This study tests the hypothesis that practice of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) and TM-Sidhi program, in a single group by approximately the square root of one percent of the population, will result in reduced conflict and violence throughout society as a whole. This hypothesis is based upon a theoretical understanding of consciousness in its fundamental state as having a field character with properties similar to physical fields, through which an influence of coherence could be propagated at a distance. The present study extends previous research by testing the hypothesis on a global scale.

Three large assemblies of TM and TM-Sidhi program participants were held from 1983–1985, ranging in length from 8 to 11 days, in which the group approached or exceeded the size predicted to create a global influence (approximately 7000). International conflict was measured daily for a period of time before, during, and after each of the three assemblies; the three time series were generated from blind ratings of news events in major international newspapers (New York Times for two assemblies, London Times for one) using a standard methodology for scoring international conflict events. A second variable studied was casualties and injuries due to international terrorism, for which data were obtained from the Rand Corporation data bank for 1983 to 1985 (aggregated in five-day periods). Capital International’s World index of stock prices was also obtained daily from mid-1983 to mid-1985 as a measure of global short-term economic confidence.

Time series intervention analyses were used to estimate the effects of each of the three assemblies on international conflict and the effect of the three assemblies together on international terrorism and the World index. The Akaike information criterion was employed to objectively define optimal noise models. Results indicated significant decreases of 36%, 24%, and 35% in international conflict during the three assemblies (p<.025, p<.005, and p<.01, respectively; see Fig. 1), a significant drop in international terrorism of 72% after the beginning of the three assemblies taken together (p<.025; see Fig. 2), and a small but significant increase in the World stock index during the three assemblies taken together (p<.025).

The fact that all of these variables displayed a near-simultaneous improvement indicates that there was a worldwide and holistic influence of reduced tension during the intervention periods. A viable alternative hypothesis for the results of the present study would have to predict both the holistic nature of the changes (a worldwide effect across three variables) and their temporal specificity. The most likely such alternate hypothesis is that since two of the assemblies occurred at the end of the year, the results could be due to some holiday-related effect at that time. This alternate hypothesis appears unlikely for several reasons. The first is that one of the assemblies occurred in mid-summer rather than at year end. Results for this assembly replicated the findings for the other assemblies for international conflict,
and this assembly was part of the intervention parameter estimation for each of the other analyses. In addition, the time series analysis for terrorism modeled seasonal cycles up to 84 lags (60 weeks), to explicitly take yearly cycles into account and to ensure that the intervention effects reported would not be due to annual cycles present in the series. Finally, as a direct control, a secondary time series analysis was performed for each variable assessing its year-end behavior in at least five previous years. For each of the three variables—international conflict, international terrorism, and the World index—these analyses demonstrated that the magnitude of change found in the present study could clearly not have been expected from the behavior of the variable in previous years. These findings indicate that a general year-end effect is not a viable alternative hypotheses. Indeed, in the case of international conflict, the trend was in the opposite direction.

It is difficult to identify other alternative hypotheses that could account for changes worldwide on all three variables during the specific assembly periods. An alternative hypothesis would have to account for a simultaneous influence on what would ordinarily be considered independent conflicts in different areas (e.g., Latin America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia). Moreover, it would also have to explain a simultaneous influence on international terrorism and on an economic indicator that would usually be considered to measure a process independent of the conflict variables. Although ad-hoc and complex explanations might be attempted, the hypothesis of the present study, while new to contemporary social science, is more parsimonious.

In contrast to the year-end alternative hypothesis and other possible post-hoc explanations which do not easily account for the scope or timing of the results, the hypothesis of a rapid onset of the Maharishi Effect on a global scale was predicted in advance of each assembly for the variables used in this study. The global reduction in international conflict and terrorism corresponding to or immediately following the onset of the large assemblies of TM and TM-Sidhi participants strongly supports the theory that generated this research, and extends previous research on this effect to the world scale. The individuals participating in these assemblies were clearly not engaged in behavioral interaction or direct communication with those involved in armed conflict or terrorist acts occurring at multiple locations thousands of miles away. Thus, it appears that the only tenable explanation for an immediate global influence of group practice of the subjective techniques is that it is propagated through an underlying field characterized by or capable of interacting with consciousness.

On a practical level, the small number of people required for the effects found here raise the possibility of a global influence of reduced violence through an approach that requires no intrusion in other nations, that can be adopted by any country regardless of its governmental system, and that involves an insignificant fraction of the defense spending of any major nation.