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New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era

Mary Kaldor

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Since 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union, both the threat of nuclear war and the threat of large-scale, interstate conventional war have receded. Yet, during the 1990s millions have died in wars in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia, and millions more have become refugees from war-torn regions.

In this pathbreaking book, the author argues that, in the context of globalization, what we think of as war—war between states in which the aim is to inflict maximum violence—is becoming an anachronism. In its place is a new type of organized violence, which she calls “new wars,” a mixture of war, organized crime, and massive violations of human rights. The actors are both global and local, public and private. These wars are fought for particular political goals using tactics of terror and destabilization that are theoretically outlawed by the rules of modern warfare; an informal criminalized economy is built into the functioning of these new wars.

The author asserts that political leaders and international institutions have been unable to deal with the spread of these wars mainly because they have not come to terms with their logic; wars are treated either as old wars or as anarchy. Her analysis offers a basis for a cosmopolitan political response to these wars in which the monopoly of legitimate organized violence is reconstructed on a transnational basis, and international peacekeeping is reconceptualized as cosmopolitan law enforcement. The author shows how this approach has profound implications for the reconstruction of civil society, political institutions, and economic and social relations.

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