

NONKILLING GLOBAL SOCIETY

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Summary

This article presents the thesis that human beings can stop killing each other from the family to the global community. The goal of eliminating lethality from global life is set forth in the unprecedented WHO *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002). To achieve this goal will require contributions from every discipline, vocation, and culture throughout the world. One example is *Nonkilling Global Political Science* (2002). Following the logic of that book, this article first raises the question "Is a nonkilling

society possible?” It then reviews conventional thinking that nonkilling societies are impossible; introduces contrary evidence for nonkilling human capabilities; explores research, teaching, and social service implications for a new nonkilling political science; recommends problem-solving engagements to facilitate nonkilling social change; and identifies institutions needed to carry out nonkilling transformational tasks. It concludes with an appeal for global cooperation. No single country has all the wisdom, knowledge, skills and resources required to realize the WHO goal of removing killing from the human condition like any other disease that threatens the survival and well-being of humankind.

1. Toward Nonkilling Global Society

In 2002 two unique books were published with potentially transforming implications for realization of a nonkilling global society. The first was the WHO *World Report on Violence and Health* edited by Eugene G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano. The second was *Nonkilling Global Political Science* by Glenn D. Paige. The first identified human killing as a global public health issue. The second called for a new political science to eliminate killing from global life. Both books were interdisciplinary, science-based, optimistic, and global in perspective.

The WHO *World Report* affirmed: “Despite the fact that violence has always been present, the world does not have to accept it as an inevitable part of the human condition....Violence can be prevented and its impact reduced in the same way that public health efforts have prevented and reduced pregnancy-related complications, workplace injuries, infectious diseases, and illness resulting from contaminated food and water in many parts of the world....Violence can be prevented. This is not an article of faith but a statement based on evidence. Examples of success can be found around the world, from small-scale individual and community efforts to national policy and legislative initiatives” (p. 3).

Nonkilling Global Political Science concluded: “Nonkilling political science must be global. Global in discovery, creativity, diversity, and effectiveness....Global in determination to end killing everywhere or no one will be safe anywhere. Global in participation for no discipline, vocation, or society has all the wisdom, skills, and resources required....Is a nonkilling society possible? Is a nonkilling political science possible? Yes!” (pp. 161-162).

1.1. World Report on Violence and Health

In its unprecedented study of global killing, WHO estimated that in 2000 there were 1.6 million deaths resulting from suicide (50%), homicide (30%), and war (20%). Calculations were based on most recent figures between 1990 and 2000. The statistical findings for suicide and homicide were reported by country, age, gender, total number, and incidence per 100 000 population. For example, the United States in 1998 reported 30 575 suicides, 17.3 per 100 000, including 24 538 males and 6037 females. In the same year the Russian Federation reported 51 770 suicides, 32.1 per 100 000, including 47 785 males and 8985 females. For homicides in 1998 the United States reported 17 893, 6.9 per 100 000, 13 652 males and 4241 females. Russian Federation homicides

totaled 33 553, 21.6 per 100 000, 25 100 males and 8433 females (WHO, Tables A.8, A.9).

Over 160 experts from all parts of the world contributed to the WHO *World Report*. It contains nine peer-reviewed chapters devoted to violence as a global public health problem, youth violence, child abuse, violence by intimate partners, abuse of the elderly, sexual violence, self-directed violence, collective violence, and recommendations. Each chapter follows a similar pattern of definition, incidence, risk factors, consequences, prevention, and recommendations.

The unique significance of the WHO *World Report* resides not only in being the first comprehensive study of global killing, but also in defining human killing as a health problem to be treated like any other disease.

1.2. Nonkilling Global Political Science

Nonkilling Global Political Science (hereafter cited as NKGPS) may be the first book in the English language with “nonkilling” in its title. It begins by raising the question, “Is a nonkilling society possible?” This question is addressed primarily to political science professors and students throughout the world, but also to other disciplines, political leaders, and the public.

In six chapters, the book proceeds to review conventional thinking that nonkilling societies are impossible; to introduce contrary evidence for nonkilling human capabilities; to explore research, teaching, and social service requirements for a new nonkilling political science; to recommend problem-solving engagements to assist nonkilling social change; and to identify institutions needed to carry out nonkilling transformational tasks. In releasing the Tamil translation of the book at the India International Centre in New Delhi on February 3, 2004, former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral said, “This book should be read in very political science department and by the public.” In early 2005, the book was being translated into 21 languages—including Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, and Urdu. The English text is freely available at www.globalnonviolence.org.

Philosophy begins when someone asks a
general question, and so does science.

Bertrand Russell

2. Is a Nonkilling Society Possible?

But what is meant by a “nonkilling society”? The word “nonkilling” is not in everyday use and cannot be found in the Oxford English Dictionary. By a “nonkilling society” is meant a society, local to global, in which there is no killing of humans and no threats to kill; no weapons designed to kill humans and no justifications for using them; and no conditions of society that depend for maintenance or change upon the threat or use of lethal force.

There is neither killing of humans nor threats to kill. This may extend to animals and other forms of life, but nonkilling of humans is a minimum characteristic. There are no threats to kill; the nonkilling condition is not produced by terror.

There are no weapons for killing (outside museums that record the history of human bloodshed) and no legitimizations for taking life. Of course, no weapons are needed to kill—fists or feet suffice—but there is no intent to employ this capability nor technologically to extend it. Religions do not sanctify lethality; there are no commandments to kill. Governments do not legitimize it; patriotism does not require it; revolutionaries do not prescribe it. Intellectuals do not apologize for it; common sense does not commend it. In computer terms of this age, society provides neither the “hardware” nor the “software” for killing.

The structure of society does not depend upon lethality. There are no social relationships that require actual or threatened killing to maintain or change them. No relations of dominance or exclusion—boundaries, forms of government, property, gender, race, ethnicity, class, or systems of spiritual or secular belief—require killing to support or challenge them. This does not imply that such a society is unbounded, undifferentiated, or conflict-free, but only that its structure and processes do not depend upon killing. There are no vocations, legitimate or illegitimate, whose purpose is to kill.

Thus life in a nonkilling society is characterized by no killing of humans and no threats to kill; neither technologies nor justifications for killing; and no social conditions that rely upon the threat or use of lethal force.

Responses to the question, “Is a nonkilling society possible?” have been received over twenty years from political scientists and groups in the United States, Sweden, Russia, India, Pakistan, Jordan, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, Lithuania, Canada, Colombia, and other countries. The responses range from “It’s absolutely unthinkable!” (American political scientists) to “It’s completely possible” (a Korean political philosopher).

The customary American negative response is based upon three beliefs. First, *human nature*; human beings have always killed and will continue to do so. Second, *economic scarcity*; scarce resources will always lead to competition, conflict, and killing—forever. Third, *sexual assault*; males must always be prepared to kill to defend their female relations against rape. American females do not cite need to kill to defend males against rape, but rather to protect their children.

On the other hand, a completely positive response was received in Pyongyang in a 1987 interview with the president of the Korean Association of Social Scientists, Professor Hwang, Jang Yop, a leading political philosopher and party leader. First, human beings are not animals. They are endowed with “consciousness, reason, and creativity” and therefore are able to liberate themselves from killing. Second, scarcity of natural resources can be overcome by “productivity, creativity, and—most importantly—equitable distribution.” Third, rape can be overcome by “education and provision of a proper social atmosphere.” Asked to define “politics,” Professor Hwang replied, “Politics means the harmonization of the interests of all members of society on the basis of love and equality” (NKGPS, pp. 21-22, 91).

Various responses can be expected whenever the question is raised. For example, “I’ve never thought about the question before. I need some time to think it over” (Swedish futurist). “It’s not possible, but it’s possible to become possible” (Japanese educational philosopher). “We know that humans are not violent by nature, but we have to fight in self defense” (Jordanian political scientists). “There are no jobs. I have to kill to take care of my two daughters” (young Colombian killer). “When the gap between the rich and the poor closes, we won’t have to kill anymore” (another young Colombian killer) [NKGPS, pp. 19-23].

Such responses are not only a product of detached personal opinion but are conditioned by contextual, political, economic, social, cultural, and historical factors. For example, political science education in the United States tends to produce nonkilling pessimism in a society that celebrates violent victories from the American Revolution to its emergence as the greatest military superpower in history. Furthermore, it is a society that is subjected to daily news of killing, at home and abroad, and that seeks entertainment in fictionalized lethality from murder mysteries to “blockbuster” action films.

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Biographical Sketch

Glenn D. Paige is professor emeritus of political science, University of Hawaii, and founder-president of the Center for Global Nonviolence in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA. Educated at Princeton (AB), Harvard (AM), and Northwestern (PhD), he is the author of *The Scientific Study of Political Leadership* (The Free Press, 1977) and *Nonkilling Global Political Science* (Xlibris, 2002). By 2005 *Nonkilling Global Political Science* was being translated into 21 languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Italian, French, Japanese, Mongolian, Russian, Spanish, Swahili and Urdu. He is the recipient of the 2004 Distinguished Career Award of the Ecological and Transformational Politics Section of the American Political Science Association.