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Globalization and Enmeshment: Implications for Foreign Policy

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Title: Globalization and Enmeshment: Implications for Foreign Policy

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Abstract. This article posits that national strategies of self-harm may become more adaptive in a world of increasing globalization.

In a pre-globalization world, one might more easily imagine political entities, e.g., nations, countries, power groups, as specific entities. Each entity would be intent on minimizing comparative weaknesses and maximizing comparative strengths. Each entity might be viewed by others as a potential ally, neutral, or adversary. Or as a potential victim. Bilateral and multilateral estimates of individual strength would be effected much as the relative positive and negative charges of a particle among particles might be. In this pre-globalization world conflict would be avoided, decreased, increased and managed through specific interactions with other entities and presenting the most compelling combination of strengths.

In a world of globalization, political entities may be becoming less specific, less discrete, less defined by boundaries and by intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. Instead of operating as a particle among particles, one functions within a field with properties that only can be defined very loosely in relation to others--cf. locally, regionally, ever more distally. The very sense of self-identity becomes problematic, the very sense of self-control tenuous. One senses becoming engulfed without a sense of independence, of being anyone or anything. In such a world, presenting the most compelling combination of strengths becomes unlikely, bizarre, even antithetical to one's own sense of ontology.

What may be happening--as the world continues to become interdependent and integrated in so many ways, as the notion of an independent entity is threatened by its context, as the meanings of independent, entity, and context are being threatened--is the enmeshment of political entities within the political field, much like the enmeshment of individuals within the family or other social grouping. And as with enmeshment, the conflict strategy of choice can involve what appears to be self-handicapping or self-harm.

To an individual, such conflict strategies include degrees of self-denial, asceticism, self-mutilation, seizing defeat from the jaws of victory, chronic tendencies of self-defeating behavior, anorexia and may be typified primarily as combinations of ideologies, emotional reactivities, and external behaviors. To the political entity, such conflict strategies include over and undervaluations of currency, deterioration of law and order, the reduction of political coherence, shortfalls in feeding populations, difficulties in making debt payments, loss of influence over pollution phenomena and medical contagion, civil war, and the imminent dispersal of large numbers of its citizens.

Strategies of self-handicapping and self-harm--apparently counterintuitive and paradoxical--have significant benefits for an individual enmeshed in a family, or political entity enmeshed in a political field. (1) The strategies constitute mechanisms of self-control. As chaotic or damaging as they be, they contribute to developing a clearly-defined identity with boundaries defined by an ever-increasing sense of self. (2) The strategies induce rescue and survival, even exploitive, initiatives of others. The reinforcing nature of this inducement is that one is in control of more powerful others. Before this

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inducement one was a reactive nobody. (3) The strategies even cause pain and suffering in others through the assets dedicated to the purveyor of the strategies as opposed to other needs of others, and through the sense of discomfort experienced at least by the more empathetic of the others. (4) As with Edgar in Act IV, Scene I of Shakespeare's King Lear, if one can reach the very bottom of existence, one has nothing more to fear. Any change can only be positive. (5) As one overcomes oneself through some variant of asceticism, one can naturally be--refusing the options of conformity of killing the truth with allegedly truthful labels as may be implied by Nietzsche in *The Dawn*. (6) Also following Nietzsche from *Beyond Good and Evil* overcoming more seemingly natural tendencies for pleasure and material acquisition is the essence of moral behavior amidst a sea of the immoral and the amoral.

The enmeshed family is a term of social and psychological pathology. If this applies as well to the enmeshed political field, the era of globalization may augur less a cornucopia of human progress than chaos theory writ large. (See Ellis, L. (1994.) *Psychic diffusion and captive minds: The possibilities for limitations of therapy with children of invasive mothers*. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 20, 243-266; Green, R. J., & Werner, P. D. (1996.) *Intrusiveness and closeness-caregiving: Rethinking the concept of family enmeshment*. *Family Process*, 35, 115-136; Herpertz, S. (1995.) *Self-injurious behaviour: Psychopathological and nosological characteristics in subtypes of self-injurers*. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 91, 57-68; Hibbard, S. K. (1994.) *The mechanisms and meanings of self-cutting*. *Modern Psychoanalysis*, 19, 45-54.) (Keywords: Enmeshment, Globalization, Self-Harm.)