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DURHAM, N.H. – Despite gloomy reports on the global war on terrorism, international recession and global warming that dominate the news, the world as a whole has become more open, stable and resilient since the end of the Cold War, according to a new report prepared by researchers at the University of New Hampshire and George Mason University.

According to "Global Report 2009," the third annual report on globalization and the global system, the global magnitude of warfare is now at its lowest level since 1960. Also, democracy has become the predominant form of governance for the first time in history and the problem of state fragility has decreased by nearly 20 percent since 1995.

Published jointly by Mason's Center for Global Policy and the independent Center for Systemic Peace, the report was written by Monty Marshall, research professor of public policy at Mason, and Benjamin Cole, Hood House Lecturer of international affairs at the University of New Hampshire. The 2009 report was produced with the support of the One Earth Future Foundation.

"The 'downside' of the dramatic decrease in armed conflict since the early 1990s, is an equally dramatic expansion in the number of postwar 'recovery states,'" Marshall says. He suggests that it is this complex postwar environment that compels the more fortunate states like the United States to become more engaged.

Marshall also states that this "political will to help" in so many locations can overwhelm the leading and donor states' capacity to act successfully in any particular location.

"The results of our analysis suggest that the global system as a whole is recovering, not through micro-management or military intervention, but through the concerted efforts of its citizens, as well as multilateral assistance," Marshall says.

Although the report is generally positive about recent trends in state fragility, it also notes that the across-the-board improvement has not contributed to a lessening of the "fragility gap." Net improvements in the highly fragile regions encompassing Africa and the Middle East have further divided those regions between improving areas and stagnating, or even worsening, areas.

"Truly alarming," co-author Benjamin Cole says, "is that despite tremendous efforts by NGOs and foreign aid agencies to improve quality of life in fragile countries, we see virtually no net improvement in economic indicators and only modest improvement in social indicators in the most fragile regions."
The report also identifies some major global concerns. First, militancy across the oil producing region spanning western Africa through the Middle East has the potential to trigger a conventional, regional war. Next, marauding militias plague many countries in central Africa, feeding the world's worst ongoing humanitarian crisis. Finally, drug, sex and arms trafficking give global organized crime networks incredible economic leverage and the political clout to subvert good governance.

The report concludes on a sobering note. "We caution that the observed global progress since the end of the Cold War has largely been purchased with a 'peace dividend' that may now be largely spent."


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