



# International Security Strategy and Global Population Aging

Christian Leuprecht

*Royal Military College of Canada*, christian.leuprecht@yale.edu

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## **Author Biography**

Christian Leuprecht is associate professor of political science at the Royal Military College of Canada. He is cross-appointed to the Department of Political Studies and the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, where he is chair (pro tempore) of the Defence Management Studies Program and a fellow of both the Queen's Centre for International Relations and the Institute of Intergovernmental Affairs. He is also a research associate at the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy as well as the Institute for Leadership and Management at the Swedish National Defence Academy. He is currently on leave at Yale University, where he is the Bicentennial Visiting Associate Professor in Canadian Studies.

## **Abstract**

To be successful, grand strategy requires objectives, concepts, and resources to be balanced appropriately with a view to defeating one's enemy. The trouble is, of course, that Generals are always well prepared to fight the last war. In the words of Yogi Berra, predictions are always difficult, especially when they involve the future. Yet, grand strategy is all about the future. But how is one to strategize about a future that is inherently difficult to predict? One way to overcome this conundrum is to rely on independent variables that can be projected into the future with reasonable accuracy. Aside from environmental indicators, the most consistent of those is demography, specifically demographic change and difference. The demographic approach to international security leads to strategic conclusions about the integration of military, political, and economic means in pursuit of states' ultimate objectives in the international system.

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**Christian Leuprecht**  
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[christian.leuprecht@rmc.ca](mailto:christian.leuprecht@rmc.ca)

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## Abstract

To be successful, grand strategy requires objectives, concepts, and resources to be balanced appropriately with a view to defeating one's enemy. The trouble is, of course, that Generals are always well prepared to fight the last war. In the words of Yogi Berra, predictions are always difficult, especially when they involve the future. Yet, grand strategy is all about the future. But how is one to strategize about a future that is inherently difficult to predict? One way to overcome this conundrum is to rely on independent variables that can be projected into the future with reasonable accuracy. Aside from environmental indicators, the most consistent of those is demography, specifically demographic change and difference. The demographic approach to international security leads to strategic conclusions about the integration of military, political, and economic means in pursuit of states' ultimate objectives in the international system.

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## Introduction

To be successful, grand strategy requires objectives, concepts, and resources to be balanced appropriately with a view to defeating one's enemy. The trouble is, of course, that Generals are always well prepared to fight the last war. In the words of Yogi Berra, predictions are always difficult, especially when they involve the future. Yet, grand strategy is all

about the future. But how is one to strategize about a future that is inherently difficult to predict? One way to overcome this conundrum is to rely on independent variables that can be projected into the future with reasonable accuracy. Aside from environmental indicators, the most consistent of those is demography, specifically demographic change and difference. The demographic approach leads to strategic conclusions about the integration of military, political, and economic means in pursuit of states' ultimate objectives in the international system. Similar to the youthful populations, rapid development, and urbanization that characterized the first half of the nineteenth century, demographic developments of the twenty-first century are also raising the specter of systemic disorder, civil war, and political instability.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a recent intelligence forecast cautioned that "lagging economies, ethnic affiliations, intense religious convictions, and youth bulges will align to create a 'perfect storm' for internal conflict" in the near future.<sup>2</sup>

Waxing and waning neo-Malthusian "end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it" gestations notwithstanding, demography had long been relegated to the epiphenomenal margins of grand strategy.<sup>3</sup> Starting with Paul Kennedy's *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*, followed by a wave of hawkish neo-conservative mongering about the perils of over-aging and immigration,<sup>4, 5</sup> and spotlighted most recently in the U.S. National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2025*, fertility, mortality, and migration have been maturing in grand strategy as independent variables in their own right. Still, much of that literature feels a lot like neo-Nebuchadnezzarian harbingers of the devil's writing on the wall. Yet, the purpose of grand strategy is not to posit demography as destiny. The future is not necessarily all that bleak. Provided that the strategic implications of demography are both understood and acted upon, we can fashion our world in accordance with demographic change instead of having demographic change fashion our world for us.

The world is at a demographic crossroads. Throughout all of history, high birth rates ensured predominantly young populations with few older people. War and epidemics, such as the plague, would intervene to depress population growth.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, depressed population growth today is a function of a historically unprecedented decline in birth rates.<sup>7</sup> That is, women are consistently having fewer or no children than at any previous time in history (for reasons that are beyond the scope of this article). Demographically, the world is entering virgin territory. On the one hand, demographic trends suggest that there will be more "heavy lifting" to do with respect to international security. On the other hand, some countries

are far better positioned to weather the impending demographic storm than others. Ergo, fewer countries will end up having to do more of the "heavy lifting" on security, and with fewer resources.

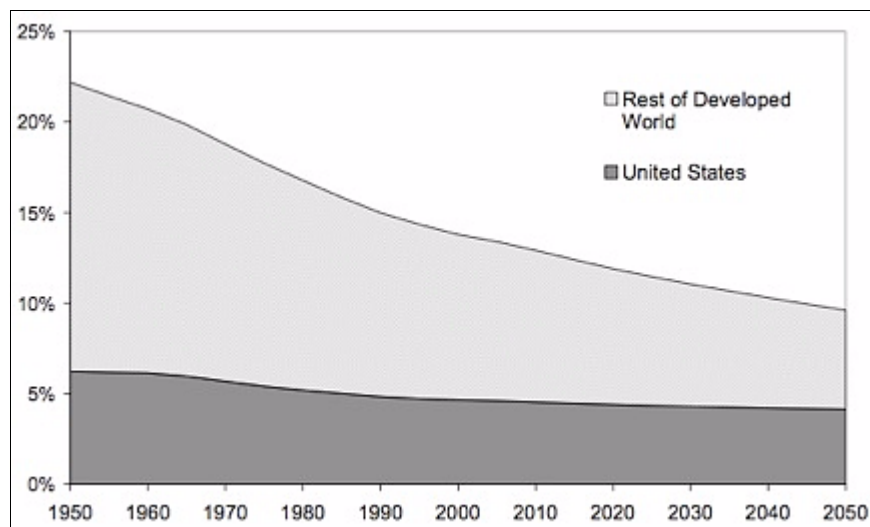
Some countries are better positioned vis-à-vis demographic change than others, and some will even have security benefits accrue to them, especially as a result of the continental multiplier effect in North America that is generated by virtue of the demographic advantage and concomitant economic growth enjoyed by the United States. In the context of slowing economic growth, increased costs of labor and defense spending, no state or combination of states appears likely to overtake the United States' position of economic and military dominance. Haas argues that global population aging is likely to extend U.S. hegemony (because the other major powers will lack the resources necessary to overtake the United States' economic and military power lead), as these other states are likely to fall even farther behind the United States.<sup>8</sup> These demographic developments suggest that there is no other country on the horizon that is able to muster the Americans' combination of innovation, economic growth, and low ratio of spending on capital versus personnel (which is key to military dominance on the high-tech battlefield of fourth generation warfare). Global population aging is thus likely to generate considerable security benefits for North America.

## Geriatrics Security: Towards Kant's Perpetual Peace?

Rarely can analysts of politics claim to be documenting new phenomena. Population aging, however, is one of these revolutionary variables. Never before has humanity witnessed such dramatic, widespread aging among the world's most industrialized and powerful democracies. Two long-term demographic trends coincided to produce population aging: decreasing fertility rates and increasing life expectancy. Fertility rates refer to the average number of children born per woman in a given country. For a state to sustain its population (assuming zero net immigration), fertility levels must exceed about 2.1 children per woman. Today the United States is the sole liberal democracy that comes close to meeting this requirement. Most are well below this average and have been for decades.

As Figure 1 shows, the proportion of the world's population that resides in advanced industrialized democracies will continue to decline: from 24 percent in 1980, to 18 percent today, and 16 percent by 2025. This is a remarkable reversal: Between 1700 and 1900, Europe's population and its overseas offshoots had doubled its proportion of the world's total popula-

tion from 20 percent to 40 percent.<sup>9</sup> As late as 1950, Europe, Japan, and North America together comprised roughly one-third of the world's population, compared to one-fifth today and under one-seventh by 2050. By 2030, that translates into an expected total increase of less than 40 million people by 2030 (primarily concentrated in North America as Europe's overall population starts to shrink) as opposed to 1.5 billion people in the rest of the world.



Source: UN World Population Prospects, 2008; for demographic scenarios see Jackson and Howe, 2008: Appendix 1, Section 3.

**Figure 1:** Developed World Population as a Percentage of World Total

In absolute terms, India's population will grow the most (by 240 million to 1.45 billion people), followed by an increase of 100 million in China, for a total population of 1.3 billion. Growth will also be strong throughout Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Much of Eastern and Central Europe, Russia, Italy, and Japan, by contrast, will see their populations decline by as much as 10 percent. Bucking the trend are the traditional Anglo-Saxon settler countries, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where population growth between 2010 and 2025 is projected to exceed 10 percent. Its current growth rate of 1.4 percent notwithstanding, China's population, by contrast, is projected to start declining by 2025 (when it will officially be overtaken by India as the world's most populous country, although many demographers already believe India to

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be more populous than China). Russia's population, by contrast, is projected to fall from 141 to 130 million by 2025 while its population ages rapidly.<sup>10</sup> While these developments have but a moderate effect on the pecking order among the world's three most populous countries, Table 1 shows that the impact on "the rise and fall" of other "great powers" (measured by population size) is marked.

**Table 1:** Largest Countries Ranked by Population Size, 1950, 2005, and 2050

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2050</b>
1	China	China	India
2	India	India	China
3	United States	United States	United States
4	Russian Federation	Indonesia	Indonesia
5	Japan	Brazil	Pakistan
6	Indonesia	Pakistan	Nigeria
7	Germany	Bangladesh	Bangladesh
8	Brazil	Russian Federation	Brazil
9	UK	Nigeria	Ethiopia
10	Italy	Japan	DR Congo
11	Bangladesh	Mexico	Philippines
12	France	Vietnam	Mexico
		(14) Germany	(18) Japan
		(20) France	(26) Germany
		(21) UK	(27) France
		(23) Italy	(32) UK
			(39) Italy

Source: Adapted from Jackson and Howe (2008); future rankings for select developed countries which are projected to fall below 12th place are indicated in parentheses.

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By 2025, for instance, the number of women of child-bearing age will be barely half of what it is today. The drag on Russian productivity is expected to be considerable (although it will be offset in the short term by rising rents from Russia's vast wealth in natural resources). In fact, Vladimir Putin has referred to the precipitous decline of Orthodox Slavs as the country's greatest security threat: "The most acute problem facing Russia today is demography," he told the Kremlin in his 2006 State of the Union Address. This is caused by large swaths of land being already under-populated and a combination of higher fertility rates and migration by ethnic minorities that are poised to eclipse Orthodox Slavs.<sup>11</sup>

The scope of the aging process is remarkable. By 2050, at least 20 percent of the population in allied countries, but also in China and Russia, will be over sixty-five. In Japan it will be as high as one-third of the population. By 2050 China alone will have more than 330 million people over sixty-five. Population aging, as Table 2 shows, is accompanied by a diffusion of absolute population decline. Russia's population is already decreasing by 500,000–700,000 people per year.



**Table 2:** Countries Projected to Have Declining Populations, by Period of the Onset of Decline, 1981–2045

<b>Already declining</b>	<b>Onset of decline: 2009–2029</b>	<b>Onset of decline: 2030–2050</b>
Hungary (1981)	Italy (2010)	Azerbaijan (2030)
Bulgaria (1986)	Slovakia (2011)	Denmark (2031)
Estonia (1990)	Bosnia & Herzegovina (2011)	Belgium (2031)
Georgia (1990)	Greece (2014)	Thailand (2033)
Latvia (1990)	Serbia (2014)	North Korea (2035)
Armenia (1991)		Singapore (2035)
Romania (1991)	Portugal (2016)	Netherlands (2037)
Lithuania (1992)	Cuba (2018)	Switzerland (2040)
Ukraine (1992)	Macedonia (2018)	UK (2044)
Moldova (1993)	Spain (2019)	Puerto Rico (2044)
Belarus (1994)	Taiwan (2019)	Kazakhstan (2045)
Russian Federation (1994)	South Korea (2020)	
Czech Republic (1995)	Austria (2024)	
Poland (1997)	Finland (2027)	
Germany (2006)	China (2029)	
Japan (2008)		
Croatia (2008)		
Slovenia (2008)		

Source: Adapted from Jackson and Howe (2008); excludes countries with populations less than 1 million.

The trends projected in these data are largely irreversible and are highly accurate. The reason for this certainty is simple: the elderly of the future are already born. Put another way, anyone over the age of forty in 2050 has already been born. Except for some global natural disaster, disease pandemic, or other worldwide calamity, the number of people in the world who are over sixty-five will grow exponentially over the coming decades. Even in democracies with comparatively good demographic prospects, the proportion of that cohort is projected to double by 2040.

### *Outgrowing the Age of Major International Conflict*

Contrary to hawkish technological "fantasies" of high-tech international war,<sup>12</sup> then, the probability of a major international war actually continues to diminish as the world's population grows older. Specifically, the demographic challenges faced by China and Russia make an international military conflict with America increasingly unlikely. Haas refers to this as "a geriatric peace."<sup>13</sup> For the same reason, it is highly improbable that any disputes over the Arctic would ever escalate to the point of war. Global aging also increases the likelihood of continued peaceful relations between the United States and other great powers. Others have shown that the probability of international conflict grows when either the dominant country anticipates a power transition in favor of a rising state or states, or when such a transition actually occurs.<sup>14</sup> By adding substantial support to the continuation of U.S. hegemony, global aging counteracts either outcome. Thus, Haas surmises that an aging world decreases the probability that either hot or cold wars will develop between the United States and other great powers.<sup>15</sup>

### **Raining on the Parade: When the Young and the Restless Move to the City, and Grow Old... before They Grow Rich**

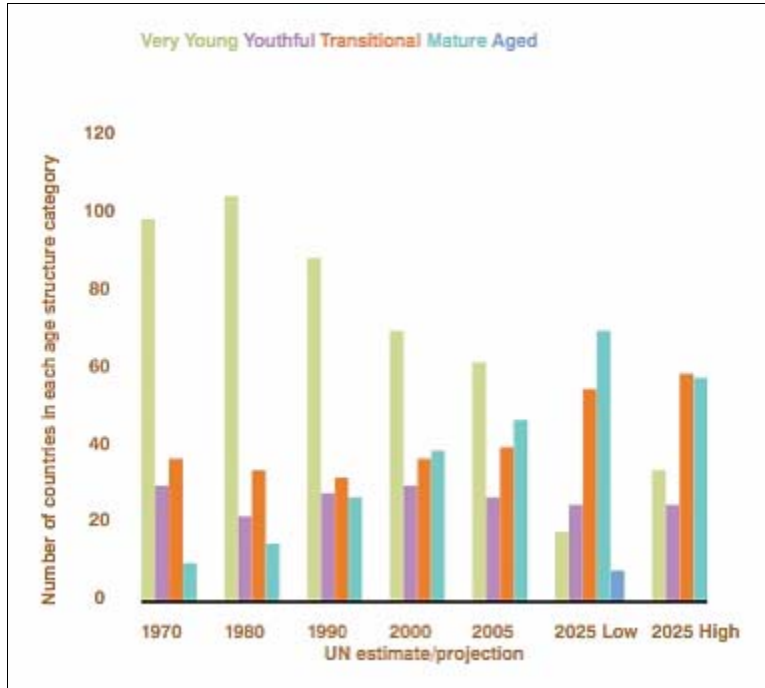
Despite the predictions of Haas, global population aging is likely to make the twenty-first century a particularly dangerous time for U.S. international interests. Population aging will beset much of the world at some point this century. In fact, the aging problem in many developing states is likely to be as acute as for industrialized countries, but the former have the added disadvantage of growing old before growing rich, thus greatly handicapping their ability to pay for elder-care costs.<sup>16</sup> For example, in China the comparative advantage associated with a large working-age population relative to a small proportion of children and elderly starts to wane around 2015, a problem that is further exacerbated by a growing excess of men over women.<sup>17</sup> The ratio of working-age adults to elderly is projected to shrink from just under ten in 2000 to 2.6 by 2050 when China's median age is projected to be just over forty-five years of age. That median age will make China one of the oldest populations in the world—older than Japan, the country with the oldest population today and a projected median age of forty-three by then.<sup>18</sup>

If the strain on governments' resources caused by the cost of aging populations becomes sufficiently great, it has the potential to exacerbate systematically both the number of fragile states and the extent and depth of

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that fragility. As fragile states are prospective havens for organized crime and terrorism, the prospect of having to contend with a proliferation of fragile states with fewer resources at the allies' disposal could prove the single greatest security challenge of this century.<sup>19</sup> This is complemented by an already reduced capacity to realize other key international objectives, including preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), funding nation-building, engaging in military humanitarian interventions, and various other costly strategies of international conflict resolution and prevention.

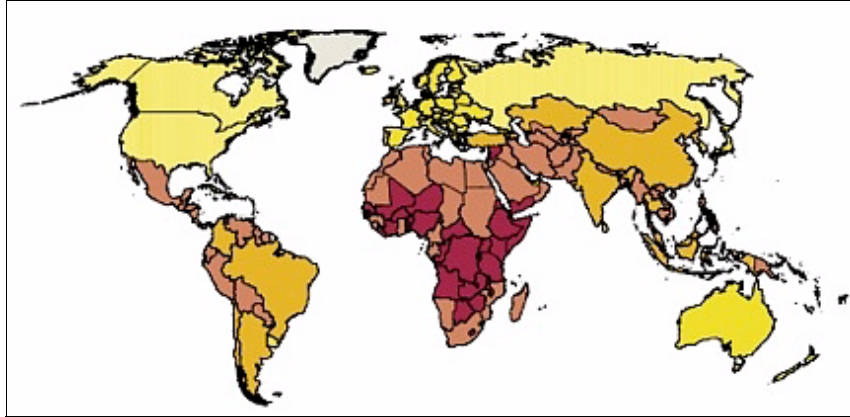
Global population is expected to grow by 1.2 billion by 2025, an increase of not quite 20 percent from the current 6.8 billion. However, that is well below the rate of increase between 1980 and 2009 when the globe's population grew by 2.4 billion. While the rate of growth may be slowing, the impact of the absolute growth is still staggering. The populations of fifty countries are projected to grow by a third, in some cases by two-thirds, by 2025 (which, of course, places additional stress on natural resources, services, and infrastructure). These are predominantly large, Islamic countries of 60 million people or more that are located primarily in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Middle East and South Asia. With the demographic transition progressing more rapidly in the Middle East and South Asia (Figure 2), the challenges associated with population growth, such as youth bulges, will be greatest in sub-Saharan Africa.



Source: Leahy et al., 2007: 19.

**Figure 2:** The Global Population Structure, 1970–2025

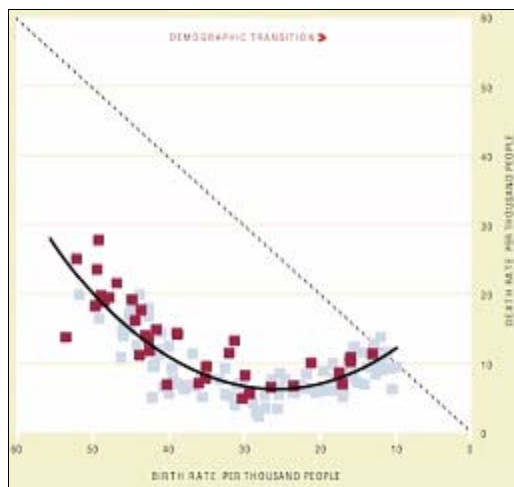
Countries with so-called "youth bulges" (the proportion of the adult population aged 15–29) are depicted in Figure 3.<sup>20</sup> These countries have been shown to be at a greater risk for civil conflict due to strains on systems of schooling and socialization as well as un- or under-employment, concomitant propensity for deviance, and countries in which more than 60 percent of the population is under thirty, have been shown to be four times as prone to civil war than countries with mature populations.<sup>21</sup>



Source: Cincotta et al, 2003: 42.

**Figure 3:** Geographic Distribution of the Youth Bulge, 2005

Another way to make the case for the correlation between fecundity, youth bulges, and the propensity for conflict is to examine the association between a country's position along the demographic transition and the outbreak of civil war (as shown in Figure 4): The further along a country's population is in the demographic transition, the lower the probability of civil war.



Source: Cincotta et al., 2003: 28.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 4:** Demographic Transition and Onset of Civil War

Populations in the West Bank/Gaza Strip, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia will continue to grow and remain comparatively youthful; therefore, we can expect continued political instability and outmigration among those countries. Still, the youth bulge will be greatest in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Guatemala, Iraq, Ethiopia, Angola, Chad and Yemen, producing population growth rates of over 2% annually (see Table 3) with populations in those countries doubling every 30–35 years. Even if fertility rates in Nigeria or Afghanistan were to decline, they are currently so high that, at best, each country might barely transition from a young to a youthful age structure by 2025.

**Table 3:** Fastest-Growing Countries 2005–2010 (at least 1 million people)

Country*	Annual Growth Rate, %
Liberia	4.1
<b>Niger</b>	3.9
<b>Afghanistan, Burkino Faso</b>	3.4
<b>Syria, Timor L'este, Uganda</b>	3.3
<b>Benin, Palestine (occupied)</b>	3.2

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<b>Country*</b>	<b>Annual Growth Rate, %</b>
<b>Eritrea</b>	3.1
<b>Jordan</b>	3.0
Burundi, <b>Tanzania, Yemen</b>	2.9
<b>Chad, Congo (DR), Gambia, Malawi, UAE</b>	2.8
Angola, Rwanda, Madagascar, <b>Sierra Leone</b>	2.7
<b>Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal</b>	2.6
Guatemala, Togo	2.5
<b>Kuwait, Mali, Mauritania, PNG, Zambia</b>	2.4
Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, <b>Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia</b>	2.3
<b>Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan</b>	2.2
Ghana, <b>Oman, Saudi Arabia</b>	2.1
Honduras, <b>Libya</b>	2.0
Cen.Afr.Rep., Congo, Namibia, Nepal	1.9
Bolivia, <b>Egypt</b> , Gabon, Ireland, Laos, Paraguay, Philippines	1.8
Israel, <b>Malaysia</b> , Venezuela	1.7
Cambodia, Haiti, Panama, <b>Tajikistan</b>	1.6
<b>Algeria</b> , Colombia	1.5

\* Countries with 50 percent or more Muslim population in **Bold**.  
Source: United Nations, 2008.

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Although youth bulges are on the wane in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, by 2025 three-quarters of the countries with persistent youth bulges will be in sub-Saharan Africa. A key driver of this development is HIV/AIDS, which delays the entry of populations with high incidence rates of infection through the demographic transition by compromising the elderly portion of the population. So, the bulk of conflict and political instability will continue to be scattered across the Middle East, Asia, and some Pacific islands, but is likely to be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. Since conflict is the single greatest "push factor" of migration, immigration pressures from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe (but also to places such as South Africa, as Lindy Heinecken's 2001 micro-study on the subject has demonstrated) are expected to continue unabated and may accelerate as climate change makes life even less viable in that part of the world.

Migration and age structure have several connections, one of which is that the most mobile populations also tend to be youthful. That is, migrants are overwhelmingly between 15 and 35 years old. There are a number of reasons for this, but perhaps most importantly, these age groups stand to reap the greatest long-term payoff from migrating and they have the least to lose from being uprooted.

Owing to the compound effect of migration and fertility, mega-cities are likely to continue as the locus of youth bulges. Ergo, they are likely to become hubs of volatility with the population influx vastly exceeding employment prospects, thus overtaxing services.<sup>23</sup> In fact, where the annual rate of urban population growth exceeds four percent, the probability of civil conflict has been found to be 40 percent; where the rate of growth is between one and four percent, it is half that at 20 percent, and where it is less than one percent it is 19 percent. In other words, disproportionately high rates of urbanization are associated with a disproportionately high probability of civil conflict.

These migratory trends are also likely to cause growing disequilibria among ethnic populations, as the "sons of the soil" have to contend with an influx of other ethnic groups. Prominent examples where population differentials are already a source of conflict include Israel, Lebanon, and Nigeria, as well as native populations across the Americas and Oceania which register some of the highest fertility (and migratory) rates in the world.

The combination of significant (1) aging, (2) diversification of populations, and (3) a reversal of the urban-rural split (from 30–70 in 1950 to 70–30 by 2050, cf. UN Secretariat 2008) is without historical precedent. Since urban populations are both younger and more diverse than rural

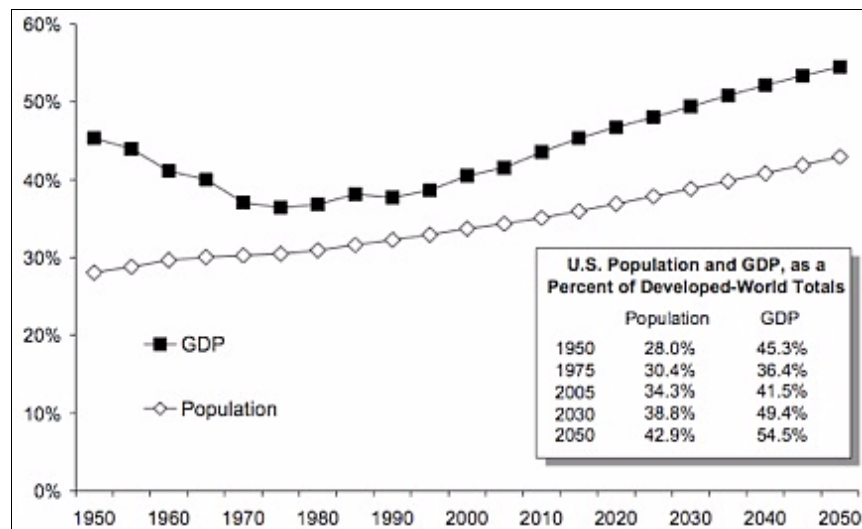


ones, one might also add a growing urban-rural divide and territorial differentiation as subsidiary challenges. For the first time in history, more people now live in cities than in the countryside. As urban growth outpaces national population growth by a factor of 1.5, the proportion of urban dwellers across the world is expected to rise to 57 percent by 2025. In the less-developed world, where population growth is greatest, however, three billion more people will live in cities (in addition to the 2.3 billion urban dwellers in 2005), a 50 percent increase from 42.7 percent in 2005 to 67 percent by 2050. In sub-Saharan Africa, the growth will be three-fold, from 3,000 today to one billion by mid-century. While much attention has been focused on the growth of mega-cities, most of the urban growth is expected to transpire in secondary centers along migratory crossroads.

When troops and reconstruction/development funds are deployed in the service of international security and stability, it will, in all likelihood, be in this part of the world. When expeditionary, civil-affairs and psychological-operations capabilities are concerned, allied armed forces need to prepare accordingly. Many of the West's immigrants originate in countries from this arc of instability. Given the likelihood of future involvement in the provision of security in this part of the world, diasporas will become increasingly important to mission success (and legitimacy).

## In Search of...New Friends

Among her allies, America will be shouldering a growing fiscal burden of expenditures on international security as the United State's proportion of the developed world's population and GDP continues to rise (see Figure 5).



Cited in Jackson and Howe, 2008: Appendix 1, Section 5.

**Figure 5:** US Population and GDP (in 2005 PPP dollars), As a Percent-age of Developed-World Totals (1950–2050).

Population aging will hamper the ability of a number of allies to "step up to the plate." Afghanistan may already provide some preliminary empirical evidence to this effect. Following the logic of relative population aging, the United States, Canada, the UK, and Australia are becoming relatively more important allies. As more countries, and especially NATO allies, face growing fiscal constraints, fewer allies will end up having to pay a growing share of the common international security interests. But even for those countries, which are relatively well-positioned, that will become increasingly difficult as they face their own fiscal challenges growing out of population aging. There will be a need to do more with less as population aging strains defense spending. Allied armed forces should not be expecting significant increases in their budgets or personnel. As funds become even scarcer than they already are, careful strategic planning will be imperative. For example, given the way international security will be developing, the potential need to deploy tanks is diminishing precipitously. With resources at a premium and personnel-to-capital expense ratio on the rise, the armed forces cannot afford procurement "errors". In light of elevated and increasingly disproportionate personnel to capital ratios, armed forces will be disinclined to expand their troop strength. On the contrary, they will be reducing troop levels to free up money for develop-

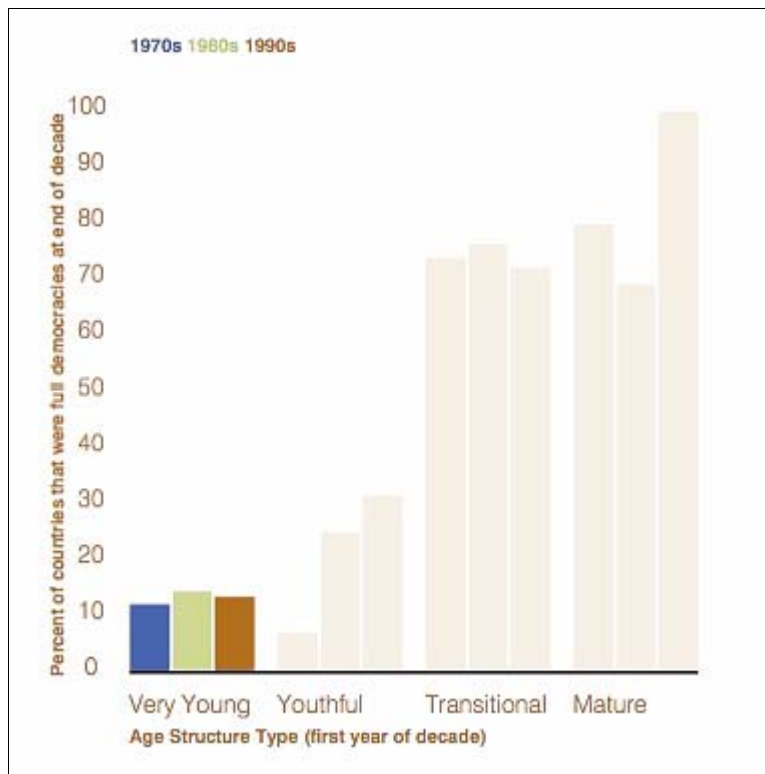
ment and procurement. This will be especially difficult in a tight labor market, which will cause the costs for highly qualified personnel to rise significantly.

In effect, the economic impact of population aging will challenge allied countries that lack the fiscal room necessary to maintain the extent of their global position and involvement, let alone adopt major new initiatives. Ergo, allies have little choice but to work actively through international institutions to preserve and enhance soft power.<sup>24</sup> Since the ability for NATO and its member countries to assert themselves on the ground will face mounting financial, personnel, and *matériel* constraints, the allies will have to maximize their returns from international institutions. Similarly, having to make do with less at home means allies will have to harness synergies among domestic institutions and government departments. The "whole-of-government" comprehensive approach *is* the future. As apprehensive as countries may be about contributing troops, as situations arise where they deem intervention is in their interest, fewer allies will be in a position to contribute; and those countries with more favorable demographic trends, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and also the UK, France, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, should prepare themselves (both at the level of mass psychology and operationally) to take on a greater share of the burden. This is not a normative observation but a sociological one: Among many of the traditional allies, the fiscal and defense capabilities are likely to erode further. So, if a country deems a given situation in need of intervention, it will have to put its money (and troops) where its mouth is.

Yet, as some traditional allies across Europe struggle in their ability to contribute financial and military prowess to international missions, countries further along the demographic transition in Latin and Central America (e.g., Brazil and Mexico) and Asia (e.g., India and China) will start to benefit from international migration's human-capital and technology-transfer effect as educated and affluent expatriates return to their countries of origin. As populations throughout the Americas mature and their economies develop, their strategic significance grows. Preliminary evidence to this end can be found in Mexican financial contributions to the reconstruction effort in Haiti as well as Brazil's military leadership in Haiti. Together, these countries will become cognizant that stable countries right across the continent are in their best interest as "pull" factors increase with improved economic conditions, and "push" factors such as political instability in Haiti, persist. So, collaboration across the Americas is likely to grow. Yet many countries in the Americas harbor suspicions about US interests and, for political reasons, do not want to be seen as too cozy with the United States. This should provide an interesting opportu-

nity for "middle-power" allies, such as Canada and Australia, to expand their traditional role of honest broker and take on a continental leadership role that should allow it to punch well above its weight.

Moreover, as youth bulges transition into bulges in the working-age population, some Asian, Latin American, and North African countries have the potential to harness not only the economic returns of the demographic transition (Bloom, Canning and Sevilla, 2003) but also "democratic returns" (see Figure 6).<sup>25</sup>



Source: Leahy et al. 2007: 25.

**Figure 6: Age Structure and Governance**

They include Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. For instance, as Iran's population matures over the coming decade (and approximates China's current age structure with a large working-age pop-

ulation but relatively few children and elderly), prospects for improved education and higher standards of living are likely to become an impetus for political moderation. Since Iran's population structure will be more mature than that of its neighbors, demographically, the risk of its initiating international war is actually on the wane.

## Conclusion

Four substantive implications follow: First, demographic developments suggest that the high-tech fantasy of the "big war" with countries such as China and Russia that the hawks are fretting about is a strategic folly whose pursuit ties increasingly scarce demographic and financial resources to a wrong-headed vision. Second, time is on "our" side: Maturing population structures will make some "rogue states," such as Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, more politically stable. Third, youth bulges will emerge as a growing driver of political instability in select African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries. Fourth, demographic convergence is providing a welcome opportunity to make new friends in the pursuit of global stability, especially in the Americas. Some of these claims have been advanced elsewhere. But the analytical implications for the strategic pursuit of soft power and new friends relative to the demographic context of political instability are novel.

The aging crisis is less acute in some countries than in others. Where it is less acute, countries have better prospects to shape international security according to their national interests. Still, the magnitude of the costs will be unprecedented (due to the compound effect of diminished overall contributions and expanded demand), as will the constraints they will impose on defense spending. The more countries sustain their comparative demographic advantage and relatively superior ability to pay for the costs of their elderly population, the more we are likely to see a middle-power renaissance among those allied countries that continue to enjoy fairly favorable demographic developments. It is in the allies' strategic and defense interests to rein in the costs of old-age security and health care as much as possible, minimize the gap between elder-care obligations and resources set aside for them, raise the retirement age, and maintain as open an immigration policy as possible to keep their median age relatively low. Proactive policies that are designed both to take full advantage of the opportunities created by global aging while mitigating the costs created by this phenomenon will enhance international security through the twenty-first century.

The bad news is that demand for armed forces will grow as demographic determinants of domestic instability rise over the next twenty years. The good news is (1) that the demographic determinants of international war are on the decline and (2) that demographic projection allows us to pinpoint the likely hotspots. In other words, analysis of the demographic evidence suggests that armed forces should prepare for international interventions rather than international war. If the dictum that the generals are always well-prepared to fight the last war holds, then prevailing military strategy runs a real danger of having armed forces bet on the wrong horse. Owing to two competing trends, they will find it increasingly difficult to cope with growing demand for their services.

Maintaining the armed forces' functional imperative in a tightening labor market means substituting capital for labor. Increased strain on demographic and fiscal resources means smaller but more capable, effective, and professional armed forces. But with soldiers' median age on the rise, and defense spending atrophying under competing political priorities in democratic countries with aging populations, the inclination will be to shift armed forces' dwindling fiscal resources from capital to labor. Owing to nuanced demographic trends and political structures, the crowding out will be more rapid and severe in some countries than in others. The downside of this trend is that fewer countries will need to bring a greater proportion of armed and fiscal resources to bear on a less secure world. The upside, however, is that demographic trends are also opening up opportunities to look for new friends as partners in international security. These developments place a premium on soft power, which include being intentionally strategic about international security regimes and institutions, and international collaboration among armed forces of traditional allies and demographically emerging powers.

## About the Author

Christian Leuprecht is associate professor of political science at the Royal Military College of Canada. He is cross-appointed to the Department of Political Studies and the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, where he is chair (pro tempore) of the Defence Management Studies Program and a fellow of both the Queen's Centre for International Relations and the Institute of Intergovernmental Affairs. He is also a research associate at the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy as well as the Institute for Leadership and Management at the Swedish National Defence Academy. He is currently on leave at Yale University, where he is the Bicentennial Visiting Associate Professor in Canadian Studies.

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