are less common than before, those that occur in the future will

be bloodier than in the past, mainly because many more states will have more advanced military hardware or even WMD.

## Loose nukes

Perhaps the greatest threat to global security in 2020 will be the spread of nasty weapons. Currently, nine countries have nuclear weapons. By 2020, Iran will probably have the bomb. There is a strong chance that the US (or Israel) will attack Iranian nuclear sites over the coming years, but whether or not that would prevent the Iranians from developing a nuclear weapon is unclear. Some in the US argue that aerial strikes would greatly disrupt Iranian ambitions. If Tehran continued its programme after aerial strikes then Washington should be prepared to attack again, perhaps even invade if necessary. Others point to the potential negative affects of aerial strikes: an Iranian backlash in Iraq and Afghanistan and/or a blockade of the shipping lanes in the straits of Hormuz, plus the increased chance of terrorist attacks in the West. They further argue that aerial strikes would actually speed up the Iranian nuclear programme because after an attack Tehran would surely conduct a 'crash course' in uranium enrichment.

It is unclear whether or not EU countries would be prepared to support military strikes on Iranian nuclear sites – that judgement would greatly

*The author argues that the global security environment in 2020 will be defined by the spread, or lack thereof, of nuclear weapons. Currently 9 nations have the bomb.*

depend on the behaviour of the Iranian regime. The key question looking to 2020 is not only that Iran will probably have nuclear weapons, but also what kind of regime will rule in Tehran? A democratic revolution in Iran is not inevitable and not inconceivable. The theocrats in Tehran are struggling to maintain their grip on Iranian society due to mass unemployment – hence their emphasis on nuclear weapons. In the future, Iranian moderates might regain the presidency, which could help develop a new security relationship in the West. But the tough question for Europe remains: is it enough to hope that Iran will have a democratic revolution before it fights a war with the West between now and 2020?

Some analysts say that the West can live fine with a nuclear-armed Iran, since it would be unlikely to use its weapons unless it was attacked. Even so, the bigger problem is that

once Iran gets the bomb, other countries in the Middle East will surely develop their own WMD. In effect there could be a WMD 'arms race' in the Middle East by 2020. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for instance, do not want Iran (a non-Arab country) to become the regional superpower. The Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, a British defence ministry think tank, has estimated that Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Syria could have chemical and/or biological weapons by 2020, and Egypt and Algeria could be on the verge of developing nuclear weapons. And not only countries in the greater Middle East may acquire WMD - China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Taiwan and Russia could all have chemical and biological weapons by 2020.

A number of countries may flirt with developing nuclear weapons. The widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons has been predicted since the 1950s, when Ireland first proposed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). Despite the NPT, a number of countries across the world did develop nuclear weapons programmes. But the good news was that at

*Global instability ranges from nuclear threat & aggressive nations to insidious low-level conflicts such as Darfur (top left)*

least 14 countries – including Australia, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Sweden, South Africa and Taiwan – eventually disbanded their programmes and signed the NPT. However, the future of the NPT regime looks bleak. Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (the UN nuclear watchdog), has said that as many as 40 countries could have the ability to manufacture nuclear warheads within a decade. Some of these countries already have civil nuclear programmes – Germany, Japan, South Korea and Turkey – and could easily make warheads. Others may try and acquire nuclear know-how clandestinely.

### The line of instability: failing states and terrorists

A number of studies show that democracy and prosperity is spreading around the world. However, a band of instability stretches from West Africa via the Middle East to Central and Southeast Asia, combining the triple challenge of state weakness; ethnic and religious conflict; and competition for natural resources. This heady mix has fermented a toxic brew that is poisoning development in most of the countries along this 'instability line'. Thomas Barnett, the American strategist, has called this "globalisation's ozone hole", meaning the group of countries where globalisation has not taken root or made any impact. Terrorists and proliferators of nasty weapons will thrive in many of these failing countries, which are struggling with war and poverty. In addition, 60 per cent of the world's known oil reserves are held in unstable countries.

The prospects for sub-Saharan Africa, which is strewn with civil and

there were 11,000 terrorist attacks, with Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Colombia and Thailand suffering the most fatalities. In the future, the regions most at risk from terrorism will be the Middle East (including North Africa) and Asia (South and South East Asia). In particular, the threat from Islamist terrorism will be greatest in predominantly Muslim (and developing) countries in these two regions.

Some Western analysts predict that by 2020 al-Qaeda will have been replaced by more diffuse, regionally based Islamist groups. Other analysts fear that Shiite groups, such as Hezbollah, might 'go global' in league with al-Qaeda-inspired cells. This would transform the nature of the Islamist terrorist threat, since Hezbollah are much better organised and equipped than al-Qaeda; and it would symbolise a new unity between Sunni and Shiite groups, which so far have not developed strong links. An Islamist extremist takeover of a Muslim country would also spur some terrorists to believe that the Caliphate (a theocratic dictatorship based on the Shari'a – a religious Islamic law) is not a pipe dream. All analysts agree that terrorists will try to acquire and use biological weapons and/ or radiological devices, which would cause mass casualties. They think it is less likely, although conceivable, that terrorists will develop and use even a crude nuclear bomb by 2020.

Religious politics will become increasingly important along the 'line of instability', and inter-religious conflict could grow by 2020. The CIA's National Intelligence Council points out that the number of religious adherents and activists will grow rapidly by 2020, in particular amongst Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. This could result in new types of inter-religious conflict, in particular between Muslims and Christians in countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Nigeria.

## New kids on the block

Doubtless the biggest change in global security by 2020 will be the rise of China and India as military powers. By 2020, the CIA thinks China will be spending close to $200 billion on defence, four times the current official Chinese figure and close to what the EU-25 collectively spend on defence today. Beijing will be the number two military power behind the US, having transformed its military by acquiring a wide range of high-tech weaponry – although it still won't be able to deploy forces around the globe as quickly as Europe or the US.

Some in Washington already predict that war with China is inevitable. But a major war

regional conflicts, do not look encouraging. Fully half of the top 20 countries in Foreign Policy magazine's 'failed states index' are sub-Saharan African states. Similarly, some of the resource-rich Central Asian and Caucasian states, such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, will also endure great instability and maybe even collapse in the coming years. All Central Asian and Caucasian countries face the stiff challenge of keeping the social peace in the face of high population growth, relatively young populations, limited economic prospects, and growing radical Islamic influence.

Middle-Eastern prospects look more mixed. Much will depend on the development of the Iraqi state and the Palestinian authority, which if successful could act as role models for others in the region. Some countries, such as Jordan and the Gulf states, should continue to grow economically and slowly develop more democratic forms of governance. Others, such as Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia, face huge internal demographic, economic and ethnic pressures, which could lead to their collapse. Plus, the recent electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt shows that there is also a chance that Sunni Islamists could gain power in one or more countries by 2020.

Unsurprisingly, Islamist terrorists are most active in countries along the instability line. In global terms, Europe and the US have much less to fear from terrorism than other parts of the world. Since 2001, over 80 per cent of terrorist incidents have occurred in five parts of the world: Colombia, Iraq, India-Pakistan, Russia and Thailand-Philippines-Indonesia. In 2005

**"By 2020 al-Qaeda will have been replaced by more diffuse, regionally based Islamist groups"**

between China and the US seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. For one, China has huge internal problems with growing instability, and terrorism is on the rise in the poorer western provinces. For another, Washington currently sees China more as a market than an enemy, and according to the CIA the rapid growth projected for US-China trade and finance to 2020 should help quell the prospect of conflict between Beijing and Washington. The wildcard in this scenario is Taiwan. Currently, that situation is relatively stable, and as long as Taiwan does not hold an independence referendum it is likely to remain so. However, based on current investments, the Chinese navy will be able to blockade the island by 2020, increasing the need for US involvement in a conflict if Taiwan cannot defend itself.

A more difficult question to answer will be China's relations with its neighbours: Japan, Korea, India and Russia. Chinese-Japanese relations have gone through a difficult period in recent years. Nationalism is growing in both countries, although so is their trade. Japan and Korea's relationship with China with greatly depend on developments in North Korea and over Taiwan. India, also conscious of China's rise, will probably spend as much on defence in 2020 as Britain, France and Germany. It should therefore have reformed its army and perhaps bought sophisticated weaponry from the US and Europe. Some in Washington like to think of India as a 'buffer' to China. But most Indians are wary of tying themselves too closely to one particular country. They are more interested in keeping good relations with everyone, including China, the US and Europe, to enhance their status as a rising global power. Both China and India are likely to take part in more UN peacekeeping missions in the future, especially in countries that supply energy to them. They are already sending more peacekeepers on UN operations in recent years.

China-Russia relations might be characterised by closer co-operation in the coming years. The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), which brings together China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, could evolve into a Central Asian anti-NATO 'axis of autocracies'. It is tempting to predict an impending conflict between two alliances – NATO and the SCO – citing the historical struggle between liberty and tyranny. However, the SCO is not yet a military alliance – it may turn out to be more like a trading bloc, such as ASEAN, than NATO. Plus NATO's future is far from secure and even if the SCO became
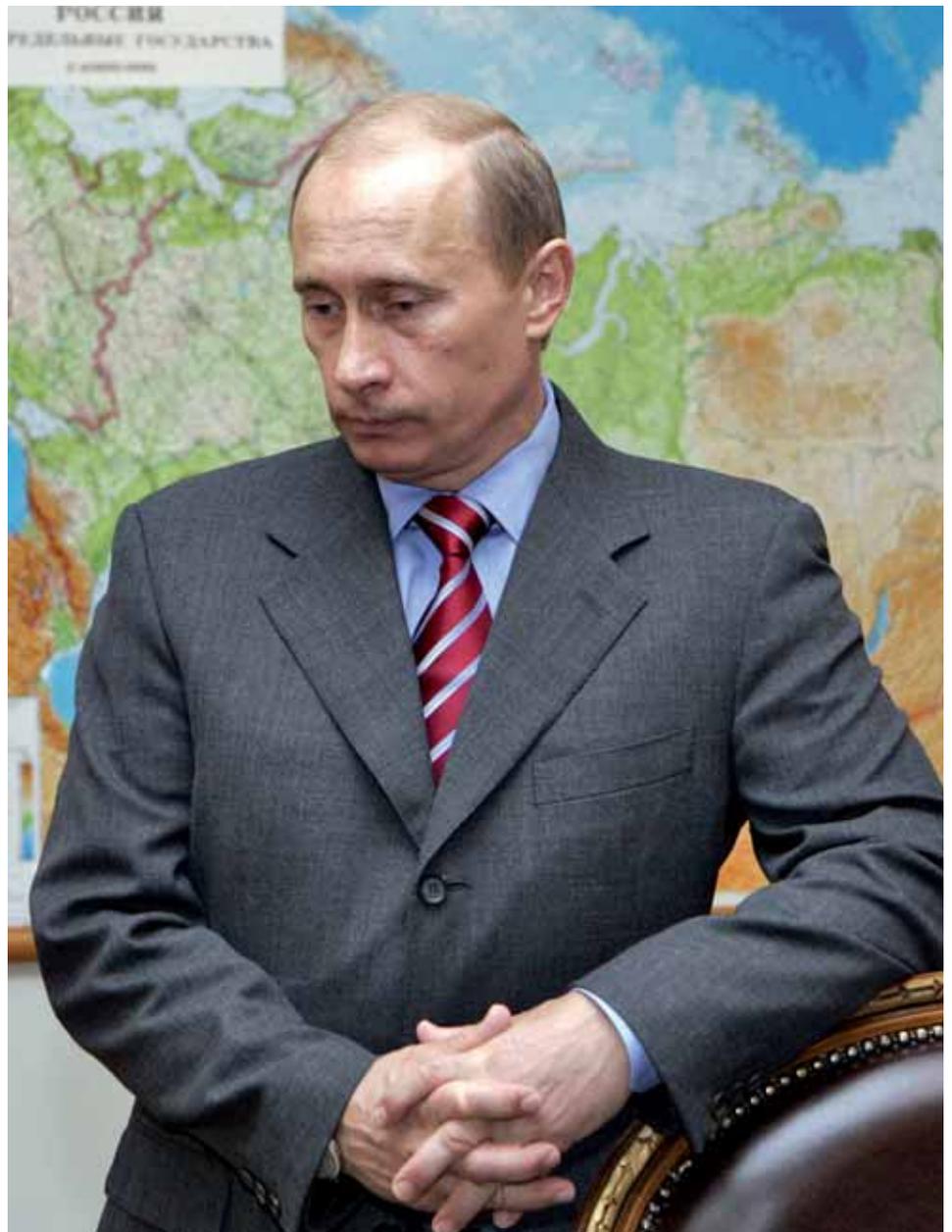


## "India, also conscious of China's rise, will probably spend as much on defence in 2020 as Britain, France and Germany"

*Under president Vladimir Putin, Russia has once again become a strident, increasingly self-confident power.*

a military alliance (perhaps with Iran joining by 2020 – it is already an observer at the SCO) it is not inevitable that NATO could clash with the SCO countries. After all, NATO and the Soviet Union did not fight a 'hot' war.

However, there is reason to believe that Russia and China will work more closely together in the future, which would cause great difficulties for the EU and the US. Already Moscow and Beijing are developing close relationships – and blocking US-EU sanctions – with autocratic governments in places such as Burma, Belarus, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and Uzbekistan. Robert Kagan of the Carnegie Endowment has described China and Russia as sponsors of an informal "league of dictators". That does not mean they will cement their co-operation with military

commitments to protect each other from the West. For one, Russia and China may find themselves in competition for affection from Central Asian and Middle Eastern governments such as Iran.

For another, as Kagan points out, they both need access to Western markets and share some interests with the EU and the US. But if Russia and China continue to oppose Western sanctions on autocratic regimes over the next decade, then by 2020 the greatest threats to global security could be a combination of a 'cold war' with the EU and the US on one side and Russia and China on the other, and a religious and ethnic-based terrorist warfare in unstable African and Asian states.

**"By 2020 the greatest threats to global security could be a combination of a 'cold war' with the EU and the US on one side and Russia and China on the other"**

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