Walls in International Affairs: Trends, Typology, and Functions

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The Role of Walls, Borders, and Boundaries in National and International Affairs: Typology, Underlying Trends, and Implications for Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

Human beings set boundaries. Close family members, for example, despite their closeness, often find it useful for their rooms to be separated from one another when they need privacy. Households living next to each other erect fences or at least lines of demarcation so that they know where their property starts and ends. Governing authorities of provinces and states are engaged in a constant process of boundary definition and defense. Alliances of states and nations draw metaphorical and actual boundaries around their own territories and areas of responsibility and undertake to provide protection and security to insiders, with diminished responsibility toward those who are not members of these moral and political communities.

These boundaries often represent visible manifestations of less visible dynamics growing in individual or collective human consciousness. These unconscious and conscious dynamics generate a separation of 'self from other' and 'us' from 'them.' These internal and external boundaries often evolve in a self-reinforcing, cyclical manner. Behavioral and perceptual patterns and boundaries developed over time have a tendency to become normative and familiar frames of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Institutionalized and routinized relationships within and across these boundaries—horizontal or hierarchic, symmetrical or asymmetrical—become structural sources of power, privilege, and prestige.

This article explores a special kind of boundary—seemingly impenetrable boundaries that sustain and deepen divisions within and between nations, called walls. We explore the ways in which walls can both create and help manage conflict at micro, meso, and macro levels, but argue that more often than not they are dysfunctional and impediments to real security and the nonviolent transformation of conflict because they constrain contact, communication, and confidence building. By creation of conflict we refer to its emergence (with latent conflict becoming manifest), escalation (in terms of intensity and magnitude), polarization, dehumanization, and refusal to recognize adversaries. By management we refer to a broad spectrum of conflict-handling behavior such as conflict mitigation (of intensity and scope) and institutionalization (to regulate excessive behavior). Importantly, the root causes of such conflicts have their own momentum, which is either exacerbated or mitigated by the presence of a wall.

First, we touch on the inherent functions of walls in human society and then move to a brief review of historical antecedents of contemporary walls, illustrating differences and similarities across cultures and regions. In the recent past, two kinds of walls that have become prevalent in many regions of the world—the walls of national sovereignty and the walls of nationalism—analyzing these leads into a proposed typology of walls in contemporary international relations: political walls, walls for national security, trade walls, religious walls, and civilizational walls. These categories are not exhaustive, but indicative of some of the most pressing current challenges to peace and security. We then follow with a discussion of barriers between sociopolitical processes: between economic cooperation and security policy, between interdependence and integration, and around civil society networks and international companies. Finally, we explore deeper trends and patterns underlying these various types of walls and what they might mean for the theory and practice of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The Functions of Borders, Boundaries, and Walls

Boundary formation begins from the moment a baby realizes that it exists separately from its mother. This primal separation is the beginning of a lifelong process of boundary formation. Processes of attachment, detachment, and the formation of personal boundaries are critical to the development of personal, social, and cultural identities and it is never ending as each individual, group, and nation considers how tightly or loosely to privilege and bind their own interests in relation to those of others (Bretherton 1992).

This process is the source of many ethical and political dilemmas. How much, for example, can individuals promote their group and self-interest without harming others? What responsibilities do individuals, groups, and nations have for the welfare of others?
proprietorial rights, and certainly no walls between them.

It was in the movement from nomadic hunter-gatherer communities to more settled agricultural communities that individuals and social groups were confronted by issues of scarcity and felt obliged to demarcate boundaries around arable and cultivated land. These communities also developed hierarchies of power, privilege, prestige, and specific patterns of resource distribution. In the competition for scarce resources, but particularly during periods of crop failure and famine, warfare was used to garner resources necessary for survival and communities became more territorial in orientation. This was the period when nations started emerging from relatively amorphous communities and developed ideas of bounded spaces with clear ideas of who should be included and excluded or considered insiders and outsiders, friends or enemies.

What distinguishes a political community, state, and nation from other kinds of community is the organization of power and coercive capacity. Tilly argues that war makes the state and states make war (Tilly 1975, 35). This process of state formation, however, only happens if political actors have started thinking in terms of particular communities and in terms of “friends and foes.” It is difficult to justify expenditure on the military, for example, in the absence of threat, fear, or desire for domination.

Friend/foe dialectics underpin nineteenth-century nationalism and the formation of modern states. These dynamics, however, can only take place when political actors have become centered and territorialized. These dialectics are used to mark political boundaries. The boundary markers in state formation as in identity formation are language, culture, dress, and specific types of behavior. If collectivities are confident about the capacity of these sorts of markers to signal to outsiders where communities begin and end, the barriers between them and others are likely to be subtle, nonobtrusive, and relatively porous. Where there is insecurity, fear, or challenges to these subtle markers then political actors will move to establish clearer, more material markers. These can vary from custom posts to clearly marked borders of fences, barbed wires, and solid walls. The function of these political walls, like normal architectural walls, is to define, demarcate, and protect those within from those without.

The Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Walls

Walls shaping and reshaping contemporary international relations have long historical roots. Different cultures have given different forms and meanings to them, but the similarities are striking.

The following are some glimpses into the history of walls, region by region, indicating the range of manifestations and functions with no claim to comprehensiveness. The most prominent of them comes from Asia—the Great Wall of China—which is said to be the only human construction visible to the naked eye if seen from the Moon. The section begins in East Asia, moves on to magical walls in Southeast Asia, continues with an unusual Indian “wall” as reflected in a best-selling Indian novel, and touches on the mythical stories of walls in the ancient Middle East before ending up with the European experiences that gave rise to international law.

The Great Wall of China

The Great Wall of China is more than a very long wall; it is a fortress system consisting also of battlefields and fortresses. There are six main routes along the wall and six secondary zigzagging routes with the combined length of 6,318 km or 3,923 miles.

The Qin emperor (221–210 BC) built the Wall remains constructed in earlier dynasties. What appears today as the Great Wall is therefore a product of several renovations and rebuilding, mostly in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Scholars maintain that Qin Shi Huangdi chose to protect the new consolidated kingdom with the wall out of suspicion of the nomads’ threat (Frey 1975). While the Great Wall could also be seen as a cultural wall separating the agrarian Chinese society from the nomadic cattle-based economy (Lastmore 1962), later scholars argue that the Wall itself could not have been built without collaboration from different nomadic groups (Cheng 1984). Symbolically, the Wall could mean different things: evidence of a tyrannical rule of the past; a cultural border between “civilized China” and threatening barbaric nomads, nurturing nationalist sentiments; or collaborative efforts by different ethnic groups in redenoting a more unified China.

Two Centuries of Japanese Isolationism

Through a series of historical incidents and actions such as the Shimabara Rebellion—Japan’s last large-scale internal strife (1637–1638)—the Tokugawa shogunate closed Japan’s doors by placing strict limitations on the entry of foreigners to the country and on the departure of Japanese citizens, roughly from 1633 to 1854. The main purposes of this foreign policy were to stop the spread of Christianity and to regulate commerce and foreign exchange. However, this “locked” status was not complete. The shogunate assigned trade rights through specific Japanese port cities to a limited number of partners: a Dutch factory in China traded through Nagasaki, Korea and Ryukyu (present Okinawa) traded through Satsuma (present Kagoshima), and the Ainu people were able to trade through Ezo (present Hokkaido). By doing so, the shogunate tried to manage all foreign trade so that the profit from it could be controlled by the shogunate. It also tried to protect the nation from total depletion of its mineral resources, such as gold, silver, and copper. This foreign policy ended when Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy forced the Shogun to sign the “Treaty of Peace and Amity” in 1854, re-opening Japan to exposure from abroad. By then, however, this semi-isolationist period had already had a deeply engrained effect on Japanese culture.

Southeast Asian Walls

In traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, walls have always been common. From studies of ancient cities in Thailand, it was found that each city was composed of similar elements: surrounding moats, walls, city gates, fortresses, religious space, houses, ponds, dykes, water canals, and roads outside the city. But among these, the most important are walls and surrounding moats designed to defend against outside enemies. The walls were also seen as irrefutable signposts of a kingdom’s greatness.

One of the most dramatic stories in the Old Malay Peninsula is about the city of Ligor. It was written that in 1348, the righteous king led more than 30,000 of his subjects through the forest for more than eight years to flee from cholera. The king came upon the site of the Enlightened Buddha’s bones and decided to establish a new city there. He then founded the city of Ligor and mobilized his people, many of them Indians and ethnic Mons, to build a city wall made of bricks and clays, with area outside to grow food for the inhabitants. The most persistent enemy, however, was not human but cholera. Determined to stay put inside the city, the king tried to find a way to stop the spread of cholera. After consultation with learned monks and knowledgeable court Brahmins, he was advised to create the magical “Namo” (the beginning word in Buddhist chant) coins. Endowed with
magic, these coins were scattered around the city walls as a magical way to protect the city from the curse of cholera. Since then, the city of Ligor has lived in peace free from such epidemics, and the "Namo" coins can still be found near the city wall today. Apart from the fact that the wall to this ancient magnificent city was a collaborative work done by people from different ethnic backgrounds, this story underscores the fact that a wall could be more than a protective structure against human enemy and the elements. Before the advent of the time of modern medicine, when endowed with some magical qualities, it could also protect those inside from the curse of an epidemic.

"No" and the Indian Wall

India has a different kind of wall to protect Indians. In Maximum City, a novel by Suketu Mehta, there is a section titled "The Country of the No," where the author tells the tale of the guru in the shahiya tradition where the novice is rebuffed several times when approaching the guru. Then the guru will stop saying "no" but will not say "yes" either which means he suffers from the presence of the student. Then when he starts acknowledging him, he will assign several menial tasks to the student, meant to drive him away. After the disciple sticks it out, through these stages of rejection, he will be considered suitable for the study under the guru or worthy of the sublime knowledge. Mehta writes: "India is the country of the No. That 'no' is your test. You have to go past it. It is India's Great Wall; it keeps out foreign invaders." (Mehta 2004, 18).

In fact, from the soil of this country, great souls such as the Buddha and Mohandas K. Gandhi had used the "No" to usher in great human transformation: toward enlightenment from sufferings in the former case and emancipation from colonial rule for the latter. Walls and Norms of Purity in the Middle East

Apart from the Crying Wall situated to the west of King Solomon's ancient temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE after the Jewish revolt, there is another famous wall in the many fantastic stories told about the Middle East—that of Jericho.

In the Hebrew Bible, Moses warned the Israelites that before they entered Canaan, they would face "large cities that have walls up to the sky" (Deuteronomy 9:1). When Joshua led them across the River Jordan, they reached and laid siege to one such city—Jericho. Jericho's great wall was destroyed at the sound of the priests blowing their rams' horns with the shouting of the Israelites on the seventh day that they marched around the city. Joshua's army then entered the city and killed everyone inside but Rahab's family who helped his spies.

That alternative—eliminating the others instead of building walls to keep them out—was well known at the time. The Old Testament describes how the Israelites could eradicate all life in the cities they conquered—animals as well as humans—to stay "clean," and be punished by God if they did not. Such notions of purity/impurity were widely held throughout the Middle East.

Europe: From the Walls of the Middle Ages to the State Sovereignty of Westphalia

Similar to East and Southeast Asia, Europe of the Middle Ages was rich with walls. City walls were erected all over the region, as reflected in the German "burg," the French "bourg," the English "borough" and so forth. Walls were built around royal castles, monasteries, and clerical centers, protecting their owners and workers against the plunders of thugs and armies. The walls gave freedom from fear—human security in modern terminology—and law and order inside. In this respect, the physical walls embodied mental walls of inclusion/exclusion and desirable/undesirable in mutually reinforcing fashions (Tsunander 1995).

The Walls of State Sovereignty

The physical barriers gradually lost their relevance as the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty took hold in seventeenth-century Europe, followed by the formation of nation-states. The pillars of Westphalia—territorial integrity, state sovereignty, and noninterference in internalaffairs—were translated into international law, which gave the same rights and obligations to all states created within the Westphalian paradigm. Sovereign states because the primary actors in a system of interstate relations, and the sovereignty equality of states became a key constituent element of international law.

As a consequence, new lines/boundaries were drawn around much larger territories. The role of external actors in domestic affairs was more or less controlled by mutual understanding and military might. In large measure, the new system was the functional equivalent of the medieval walls. The evolution of the Westphalian state system generated a national collective mindset which upheld its underlying structure. This distinct system of political control was introduced to the rest of the world through colonialism, first by Europe and later by the United States (US) and Japan.

We have therefore come to where we are from, a strong tradition of walls that exclude others, that protect insiders against perceived threats from outside, and that carry mental predispositions against unknown others named "strangers" or "barbarians." This tradition has been diluted over the centuries, and in recent years undermined by the increasingly globalized networks of transportation and communication, but significant remnants still exist.

The Walls of Nationalism

The principles and practices of Westphalian state-making mesh closely with nation-building and nationalism. While the former is primarily social and institutional, the latter is linguistic, cultural, and psychological. They are often indistinguishable, reinforcing each other.

Following "the century of humiliation" (mid-nineteenth century—1949), the turbulence of the Great Leap Forward (1958—1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966—1976), China had only three to four decades of steady nation-building. Nationalist sentiments are strong as it continues to grapple with the legacy of its past while searching for a rightful place in the emerging global order of the twenty-first century. Nationalism is running strong also in Russia as it seeks to redefine its international role after the demise of the USSR. Provoked by the establishment of US and NATO positions along its borders, Moscow seeks to demonstrate its capacity to deter these potential threats and legitimize policies that aim to restore Russia's prominent role among the major powers. Recent trends in Indian politics suggest that New Delhi, too, is more conscious of its size and weight than before. As illustrated by the nuclear weapon tests conducted by the nationalist government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in May 1998, nationalism is an important determinant of Indian foreign policy.

In these and dozens of other countries, similar trends are at work, with rising nationalism boosted by a growing economy, self-confidence in military might, and a revival of nationalist legacies to counter the homogenizing effects of modernization and globalization. In some of them, nationalism is driven by frustration over American
and Western interventionist policies and their underlying discourses of superiority. Contending discourses are nothing new in international relations. Today, however, disagreements and frustrations spread widely and quickly because of the revolutionizing effect of information technologies.

Walls in Contemporary International Relations: Five Thematic Areas

The walls that have been created in the name of state sovereignty and nationalism have shaped and reinforced a number of other walls in contemporary international affairs. We will survey five of them: political walls, walls erected for national security, trade walls, religious walls, and civilizational walls.

Political Walls

Historically, the primary function of physical walls has been to protect territories and mark sovereignty by keeping "alien" others out. In contemporary times of mass migration, some borders are also sealed by physical walls in order to stop inward flows, such as the border between the US and Mexico (Río Grande) and the newly erected Israeli wall (to keep Palestinians out). In the Mediterranean, coast guards and military units are used to limit mass migration from northern Africa to the European Union (EU).

The magnitude of these operations and the flows they try to stop are so significant that they have been widely recognized as major physical barriers to movement. More often, however, flows of people, commodities, capital, and information are controlled and restricted by softer means.

On the other hand, the main rationale for the most famous of walls in modern history—the Berlin Wall—was to keep East Germans in and the West out. The wall was built to ensure maximal internal and external control over the flow of population and to keep the communist bloc intact. Globally, the more unpopular the regime and the harder the living conditions, the greater the configuration pressure, leading some governments to seal their borders to make it impossible for citizens to flee. Under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran strictly controls entry into the country, and quite often it also seems keen to do away with regime critiques. The Castro regime of Cuba, likewise, saw fit to let oppositional factions go. Most authoritarian regimes prefer to control both inward and outward flows to sustain their governance.

All these walls, physical or not, reflect a political will to separate Self from Other and "us" from "them." These political walls, however, are often integrated deeply into other types of walls, which we will explore in what follows.

Walls Erected for National Security

The political walls are usually integrated with walls built for national security. They are of two interrelated kinds: military preparations to fend off attack, and walls of secrecy in the name of national security.

Military Walls

In the nuclear age, military planning centers on deterrence. Deterrence is practiced by way of demonstrating credible defense capabilities or by a threat of retaliation, or some combination of both. The classical nuclear Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) concept stakes all on the ability to render unacceptable destruction to the other side. Walls in the sense of defensive measures to repel attack can only complicate this strategy and are therefore anathema. Hence the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 prohibiting ballistic missile defenses. The concept is counterintuitive, for it suggests that you are best defended when naked. However, in the absence of effective implementation of the disarmament provision of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it is practiced for lack of better alternatives.

In the conventional field, deterrence by defense does not prescribe any walls either. Maginot-style defenses, exemplified by the heavy French fortification in the aftermath of World War I, are now relegated to history as was the Great Wall of China. On the other hand, if and when a credible ballistic missile defense system is established, it could be a wall against ballistic missile attack—it being noted that its functions can be offensive as well as defensive. In defending the ABM Treaty, Richard Nixon put it bluntly, "if you have a shield, it is easier to use the sword."

More recently, the US homeland defense system established in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks has attempted to build a variety of walls/barriers against international terrorism. Foot-proof walls, however, are an unattainable goal. They are only more or less effective or more or less porous. A more convincing defense system against terrorism would involve sustained diplomatic and civil society engagement aimed at transforming the very roots from which acts of terror arise to target the American homeland.

Walls of Secrecy

Military institutions and intelligence agencies operate under cultures of secrecy in the name of national security. They are known both for their external and internal walls, that is, for the walls that keep political leaders at a distance and civil society out, and for barriers that control the flow of information between different organizational units. Strictly speaking, they may all operate in conformity with the law, but their legitimacy may be questioned because they tend to defy democratic control. Secrecy is bound to be controversial—on occasion if not in principle—because of the suspicion that insiders use it for purposes that would be illegitimate had they become known. Democratic control is always hard to exercise in the absence of transparency. These intelligence services privilege secrecy and nontransparency which often results in small and major violations of civil liberties, human and citizen rights, and high levels of political unaccountability.

Trade Walls

Historically, a number of states have practiced policies of autarky, trying to be self-sufficient in some or all respects of economic life. Japan took it to the extremes in the centuries of isolation mentioned above. In recent decades, North Korea's juche ideology has been all-encompassing in this regard. Bhutan has also kept high economic and cultural barriers against the outside world projecting an image of national happiness while engaging in processes of forced displacement, human rights abuse, and torture. In most cases, however, autarky has been limited to the economic sphere. Recent examples include: India, which had a policy of import substitution, industrialization, and strong state control from independence to the 1990s; Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge in 1975-1979; Afghanistan from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s; Romania in the 1980s as the government tried to get rid of all foreign debt; and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime in 1996-2001.

Mercantilism—a form of economic nationalism—holds that governments can best advance their wealth by playing a protectionist role in the economy, encouraging exports and discouraging imports through the use of subsidies and tariffs. It was the dominant school of thought from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, and briefly came to life again during the Great Recession. In recent
decades, subsidies and tariffs have been much reduced, but they are still important regulatory mechanisms of world trade and subjects of much contention. However, while today's subsidies and tariffs are sometimes referred to as trade walls, they are far from creating interstate conflicts the way mercantilism did.

Trade embargos to influence the policies of others, or to change governments and regimes in power, are frequently applied through the UN Security Council and regional organizations, and as national means of foreign policy. During the Cold War, the Western economic embargo against the communist world covered 30-50 percent of all commodities in world trade (Adler-Karison 1968). Economic sanctions have seldom functioned as intended, however. More often, they are ways of expressing concern and of showing willingness to "do something" about objectionable behavior when more effective measures are not at hand.

Religious Walls

There are no "pure" religious conflicts. The religious dimension works in combination with other factors—historical, cultural, ethnic, economic, and territorial. Conflicts labeled in religious terms should be interpreted carefully, as throughout history, religion has often been used as a political tool to legitimize collective actions driven by secular motives unrelated to religion itself. The present seems no different from the past in this respect.

In retrospect, the Cold War is now seen as an aberration and Hiterian Fascism as a one-time discontinuity, so in the 1990s attempts were made to redraw political maps on the basis of old cultural and religious differences. One of them was the Muslim-Christian border line from Morocco through the Balkans, Lebanon, and the Caucasus into Afghanistan and Central Asia; another, the division of Christianity into the Orthodox East and the Catholic-Protestant West. In the Muslim world, the divergent historical experience between Sunni and Shia goes all the way through the Middle East from Lebanon, via Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to Iran and Afghanistan. In the rather secular European domain, differences among Christian denominations matter less and less for patterns of cooperation and conflict.

Radicalized Muslims play a significant role in wars in the Middle East and in the global spread of terrorism. In the US, the fundamentalist strands of the Bible-Belt and evangelical Christianity are important elements of its political culture, influencing US policy toward the Middle East in particular. Fundamentalism thrives in combat, where the focus of attention revolves around the dualistic worldview of good versus evil, God versus Satan—another "us" versus "them." There is a religious dimension, therefore, to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and the US and Western-led war on terror.

When religious aspects of conflict become more prominent, walls grow higher and more impenetrable. The religious dimension makes them particularly intractable, for couched in religious terms they are value conflicts, or at least portrayed as such. Different from conflicts over resources, territory, and forms of governance, whose compromises may be struck, value conflicts tend to be more zero-sum or become even existential in nature. When conflicts are phrased in terms of right or wrong, moral or immoral, the parties do not believe there is common ground to solve their differences.

At the same time, religious communities have much in common. In the view of many religious as well as secular observers, the commonalities between them outweigh their differences, offering ample space for conciliation. Increasingly, religious leaders and organizations are engaged in constructive dialogues for conflict resolution.

Civilizational Walls

Civilization is culture extended in time and space. Historically, civilizations have been millennia old. Geographically they encompass multiple nations and often cut across national boundaries. Religion has often been seen as a civilization's defining character. Yet a civilization and its underlying cosmology represent a much broader construct than religion.

In a 1993 article in Foreign Affairs, Samuel Huntington argued that after the end of the Cold War, the fundamental sources of conflict would be cultural and religious, not ideological or economic. Nation-states would remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts would occur between constellations of states belonging to the same civilization. He described these divisions in detail based on religious affiliations, linguistic factors, and geographical proximity. Huntington took exception to the widespread Western belief in the universality of Western values and political systems, which had led the leading American political scientist Francis Fukuyama to declare the end of history.

Huntington's emphasis was first of all on the Sinic civilization because of its rapid economic growth, and on the Islamic civilization because of its fertility rate. The latter's population growth and proximity to many other civilizations including the Sinic, Slavic Orthodox, Western, and African, led him to conclude that the borders in and around the Islamic civilization have undergone an especially violent history. Russia, Japan, and India are "swing civilizations" which may turn in different directions. The relationship between the Western Christian and the Islamic civilization is particularly virulent, in his view, because they both follow

monotheist, missionary traditions that seek to provide the meaning and purpose of human existence.

The Foreign Affairs article may have triggered more responses than any other article in the history of journals. Paul Berman, an American author and commentator, argued that distinct cultural boundaries do not exist and, thus, there is neither Western nor Islamic civilization to speak of (Berman 2010). Berman played down the importance of cultural and religious identities and instead emphasized the significance of different philosophical beliefs.

The leading Indian economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen saw singular as opposed to multiple affiliations as the root cause of violence (Sen 1999). Yet others saw political utility in Huntington's global mosaic, the postulated clash of civilizations replacing the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War as the main threat perception in US and Western foreign policy. Geared to dire threats for many decades, it would have been hard for Western societies suddenly to do without any such challenge. Toward the end of the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev alluded to the same in an effort to undermine the threat perceptions of the West.

More recently, the 9/11 attacks on the US generated far-reaching implications for creating and reinforcing civilizational walls. In response to what many Americans saw as direct attacks on their way of life, comprehensive barriers were built in defense of their homeland, sending off radical Islamists and other sources of terrorism. Iran is another glaring example: comprehensive coalitions have been built, and global (UNSC), regional (European) and national (US) sanctions imposed to isolate the Islamic Republic. The Sinic civilization has come to its rescue, pressing punitive measures that go beyond the UN sanctions, and swing civilizations like the Russian and the Indian have done
the same in part. As in missile defense, homeland security is not just defensive: it is also a precautionary measure to keep the imperial power in a position to clamp down on others with impunity. This function is often overlooked in the West.

There are two very general responses to security. The first is what can be identified as an agentic response. This is based on an individual or a nation deciding to develop individual/national capacities to resist any potential threat or aggressor. This might take the form of a strong offensive military capacity and/or strong boundaries/walls against enemy others. The other orientation to security is what might be called relational. This means that individuals and nations acknowledge that security resides primarily in the quality of the relationship rather than in individual capacity. Agentic security is much more likely to be associated with a willingness to develop impenetrable walls to prevent exchanges with potential enemies. Relational security is much more likely to be associated with, either, no walls, lightly demarked boundaries or highly porous walls which facilitate a wide variety of different types of exchanges within and across them.

The social science evidence (e.g., contact theory) is that relational security is much more likely to generate an honest appreciation of the other, a capacity to connect with the other collaboratively and creatively, and higher levels of stability and security that can be gained through agentic security which is inherently unstable and insecure. The persistence of this observation is underlined by the fact that political, economic, and civil society networks are becoming increasingly deterritorialized and serve all sorts of functions other than territorial control. These nonstate networks all have one thing in common: all of them make national borders porous, and most of them degrade the importance of nation-states. The challenge for the twenty-first century, therefore, is how to understand the boundaries and distinctions between networks of effective and ineffective action, how to build human security in relationship with others rather than in opposition, and how to create interdependencies that make physical walls unnecessary.

The Interface Between Multiple Social Processes—A Further Investigation of Walls

Economic, political, and social systems all survive through time because of boundaries that are drawn between different spheres of individual and social activity. Political and social systems, for example, depend on economic systems to generate wealth. The economic system in turn depends on an effective legal and regulatory framework generated by government. Families, religious, educational and health institutions depend on a thriving economy and effective, capable, and legitimate government. While the subsystems of particular social systems need boundaries between them so that they can fulfill their unique functions, it is also true that internal boundaries between state, economy, and society have to be responsive, adaptive, and porous if they are to contribute to a dynamic equilibrium in the system as a whole. Walls in complex social systems, therefore, are functional to the extent that they enable a rational division of labor while communicating needs across the different parts of the whole.

The walls between economic cooperation and security policy may be functional in the sense that they protect the former from the caution, sensitivity, and tension that so often characterize the latter. There is some evidence, furthermore, showing that trade generates interdependence which in turn makes walls porous. On the other hand, security cultures that are sustained and protected by national security institutions and surrounded by secrecy may translate into walls that are dysfunctional in the sense that they block the confidence-building effects that international cooperation may yield. The question is under what conditions interdependence tears walls down and under what conditions it fails to do so.

The Walls Between Economic Cooperation and Security Policy

China, India, and Russia have opened their economies to the outside world—China from 1978, India from 1991, Russia in fits and starts from its reconstitution in the early 1990s—but they all stress the importance of state sovereignty. China and Japan are trading partners, but this does not convert into a high degree of political trust. If trade and investments between China and India develop into a common market—hypothetically, maybe, but not excluded as a future possibility—they may still be wary of each other when it comes to geopolitics and military dispositions. One hundred years ago, trade between the European powers peaked, but this did not prevent the escalation of political tensions into World War I.

In other cases, it is an open question whether growing trade and interdependence will shift the ground in favor of confidence-building. There is a growing body of evidence that economic growth and opening up economies for free trade generates higher levels of negative peace. This helps account for the dramatic growth in transnational negative peace in Northeast Asia.2 A case in point is the relations across the Taiwan Strait, especially since 2008, when Taiwan elected Ma Ying-jeou as president under the campaign promise of economic liberalization with Mainland China. The two sides signed a comprehensive agreement for easing restrictions on trade and investment in 2010, while their defense systems remain on high alert to cope with potential threats across the Strait. History is still in the making as to what will come out of this uneasy, nascent détente in terms of resolving the long-standing political conflict between them. The jury is out.

The Walls Between Interdependence and Integration

Growing interdependence between emerging powers does not necessarily translate into political integration between them. Liberal internationalists are right to say that interdependence raises the stakes in peaceful relations. They rightly emphasize that globalization is an essential driving force that limits the ability of any nation to control its own development and makes adaptation the key to success. But realists are also right in claiming that the politico-military sphere is different from the economic realm, to a large extent living a life of its own. There is as yet no other part of the world that has emulated the EU, where the Coal and Steel Community led to economic and political integration over a relatively short period of time.

The EU is a unique exercise in political integration. In East Asia, a number of cooperative frameworks have been established, but none of them has moved beyond economic cooperation to deeper political integration.

Walls Around Civil Society Networks and International Companies

In the Middle Ages and well into the era of nation-states, European guilds and orders were important institutions operating within the territories controlled by states, in parallel with the territorial rulers. They were closed networks with their own hierarchies, power structures, loyalties, and rituals. Today, too, there are many similar examples of more or less exclusive and secretive national and international networks of various kinds that have their own boundaries, procedures, hierarchies and, bonds. The Mafia, for example,
is a strongly bounded group with exclusive membership, codes of honor, and capacity to do minor and major harm nationally and transnationally. Its walls are directed at other criminal groups and state coercive agencies which might seek to infiltrate them.

International companies are also known to defy control by national political organs. Exclusivity and secrecy—the walls surrounding them—can make influential people even more powerful, posing a threat to democratic institutions. The actions of relatively closed financial elites, driven by greed and profit, generated global economic chaos in 2008. The International Committee of the Red Cross, on the other hand, while strongly bound, highly secretive, and operating according to a very strict code of conduct, is an example of a bounded organization that is doing good in different parts of the world.

Implications for Conflict Management

These different types of "walled" networks illustrate that bounded groups and walled nations can use divisions for both positive and negative purposes. One of the conceptual challenges in thinking about walls, therefore, is to determine what it is about boundary-forming phenomena that makes positive or negative behavior more or less likely. In the first instance, it would seem that porous walls which demarcate boundaries but which allow a range of transactions to take place across them are more likely to have positive effects than those which are rigid and fixed with limited transactions. Secondly, walls that are aimed at providing safe and generative spaces, e.g., partitions dividing one space from another for different functional purposes, religious walls providing sanctuary for all who need it, and political walls providing freedom to those who escape persecution are more likely to have positive outcomes than narrowly defensive spaces for fringed people.

However, there are times of mass migration—commodities and capital are moving more easily across national borders and the interconnectedness enabled by information technologies make it harder and harder to keep information and ideas out. Isolating oneself has become unattractive and infeasible: there are few exceptions left. For the same reasons, isolating others through embargos and sanctions has also become more difficult. States that are targeted by sanctions can turn in new directions to compensate for opportunities lost.

National walls to keep people in, preventing them from leaving, are rare as well. After the Berlin wall fell, North Korea has been the only case. Many states, however, practice selective migration policies. They go both ways, barring people who are privy to state secrets from going abroad while getting rid of troublesome opponents, for example, by letting them go and denying them their right of return. While attempts to constrain inward flows may affect all sorts of items, constraints on outward flows are usually aimed at humans.

We have noted that some civil society networks preserve their exclusivity by keeping walls of secrecy, but without necessarily being in conflict with anybody else for that reason, at least not explicitly. Also, we are open to the possibility that by stopping interactions that may lead to open violence, destructive conflict behavior can be avoided. For example, the newly erected wall between Israelis and Palestinians is intended to prevent suicide bombings, and homeland security programs have been instituted to prevent international terrorism from penetrating the homeland. Interstate territorial conflicts may be regulated, at least temporarily, by freezing the ceasefires line, and confidence-building measures in adjacent areas may help stabilize the situation and buy time for conflict resolution. Immigration restrictions can slow the flow of newcomers and make it possible to accommodate them and integrate them into well-functioning pluralistic societies. Every so often, a delicate balance must be struck between humanitarian concerns and the need to manage immigration flows in a way that avoids conflict escalation.

However, more often than not, we believe that walls tend to have the opposite effect, creating and enhancing conflicts. The wall that divided Europe into East and West during the Cold War, bolstered by nuclear deterrence, may or may not have helped to prevent World War III—there is no way of knowing—but behind the frozen line of demarcation, conflict attitudes flourished, unchecked by the mutual understanding that personal encounters and open flows of information would have provided. Enemy images had a free ride. Today, relations between civilizations have the same dual face: walls may regulate conflict behavior while deep, sustained dialogue can transform conflict attitudes and promote conciliation (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

In an effort to mitigate the dysfunctional effect of walls on interstate or intergroup relations, this brief review leads us to suggest the following three steps:

1. A balanced assessment of the purpose a given wall is serving
   Besides might question the utility of walls erected for political/security/economic/religious/cultural reasons, the real challenge is in understanding the significance of walls to those who erect them. What interests are it serving? What needs does it fulfill? Who benefits from its existence, and who suffers from the consequences? There are now numerous instruments being used to conduct useful conflict assessments, in order to map out the factors contributing to either the escalation or de-escalation of violent conflict, and the "walls" dimension is a critical element in such analyses.

2. For walls that create or threaten to create violent conflict, what are the possible approaches to creating bridges rather than walls, or to meeting the needs of the salient parties such that the walls are not seen as necessary?
   This second step depends explicitly on the first; the approaches chosen must fit the specific context and take into account the power relations as well as the needs/interests of parties on either side of the wall. Approaches fall into two major categories: structural and relational.
   Structural approaches focus on the institutions of a given country or society, including...
The Role of Walls, Borders, and Boundaries

Notes


References


