

A New Internationalism?

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The weak and intellectually bankrupt label “post–Cold War era” may now be fading after its decade of overuse. Recent military engagements in Kosovo and Iraq, political developments in South Africa and South America, and financial turmoil in Asia and Russia have forced us to push our thinking in different, more forward-looking directions. Our world is being defined in new ways by recent decisions. Volume 13 of *Ethics & International Affairs* aims to make us fully aware of this process.

Whatever it becomes, the new label or term of art for describing international politics on the eve of the twenty-first century is less important than the actual decisions that will be made under its influence. We can already begin to see some of the emerging contours of the next era if we look carefully at the choices being made. Now is the time to decide if we are on the course that we want to be on.

Charles Krauthammer, stating the archrealist argument, has asserted that the very idea of “international community” is a fiction.¹ One need only consider recent events in the former Yugoslavia or Sierra Leone to see his point. The notion of a world community with “shared values” has obvious limits. Yet we also know that Krauthammer makes his claim at a time when efforts to bolster the idea of an international community based on shared values proceed vigorously even if with mixed results. A short list of such efforts would include war crimes trials (resulting from events in Rwanda and Bosnia); the adoption of a statute for an International Criminal Court; the signing of treaties and conventions on land mines, global climate change, and nuclear nonproliferation; and the growing awareness of the power and global responsibilities of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Is the world coming together, or coming apart? And what are we to make of this contradiction?

The realists remind us that moral aspirations must be considered in relation to interests and power. Good intentions alone are not enough. What is needed is an integrated approach—an approach that recognizes that values and ideas compete. As Isaiah Berlin has taught us, the narrow pursuit of single virtues

¹ Charles Krauthammer, “A World Imagined,” *The New Republic*, March 14, 1999, pp. 22–25.

can do more harm than good: freedom can conflict with order; justice can conflict with mercy; truth can conflict with loyalty. There is no escaping the hard reality of human existence: imperfect choices must be made.

In this issue of *Ethics & International Affairs* some of these alternatives are brought into clear view. If these choices have been latent—like the figure in the carpet that is “hidden” in plain view—the essays that follow should help to lift them from the obscurity that can come with overexposure and insufficient analysis.

The ideas that are held about international community, human rights, economic fairness, the appropriate use of force, and the power of our collective memories have real consequences in terms of policy outcomes. If humanitarianism and human rights are asserted without sufficient reflection on appropriate means of implementation, the results will be morally problematic and perhaps dangerously unpredictable. If the “logic” of economic globalization is accepted blindly and uncritically, there may be morally troublesome consequences, especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. If the moral restraint suggested by just war theory is not heeded, there is a risk that force will be used immorally. And if past injustices and our national mythologies are not confronted candidly, we will not have done our duty as citizens. It is here at the intersection of power, principle, and practice where our attention is needed. It is to these concerns that the following pages are dedicated.