

EMERGENCE OF A GLOBAL POLITY

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Summary

Global politics in the 21st century is much different from what it was 1000 years ago. A critical difference between these two points in system time is the rise of a global political system as an emergent property of the modern world system. The driver of this process has been the long cycle of global politics, powered by competition among major political units. At a higher level of organization, the century-long long cycle also activates a process of global political evolution in the broader context of globalization, a process that is an ongoing one. That is why in the decades and centuries ahead further changes are likely. This article sets out to answer the following questions: How much has the world system changed in the millennium between 1000 and 2000; how do we explain the emergence of a global polity, and what does that explanation tell us about likely structural change in the 21st century and beyond.

Introductory

The human world of today – and the way that people on this earth live and relate to each other in a world system – is the result of major changes in the past millennium. That

much may be obvious to anyone who gives even the most casual thought to that question. What might be less obvious is the way the politics of that world, and its organization, are also much different now from what was the rule, or ‘normal’, not so long ago. One striking change is the rise of the nation-state as the standard form of political organization; the other is the emergence, in the modern era, of global - level political system in step with the mounting rate of interactions of planetary scope. It is this second strand of developments that is the focus of this article.

1. The World in 1000 and 2000

Before 1000, in the ancient and classical eras (say from - 3000 to 1000) the prevailing form of political organization was, in global perspective, basically regional (and never planetary in scope) and was usually made up of two levels. In its earlier, simpler, forms the levels were urban and rural, the city being the seat of “civilization”; an early example being the city states of Mesopotamia some 3,500 years ago. In its more elaborate form it was imperial and local (or provincial), as in the classical examples of China and Rome, some 2000 years ago, with populations of about 50 million people each, both centered on major cities that were the seat of imperial courts, and hubs of administrative services. In the first case, Luoyang and Changan alternated as the great imperial capitals, in the second it was Rome, and then Constantinople. Both Imperial Rome and Han China regarded themselves as centers of their own “worlds”. While both maintained contacts beyond the sphere of their immediate interest, that is the Mediterranean, and East and Central Asia respectively, such these contacts were sporadic only, falling in intensity in proportion to their distance from the capitals, and limited in impact. There was a tentative network of communications between them, later dubbed the “Silk Roads”, but it was long, segmented, unstable, and insecure. It never reached the proportions of a global system. Empires were the principal form of large-scale of political organization, even if it is remembered that ‘large-scale’ meant political structures responsible for populations basically ranging between 5 and 50 million people – not so large by contemporary standards.

1.1 Global Political Institutions

Tables 1 and 2, supply some summary evidence for the proposition that global politics at the start of the 21st century is much different from it was one thousand years ago. Table 1 compares the political institutions of the two periods and highlights the major differences. In the most salient point, it is quite evident that the era of the year 1000 harbored no global political institutions. The diplomatic system was weak, basically one of messengers. True, the practice of dispatching diplomatic missions – for exploratory purposes, to arrange alliances, or to trade - was well established but it was none too frequent. Chinese practice combined tribute missions from client states with trading opportunities, but the Song themselves also paid a hefty tribute (in silk and silver) to the Liao Empire (a form of foreign aid that saved on military expenses). Formal multilateral organizations (such as e.g. NATO), as distinct from bilateral arrangements, are definitely unknown in the world of 1000. There was nothing like a global war but the 10th century has been called a dark period marked by aimless and anarchic strife: civil wars, raids from the hinterlands, and violence at the centers of power. The chief burden of organization was borne by a number of empires of dubious capacity shown in Table

1. The Moslem world, once commanded by the Abbasids' Caliphate and for a time the central precinct of the world system, was now divided, and under challenge from the Fatimids, the Buyid Turks having hijacked Baghdad and the Caliphate. China had only just recovered from the collapse of the Tang. By comparison, the global political system of 2000 was principally one of nation-states, but also equipped with a substantial range of global political institutions and capable of constructive development.

	1000	2000
Global political institutions	None	United Nations (189 member states) and United Nations system; G-7,G-8 summits; US global leadership; Resident diplomacy, International Law
Multilateral groupings	None	North Atlantic Treaty Org. (1949-) Shanghai Cooperation Org. (1997-)
Global wars (previous century)	None	World Wars I,II (1914-1945)
Forces of global reach	None	Global reach naval/air forces (USA, 20+ END Extended Nuclear Deterrence relationships) Strategic nuclear forces (USA, Russia (90 p.c. of 33,000 warheads); Space resources (US, EU, Ru, Ch)
Prominent units of political organization (m est. population)	Empires, including Song (Kaifeng), 60m, Fatimid Caliphate (Cairo15m) Buyid ShahinShah (Baghdad), Byzantium (Constantinople), Holy Roman Empire, 10m Cholas (Thanjavur)(10m); Japan (4.5m); Umayyad Caliphate (Cordova) (3m); Mahmoud of Ghazni; Liao (Lin-huang), Khmer (2m); Republics of Pisa, Genoa, Venice ...	Nation-states, including: China (1,346m), India (1,100m), United States (281m), Britain, France, Germany...(European Union 15 mbs.) Indonesia (211m); Brazil (191m), Pakistan (145m); Russia (142m), Japan (127m), Bangladesh (127m), Nigeria (115m), Mexico (100m).

Table 1: World System at 1000, 2000: political institutions

1.2 The World System

Table 2 looks at the world as a whole, and shows a world system that has expanded significantly between 1000 and 2000. It also suggests, in broad terms why, given such rapid expansion overall, the emergence of global political institutions was to be expected. That is most obviously so in respect of the world’s population: that grew by a factor of over 20. Similarly spectacular has been the growth in the total output of the world economy. If A. Maddison’s recent estimates are to be credited, world GDP rose at an even higher rate than world population, and so did per capita output, albeit somewhat slower. Both sets of figures suggest an increased complexity of interactions, and a greater degree of interdependence.

Higher urbanization, and democratization, as well as a two-order-of-magnitude increase in the size of libraries, (one index of the stock of information) suggest an enhanced capacity for dealing with the complexity created by demographic and economic changes. The data on the disparity of per capita product between Western Europe and China and India as stand-in for the developing world, point to one important set of problems that are still to be dealt with.

	1000	2000
* World Gross Product (T\$US1990)	0.117	37.2 (2001)
*WGP/cap (in US\$ 1990)	436	6 049 (2001)
World exports (T\$US)	(0.01?)	12.44 (2004)
Multinational enterprises		
* World population (m)	260	6 150
Democratization (democracies as % of world population)	n.app..	57
Peripheralization *(GDP/cap)(US\$1990)	Western Europe 400 China, India (av) 450 A:B 0.9	Western Europe 19,256 China, India (av) 2,520 A:B 7.6
World urbanization	>10	
• % urban	1	49
• No. “millionaire” cities		341
Major libraries (m books)	Cairo: House of Wisdom, 0.2 Kaifeng Imperial Palace 0.08	US Library of Congress 29 British Library 25

* A. Maddison, *The World Economy 1-2001 AD*, at www.ggdc.net/Maddison

Table 2: The world system in 1000, 2000.

Given the changes underway in the world at large, it is little wonder that new forms of political institutions would arise as one set of instruments for coping with these changes. What needs to be explored is: precisely by what mechanism was the emergence of a global political system mediated, and how, why, when and where, was it accomplished?

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Biographical Sketch

George Modelski is Professor Emeritus, Political Science, in the University of Washington. He co-edits

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