

TAKING SIDES 立场

辩证思维训练

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7TH 第7版
EDITION

外语教学与研究出版社



SIDES立场

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全球问题篇

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CLASHING VIEWS ON
GLOBAL ISSUES

(美) JAMES E. HARF
MARK OWEN LOMBARDI 编

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Members of the Academic Advisory Board are instrumental in the final selection of articles for each edition of *TAKING SIDES*. Their review of articles for content, level, and appropriateness provides critical direction to the editors and staff. We think that you will find their careful consideration well reflected in this volume.

TAKING SIDES: Clashing Views on GLOBAL ISSUES

Seventh Edition

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英语思辨，攻错他山

朱绩崧

学界奉为主臬的《牛津英语大词典》（*The Oxford English Dictionary*）在 side (n.)¹条目的18.a.义项里，把18.b.所收词组“to take a (or one's) side, take sides. Also to hold side (with one)”里的side解释为[t]he position or interests of one person, party, etc., in contrast to that of an opposing one，个人立场相反、党派利益对立之意，了然无疑。

惜我愚钝，近年才明白，take sides不仅仅是英语词典里的一个词组，甚至可说是英国议会制度的根本；而议会制度，实在是英国对人类文明进步最大的贡献之一：通过take sides，把思辨，而非独断专行，尊奉为国事决策那不可撼动的核心机制。我们不会忘记，电影《铁娘子》（*The Iron Lady*）里梅里尔·斯特里普（Meryl Streep）新学一口英国腔就来西敏寺宫滔滔激辩的场景，那不是骂街，虽然嘘声迭起，那是两股思想在龙争虎斗，最终推进历史。

谈到西方好争论、善思辨的传统，古希腊已臻化境，垂范千古。但这并不意味着我国真如某些评论家所言，为定于一尊的儒学所戕害，使得读书人唯服从传承是务，从不挑战权威。

《古文观止》读到最后几卷，便会看到编注者吴楚材、吴调侯叔侄鼓励读者对古时定论大胆质疑的用心。如建文忠臣方孝孺的名篇《豫让论》，标新立异，一反古说，直指春秋时代为主雪仇的刺客豫让“不能扶危于未乱，而捐躯于既败者”，不配“国土”之誉。

甚至，在我们历史课本一向蔑之为“埋头故纸”、“皓首穷经”的乾嘉学派里，多数学者的考据也都具有很高的思辨性。从王念孙的《读书杂志》、刘宝楠的《论语正义》，到戴震“由字义以明经义”的治学方法和段玉裁《东原先生年谱》所载的戴氏札记——“仆生平著述最大者为《孟子字义疏证》一书，此正人心之要。今人无论正邪，尽以意见误名之曰理，而祸斯民，故《疏证》不得不作”——从文本到现实，立场鲜明、无不指向对真理的上下求索。

读书为求真。这句话，是儿时由老师灌输给我的，我不曾怀疑过。可也正是老师告诉我“乾嘉学派在历史上的作用是反动的”、“高考答题时，如遇到岳飞，不能勾选为民族英雄，他打的仗是人民内部矛盾”等等当年不容我怀疑辩驳的“事实”。

往事固不可追，令我大失所望的却是“寓教于乐”、“反对应试教育”了不知凡几年，中小学生在变本加厉地背记历史、语文的“标准答案”，到了易只字则为错的地步。有人甚至把中小学生对语文水平的普遍降低归咎于英语课太多，视母语、外语修习为零和博弈，全然不去审视、拷问、批判当下严重阻碍思辨与创造的文科教育体制本身。试问这样的教育，又如何能培养出活泼泼的人来？如何能引导他们求真？

求真，真真何其不易也。有时，权威发声，莫敢深究。有时，缺乏条件，无从寻觅。信息爆炸、思路开阔的今天，更多情况下是众说纷纭，莫衷一是，乃至有时在“是”与“非”这两者之间，都不知何从矣。

而相对综合型、重意合（parataxis）的汉语，英语是分析型语言，重形合（hypotaxis），语法规则更明确，对指代、性数格一致等形式要求更高，且有强烈的时态观。不能不说，这在很大程度上避免了汉语常见的因文害意：把一些站不住脚的歪理，用华丽辞藻一包装，就算是“美文佳构”了。（这方面，韩愈的个别名作，如为名教张目的《原道》，可算反面教材，远逊柳宗元的《驳复仇议》。后者的论理，简朴而流畅，本质上与今天英美法院经典判词如出一辙，堪称我国古代taking sides的典范。）加之英美学者好辩的传统在当代通过课堂教育、学术论文等形式得以强化，思辨的局面委实优于我国。

我素为古罗马倾倒，曾读国人编著的几种罗马史，又看了英国剑桥大学克里斯托弗·凯利（Christopher Kelly）教授写的《罗马帝国简史》（*The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction*），后者末章呈现的学者思辨生动别致，过目难忘，非我国传统重介绍“史实”的史书可比：20世纪初，英国历史学家、律师、自由党政治家詹姆斯·布赖斯（James Bryce）认为罗马帝国与大英帝国非常相似，都能维持高水平的内部和平与秩序，民人深谙工程技术，勇猛活跃，不畏困苦；牛津古代史教授弗朗西斯·哈弗菲尔德（Francis Haverfield）进一步说明，罗马帝国的成功，在于把行省居民同化为一个秩序井然、富有凝聚力的文明；曾奉职印度的英国古典学会会长埃弗林·巴林（Evelyn Baring）持不同看法，在“同化”问题上，大英帝国与罗马帝国有不可弥合的区别，单论印度语言、宗教、种族的多样性，就和罗马人征服的任何地区不同；哈弗菲尔德不同意巴林，认为英国之所以有印度问题，是因为征服印度时，印度已经发展成发达社会，文明形态稳固；牛津的古代史专家、考古学家D. G. 霍加斯（D. G. Hogarth）也反对巴林，认为罗马帝国有三个阶段，即“尚未同化”、“有意同化”、“积极同化”，大英帝国对印度犹处“尚未同化”的第一阶段。

把学者taking sides过程中的各种观点陈列出来，供读者思辨，是我国各阶段教材的短板。同时，也应注意，为提高我国学生的思辨水平以及英语能力，taking sides的内容不宜学科专业化程度过高（上述关于罗马帝国与大英帝国的争辩即有此虞），还是具有一定社会影响力、为民众熟知的话题更宜为组织教材的出发点。

美国著名的Taking Sides丛书，其宗旨正在于满足成长中的思考者兼英语学习者的需要。这套书系，诞生于20世纪80年代，迄今出版52种专题分册，多数一版再版，其中传媒凡12版，经济、环境达15版，社会、教育更已有17版之多。畅销程度，不劳赘言。

从题材看，外研社首批择取的七册分别覆盖了社会、教育、经济、环境、科技、大众传媒与全球性问题，无一不是当下公众话题的焦点。但呈现的手法却很“单一”，即先提出问题，再摆出正反双方最典型、最具说服力的论证，最后引导读者作进一步的阅读与思考：

问：计算机对学生成长是否有副作用？

正：有。学校对电脑技术的迷信与滥用，导致学生心智发育与创造力受损。

反：无。如对电脑善加利用，能促进教学革新，从而使学生获益。

后记：“学校”或许正在由“地点”转变为“概念”，随着计算机技术的进步，许多教育手段都不必在课堂实施，但随之而来有许多新问题，需要探讨。多媒体能让学生与更多的信息产生互动，但往往也减少了学生与学生、学生与所在环境之间的互动。相关研究请见……（扩展阅读涉及三十余处学术资源）

（《教育篇》第10话题）

目录并不冗长，但当读者学完全书，必会惊喜地发现，自己在这一领域的知识结构已搭建得初具规模。摆在面前的问题往往庞大空疏，报章常见，迄无公断。从这个角度思考，有这样的道理可知；从那个方面切入，有那样的结论可得。读者的任务，就是跟着两派的思路各走一遍，最终判定哪派有理。当然，结果也可能是两派皆不尽善，或者需要修正调和之后才能获得正解。但无论如何，这一过程本身，实在是智力上的一次奥德修斯式的旅行（an intellectual odyssey）。

之所以要用荷马史诗的隐喻，是因为读*Taking Sides*与看街边吵架或中学生议论文最根本的差别，就是需要调用的思想、学术资源极多。以《社会篇》第8话题为例，菲利普·迪瓦恩（Philip E. Devine）在得出“酷刑不可保留”的结论之前，将自由主义政治学、康德学说、功利主义、自然法等一一引出，要言不烦。对迪瓦恩这位哲学学者而言，这些理论或许早已熟烂于胸。但对一般读者而言，为了确证作者没有断章取义，至少得就上述内容再读通几本导论、简介之类的书。顺便一提，酷刑当否的问题，我在近年畅销的一部法律通俗读物《法治》（*The Rule of Law*）论恐怖主义的一章中，也曾读到评论。作者、已故英国前首席大法官汤姆·宾厄姆（Tom Bingham）反对向恐怖主义犯罪嫌疑人施以酷刑的理由本质上与孔子的“己所不欲，勿施于人”无异，认为这是对法治原则的破坏。与迪瓦恩相较，其说直指人心，唯于学理微缺然。

事实上，*Taking Sides*书系所选文章，无论篇幅修短，莫不观点鲜明，针锋相对，而每一方都有强大的理据支撑，乍看难以撼动。由此，我们也不得不感叹，人类文明在今天呈现出的多样性，自有其道理，无论是同一文明内还是不同文明间发生的碰撞冲突，其背后都有复杂的理性动因，绝非皂白可以分明，需要我们全面观察，深度分析，最终选定立场。

我出身英文系，工作后常应媒体之邀，写些时事评论。落笔之前，现已养成习惯，会去新浪微博、知乎、Quora等网站，浏览各方的理性评论，在争议极大的问题上，熟悉*Taking Sides*封面上印的那两个词：Clashing Views（对立观点）。这是我在“后大学”时期补上的一堂课。

回想本科求学时，这方面所受教育几乎为零。教育的重点是背同义词、反义词

与词形变化。文章，读通便好，却读不透，因为读通之后，总觉所言有理，不会想着去倾听“不同的声音”。这个弊端，到写毕业论文时曝露无疑：说明文还凑合，议论文就写不好了。名虽论文，连核心的论点都渺不可寻。这几年，本专业内，我还常常看到号称博士论文的研究综述，或者连文献回顾都没有的论文。

为了矫正这一通病，不少学校从编教材上下功夫，课文引入争议性话题，意在以此激发学生的critical thinking——“批判性思维”遂成高校英语教师培训班级极为青睐的广告亮点。可惜，在我有限的学术视野内，能一变风气的作品，尚阙如焉。我看到过浅尝辄止者，其内一篇课文，取自美国某小报，讲一对夫妻人工受孕后离婚，胚胎留在医院冰箱里，不知如何处置，遂对簿公堂。最终，作者只是提出问题，没能向学生指出解决的途径。如果有至少两种具备一定思想深度与差异性的观点呈现在教材里，附上扩展研读的书目、提要，教育的效果定会面目一新，我们也会真正地开始在语言教育中培养思想者，而不只是机械的记忆者、复制者。这一任务，如前所示，*Taking Sides*完全胜任。

我乐于推荐该书系作精读教材的另一项理由在于语言质量。就量而言，目前的精读课（Intensive Reading），阅读量普遍过低，一两千词的文章，一读就是十天半月，课程设计者不明白唯有大数量与短时间的结合，方成就intensive之效。与此相比，以本书系一卷之量，读一学期，日均1500词左右，恰到好处。以质而论，本书系符合我的外语习得理念：中高阶学生，应以非虚构作品（non-fiction）为“主食”。例如，本书系中有大量美国国会证言（congressional testimony），思维严谨，语言地道，学习西方法律、外交以及高等翻译等专业的学生如能熟读成诵，其英语学习的眼界势必更上层楼。从实用的角度看，有理、有力、有节的明快文风才是日常工作、生活所需，是语言的“常态”；文学作品中因作者意图而创造出的丰富表达，只是语言的“变态”。由常入变，初地坚固，发展空间亦大。反是，恐事倍功半。

至于“泛读”，也有一个基于*Taking Sides*的策略可行：各个话题牵涉到的著作，一学期可读上三五本。如读《环境篇》，可辅读雷切尔·卡森（Rachel Carson）的《寂静的春天》（*Silent Spring*）；读《科技与社会篇》，可辅读阿道司·赫胥黎（Aldous Huxley）的《美丽新世界》（*Brave New World*）。此时，不妨多些文学作品，加深对“精读”义理的体悟思辨，可全“文以载道”之功。

此外，*Taking Sides*对如今各高校流行的英语辩论也有直接的指导作用，无论其辩题还是论据，都可在模拟阶段直接取用。我更相信，认真研读过本书系的学生，其论文一定不会沦为简介、综述，不会抄袭维基、百度，因为他们掌握了论文写作的核心技术：如何灵巧运用事实与逻辑来作严肃的学术之论，而非执着于印象、习惯、偏见的意气之争。

总之，希望*Taking Sides*书系的引进，能综合我国英语学生的语言习得与思维训练，既提升交流的效率，更开启求真的法门，在乱云飞渡的当今时代，帮助读者迅速达成思想之质与辞藻之文的兼美共谐。



Topic Guide

This topic guide suggests how the selections in this book relate to the subjects covered in your course. You may want to use the topics listed on these pages to search the Web more easily. On the following pages, a number of Web sites have been gathered specifically for this book. They are arranged to reflect the units of this *Taking Sides* reader. You can link to these sites by going to <http://www.mhhe.com/cls>.

All issues and the articles that relate to each topic are listed below in the bold-faced term.

Al-Qaeda

9. Are We Headed for a Nuclear 9/11?

Capitalism

8. Is the Global Economic Crisis a Failure of Capitalism?

Drugs

5. Can the Global Community "Win" the Drug War?

Energy

2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?

Food

2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?
3. Will the World Be Able to Feed Itself in the Foreseeable Future?

Global Environment

2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?
3. Will the World Be Able to Feed Itself in the Foreseeable Future?
4. Is the Threat of Global Warming Real?
9. Are We Headed for a Nuclear 9/11?

Global Resources

1. Does Global Urbanization Lead Primarily to Undesirable Consequences?
2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?
3. Will the World Be Able to Feed Itself in the Foreseeable Future?
4. Is the Threat of Global Warming Real?

Global Warming

2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?
4. Is the Threat of Global Warming Real?

Health

5. Can the Global Community "Win" the Drug War?
6. Is the International Community Adequately Prepared to Address Global Health Pandemics?
7. Do Adequate Strategies Exist to Combat Human Trafficking?

Human Trafficking

7. Do Adequate Strategies Exist to Combat Human Trafficking?

Islamic Fundamentalism

9. Are We Headed for a Nuclear 9/11?

Nuclear Proliferation

9. Are We Headed for a Nuclear 9/11?

Population

1. Does Global Urbanization Lead Primarily to Undesirable Consequences?

2. Should the World Continue to Rely on Oil as the Major Source of Energy?
3. Will the World Be Able to Feed Itself in the Foreseeable Future?

Urbanization

1. Does Global Urbanization Lead Primarily to Undesirable Consequences?



Introduction

Global Issues in the Twenty-First Century

James E. Harf

Mark Owen Lombardi

Threats of the New Millennium

As the new millennium dawned a decade ago, the world witnessed two very different events whose impacts have been far reaching, profound, and in many ways have shaped the discourse of global issues. The first was the new era of terrorism, ushered in by the tragedy of 9/11. It burst upon the international scene with the force of a mega-catastrophe, occupying virtually every waking moment of national and global leaders throughout the world and seizing the attention of the rest of the planet's citizens who contemplated both the immediate implications and the long-term effects of a U.S. response. The focused interest of national policymakers was soon transformed into a war on terrorism, while average citizens sought to cope with changes brought on by both the tragic events of September 2001 and the global community's response to them. Both governmental leaders and citizens continue to address the consequences of this first intrusion of the new millennium on a world now far different in many ways since the pre-9/11 era. Unfortunately, as the millennium's first decade ended, other challenges to global welfare and security also emerged. At the global level, a severe financial crisis forced world leaders to question the major tenets of contemporary capitalism. At the national level, a reemerging Russian presence, flexing its new economic muscles based on energy and backed by a growing military might, brought back fears of a new cold war. And throughout North Africa and the Middle East, citizens took to the streets to protest decades of autocratic rule by despotic rulers and to seek more democratic government. The second event at the beginning of the millennium was less dramatic and certainly did not receive the same fanfare, but still has had both short- and long-term ramifications for the global community in the twenty-first century. This was the creation of a set of ambitious millennium development goals by the United Nations. In September 2000, 189 national governments committed to eight major goals in an

initiative known as the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG): eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development. This initiative was important not only because the UN was setting an actionable 15-year agenda against a relatively new set of global issues but also because it signified a major change in how the international community would henceforth address such problems confronting humankind. The new initiative represented recognition of (1) shared responsibility between rich and poor nations for solving such problems; (2) a link between goals; (3) the paramount role to be played by national governments in the process; and (4) the need for measurable outcome indicators of success. The UN Millennium Development Goals initiative went virtually unnoticed by much of the public, although governmental decision-makers involved with the United Nations understood its significance. As we approach the 15-year timeline for implementation of these millennium goals, the success rate has been mixed at best.

These two major events, although vastly different, symbolize the world in which we now find ourselves, a world far more complex and more violent than either the earlier one characterized by the cold war struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, or the post-cold war era of the 1990s, where global and national leaders struggled to identify and then find their proper place in the post-cold war world order. Consider the first event, the 9/11 tragedy. It reminds us all that the use and abuse of power in pursuit of political goals in earlier centuries is still a viable option for those throughout the world who believe themselves disadvantaged because of various political, economic, or social conditions and structures. The only difference is the perpetrators' choice of military hardware and strategy. Formally declared wars fought by regular national military forces publicly committed (at least on paper) to the tenets of just war theory have now been replaced by a plethora of "quasi-military tactics" whose defining characteristics conjure up terrorism, perpetrated by individuals without attachments to a regular military and/or without allegiance to a national government and country, and who do not hesitate to put ordinary citizens in harm's way.

On the other hand, the second event of the new century, the UN Millennium Goals initiative, symbolizes the other side of the global coin, the recognition that the international community is also beset with a number of problems unrelated to military actions or national security, at least in a direct sense. The past four decades have witnessed the emergence of and thrust to prominence a number of new problems relating to social, economic, and environmental

characteristics of the citizens who inhabit this planet. These problems impact the basic quality of life of global inhabitants in ways very different from the scourges of military violence. But their impact is just as profound. Consider that in the first months of this millennium's second decade, for example, two major natural disasters struck the planet, the devastating earthquake in Haiti, which followed on the heels of a similar disaster in Chile, and the equally destructive earthquake and tsunami in Japan with its resultant nuclear dangers. These events illustrate that in today's world, natural disaster phenomena are just as threatening. And they also unite us as global citizens in the same way that terrorism separates us. At the heart of this global change affecting the global system and its inhabitants for good or for ill is a phenomenon called globalization.

The Age of Globalization

The cold war era, marked by the domination of two superpowers in the decades following the end of World War II, has given way to a new era called globalization. This new epoch is characterized by a dramatic shrinking of the globe in terms of travel and communication, increased participation in global policymaking by an expanding array of national and nonstate actors, and an exploding array of problems with ever-growing consequences. While the tearing down of the Berlin Wall two decades ago dramatically symbolized the end of the cold war era, the creation of the Internet, with its ability to connect around the world, and the fallen World Trade Center, with its dramatic illustration of vulnerability, symbolize the new paradigm of integration and violence.

Globalization is a fluid and complex phenomenon that manifests itself in thousands of wondrous as well as disturbing ways. In the past couple of decades, national borders have shrunk or disappeared, with a resultant increase in the movement of ideas, products, resources, finances, and people throughout the globe. This reality has brought with it great advances and challenges. For example, the ease with which people and objects move throughout the globe has greatly magnified fears like the spread of disease. The term "epidemic" has been replaced by the phrase "global pandemic," as virulent scourges unleashed in one part of the globe now have greater potential to find their way to the far corners of the planet. The world has also come to fear an expanded potential for terrorism, as new technologies combined with increasing cultural friction and socioeconomic disparities have conspired to make the world far less safe than it had been. The pistol that killed the Austrian Archduke in Sarajevo in 1914, ushering in World War I, has been replaced by the jumbo jet used as a missile to bring down the World Trade Center, snuffing out the lives of thousands of innocent victims.

We now live in an era of global reach for both good and ill, where a small group or a single individual can touch the hearts of people around the world with acts of kindness or can shatter their dreams with acts of terror.

This increase in the movement of information and ideas has ushered in global concerns over cultural imperialism and religious/ethnic wars. The ability both to retrieve and to disseminate information in the contemporary era will have an impact in this century as great as, if not greater than, the telephone, radio, and television in the last century. The potential for global good or ill is mind-boggling. Finally, traditional notions of great-power security embodied in the cold war rivalry have given way to concerns about terrorism, genocide, nuclear proliferation, cultural conflict, [. . .] and the diminishing role of international law.

Globalization heightens our awareness of a vast array of global issues that will challenge individuals as well as governmental and nongovernmental actors. Everyone has become a global actor and so each has policy impact. This text seeks to identify those issues that are central to the discourse on the impact of globalization. The issues in this volume provide a broad overview of the mosaic of global issues that will affect students' daily lives.

What Is a Global Issue?

We begin by addressing the basic characteristics of a *global issue*.¹ By definition, the word *issue* suggests disagreement along several related dimensions:

1. whether a problem exists and how it comes about;
2. the characteristics of the problem;
3. the preferred future alternatives or solutions; and/or
4. how these preferred futures are to be obtained.

These problems are real, vexing, and controversial, because policymakers bring to their analyses different historical experiences, values, goals, and objectives. These differences impede and may even prevent successful problem solving. In short, the key ingredient of an issue is disagreement.

The word *global* in the phrase *global issue* is what makes the set of problems confronting the human race today far different from those that challenged earlier generations. Historically, problems were confined to a village, city, or region. The capacity of the human race to fulfill its daily needs was limited to a much smaller space: the immediate environment. In 1900, 90 percent of all humanity was born, lived, and died within a 50-mile radius.

¹ The characteristics are extracted from James E. Harf and B. Thomas Trout, *The Politics of Global Resources*, Duke University Press, 1986. pp. 12–28.

Today, a third of the world's population travel to one or more countries. In the United States, 75 percent of people move at least 100 miles away from their homes and most travel to places their grandparents could only dream about.

What does this mobility mean? It suggests that a vast array of issues are now no longer only local or national but are global in scope, including but not limited to food resources, trade, energy, health care, the environment, disease, natural disasters, conflict, cultural rivalry, populism, [. . .] democratic revolutions, and nuclear Armageddon.

The character of these issues is thus different from those of earlier eras. First, they transcend national boundaries and impact virtually every corner of the globe. In effect, these issues help make national borders increasingly meaningless. Environmental pollution or poisonous gases do not recognize or respect national borders. Birds carrying the avian flu and nuclear radiation leaking from disabled power plants have no knowledge of political boundaries.

Second, these new issues cannot be resolved by the autonomous action of a single actor, be it a national government, international organization, or multinational corporation. A country cannot guarantee its own energy or food security without participating in a global energy or food system.

Third, these issues are characterized by a wide array of value systems. To a family in the developing world, giving birth to a fifth or sixth child may contribute to the family's immediate economic well-being. But to a research scholar at the United Nations Population Fund, the consequence of such an action multiplied across the entire developing world leads to expanding poverty and resource depletion.

Fourth, these issues will not go away. They require specific policy action by a consortium of local, national, and international leaders. Simply ignoring the issue cannot eliminate the threat of chemical or biological terrorism, for example. If global warming does exist, it will not disappear unless specific policies are developed and implemented.

These issues are also characterized by their persistence over time. The human race has developed the capacity to manipulate its external environment and, in so doing, has created a host of opportunities and challenges. The accelerating pace of technological change suggests that global issues will proliferate and will continue to challenge human beings throughout the next millennium.

In the final analysis, however, a global issue is defined as such only through mutual agreement by a host of actors within the international community. Some may disagree about the nature, severity, or presence of a given issue. These concerns then become areas of focus after a significant number

of actors (states, international organizations, the United Nations, and others) begin to focus systematic and organized attention on the issue itself.

Defining the Global Issues Agenda

The election of President Barak Obama has opened up opportunities for the United States to adopt differing policies to the new global agenda. After two years, there are signs of differing approaches to issues such as terrorism, civil conflict, nuclear proliferation, and resource use. The long-term impacts of these changes are yet to be determined. And the next national election could bring yet a different set of values as guiding principles in foreign policy decision making.

The Nexus of Global Issues and Globalization

Since 1989, the world has been caught in the maelstrom of globalization. Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, scholars and policymakers have struggled to define this new era. As the early years of the new century ushered in a different and heightened level of violence, a sense of urgency emerged. At first, some analyzed the new era in terms of the victory of Western or American ideals, the dominance of global capitalism, and the spread of democracy versus the use of religious fanaticism by the have-nots of the world as a ploy to rearrange power within the international system. But recent events call into question assumptions about Western victory or the dominance of capitalism. Others have defined this new era simply in terms of the multiplicity of actors now performing on the world stage, noting how states and their sovereignty have declined in importance and impact vis-à-vis others such as multinational corporations and nongovernmental groups like Greenpeace and Amnesty International. Still others have focused on the vital element of technology and its impact on communications; information storage and retrieval; global exchange; and attitudes, culture, and values.

Whether globalization reflects one, two, or all of these characteristics is not as important as the fundamental realization that globalization is the dominant element of a new era in international politics. The globalization revolution now shapes and dictates the agenda. To argue otherwise is frankly akin to insisting on using a rotary phone in an iPhone world. This new period is characterized by several basic traits that greatly impact the definition, analysis, and solution of global issues. They include the following:

- an emphasis on information technology;