Deconstructing Our Dark Age Future

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P. MICHAEL PHILLIPS

The Middle Ages is an unfortunate term. It was not invented until the age was long past. The dwellers in the Middle Ages would not have recognized it. They did not know that they were living in the middle; they thought, quite rightly, that they were time's latest achievement.
—Morris Bishop, 1968[1]

To many observers, almost two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union the post-Cold War world's future remains frightening. In an increasingly multipolar world, rapid advances in technology and globalization have dangerously empowered nonstate actors who compete for legitimacy with states and undercut long-held constructs of national autonomy and sovereignty. The community of nation-states, ensnared by its own bureaucratic inertia and dwindling capacities, cannot keep pace with these agile malefactors. More and more states contract out their responsibilities to commercial entities, further eroding their monopoly on power.[2] In such an environment it can appear that crisis is imminent, powerful states will weaken, and weakened states will fail. The Westphalian state system will crumble, and the world will slip into a New Dark Age presaged by fragmented political authority, overlapping jurisdictions, fluid territorial boundaries, group marginalization, divided loyalties, no-go areas, and contested property rights.[3] But this Draconian future might not become reality.

Crises tend to generate apocalyptic warnings, and this is not the first period in modern history when observers have misused historical themes such as the Dark Ages to describe troubling shifts in global politics.[4] The rise of Adolf Hitler in the interwar years and the imagined aftermath of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union were often described in comparable terms.[5] Had he survived the Battle of Hastings, one supposes even King Harold II would have viewed the Norman conquest of Britain as turning the clock back 66 years. Worrisome social and environmental trends should be cause for concern. Patterns in global terrorism, competition for dwin-

dling resources, and mounting perceptions of inequality, among other discomfiting trends, should stimulate reassessments of policy and strategy. But is what we are witnessing a dissolution of the international system as we know it—and a return to Petrarch's poetic construct of "darkness and dense gloom"—or, instead, are we merely distracted and deceived by the noisy death rattle of the cherished model that attempted to explain it?[6]

This article suggests that the system of Westphalian states is not in decline, but that it never existed beyond a utopian allegory exemplifying the American experience. As such, the Dark Age thesis is really not about the decline of the sovereign state and the descent of the world into anarchy. It is instead an irrational response to the decline of American hegemony with a naïve emphasis on the power of nonstate actors to compete with nation-states. The analysis concludes that because the current paradigm paralysis places a higher value on overstated threats than opportunities, our greatest hazard is not the changing global environment we live in, but our reaction to it.

No "Majestic Portal"

For more than a decade, political scientists have proposed the ideal of the Westphalian state—a territorial, sovereign, and legally equal entity—as most similar to academic shorthand rather than an empirical reality.[7] Still, security analysts routinely invoke the Westphalian paradigm to underwrite their observations of global chaos and predictions of a dismal future.[8]

This paradigm endures because during the past century it has become a guiding principle in America's worldview, the product of utopian interpretations of power relationships. To understand why this is the case, a brief review of the genesis of the international relations (IR) field of study might prove helpful. Emerging from the field of diplomatic history, IR took hold mostly in the United States in the period following World War I, as much out of revulsion for the scale of that conflict's slaughter as to investigate the causes of war and peace.[9] Rather than adopt a rigorous analytical framework, early IR scholars assumed a normative bias toward international law, international organizations, and collective security to counter balance-of-power theories of world politics, often with a view toward defining the role of the new League of Nations.[10] Casting states as rational actors whose interactions were bound by law and convention,

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practitioners evaluated national policies against idealistic rules of behavior and denounced statements of national interest and power politics in favor of more enlightened standards.[11] By the mid-twentieth century, American thinkers had identified the Peace of Westphalia—the common term for the 1648 treaties of Munster and Osnabruck ending the Thirty Years' War—as "the majestic portal which leads from the old into the new world" in which states are territorial, sovereign, and legally equal.[12] The reference to the old and new worlds appears to be deliberate; for many Americans, the old world of Europe was synonymous with cynical expressions of naked power, while America—a new world birthed in the warm afterglow of the Enlightenment—reflected reason and rational behavior. Likewise, the United States, a powerful state from its conception due in no small part to an accident of geography and a bountiful physical environment, conformed closely to the Westphalian model.[13] In short, the model reinforced the essential American experience, rather than the realities of global politics.

Early IR scholars asserted the 1648 treaties were the conceptual origin of national sovereignty and self-determination. By extension, this claim provided not only a useful pedigree but also conferred additional legitimacy on international institutions in their role of managing world affairs. Appropriating these treaties for such greater purposes, however, was a tremendous stretch, because apart from clarifying some religious rights, the treaties served simply to validate and perfect a scheme of mutual relations between semiautonomous actors that already existed.[14] Andreas Osiander notes that even prior to the war the Hapsburg Emperor exercised direct control over his family's dynastic lands only and that under the concept of territorial jurisdiction, subordinate princes of the realm enjoyed control over their individual estates.[15] After the treaty was signed, the Hapsburg's German princes were no more legally able to conclude agreements with foreign powers or to separate from the empire than they were before the war, and these limitations were understood and fully acknowledged by Europe's independent powers.[16] In fact, the Peace of Westphalia is silent on the issue of sovereignty and its corollaries; thus, the treaties were no more a "majestic portal" to a new world of law and reason than was C. S. Lewis's magic wardrobe an entry to the land of Narnia, where animals talk.[17]

Even if we accepted the validity of the Westphalian order, the model's underlying assumption—that the world is composed of sovereign and legally equal states—has never been absolute. Sovereignty is defined differently depending on the level of analysis. Some analysts describe it as the degree of control public entities enjoy within their borders, or the level of control over cross-border movements. To others, it is the freedom to

enter into treaties or to exercise territorial autonomy. While these definitions are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive.[18] Also, such sovereign constructs are not universally observed. Steven Krasner notes that conventions, contracts, coercion, and imposition have all been enduring patterns of behavior in the international system.[19] States can enter into international agreements that limit their own autonomy. Likewise, intervening in another state's domestic affairs remains a viable policy option because, in spite of the plethora of modern international organizations, no overarching international authority structure can oppose intervention.[20] The examples of both the United States-led invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq as well as the more recent Russian intervention in Georgia's South Ossetia province are just two instances of many, where a more powerful state's perceptions of its vital interests trumped a weaker nation's supposed sovereign rights. Thus, in spite of the Westphalian model's normative bias, all states are not created equal, and Thucydides's observation about the nature of power remains valid.[21]

If Not Westphalia, Then What?

If sovereignty is illusory, the obvious question remains: What exactly is a state? The ancient German concept of territorial jurisdiction is as good a starting point as any; it enshrines the legitimacy to make and enforce rules within a given territorial boundary. In a state sense, legitimacy is conferred by two processes, the ability of any state to defend its claimed jurisdiction and the agreement of other states to observe it. The historical fact that strong states have been more successful than weaker ones at guaranteeing their survival reinforces this relationship.

A third component, the degree to which a population accepts the state's legitimacy to rule, is not necessarily essential to a state's existence; history is filled with examples of states ruling autocratically and with relative success without public support. But for states trending toward Washington's favored democratic governance model, strength and resilience depend a great deal on whether the populace view their government as legitimate. In his study of Swiss villages and communes, Randolph Head concluded that "every viable political entity must reach legitimate decisions—ones accepted by a preponderance of its members—and must distribute benefits and burdens in a predictable way."[22] The late Charles Tilly suggested the establishment of democratic states evolved through extensive bargaining that made rulers dependent on widespread compliance by their citizens and the establishment of "rights and obligations that amount to mutually binding consultation."[23] A democracy thrives when the resulting trust networks integrate

with public politics, insulate public politics from categorical inequalities, and eliminate alternate coercive power centers within the state.[24]

This introduces the essential divide in the world that exists between strong and weak states. The strong states in the international system seem self-evident. Whether referred to as the "northern tier," "The West," or "the developed world," we generally associate developed nations as strong states that have control of most of the world's monetary markets. Apart from access to capital, these states command sufficient military strength to support their geopolitical claims, either singly or in concert with other states. Possessing viable landmasses and having societies forged by the long process of social interaction, these strong states are generally more resilient in the face of change to the international system.

All states are not created equal, though in fact many are created. Almost two decades ago, Robert Jackson coined the term "quasi-state" to describe former colonies that were granted independence from the *metropole* and accorded United Nations recognition as sovereign states without having to demonstrate the institutional features commonly accepted by international law.[25] Jackson observed that although the international community recognized these new states as equal partners, they were only marginally able to support their populations. It is therefore not surprising that of 141 states labeled as "weak" in a 2008 Brookings Institution study, the 28 states forming the bottom quintile all were former colonies granted independence following World War II.[26]

The state as described in this article differs greatly from the ideal imagined in the Westphalian paradigm. States do not universally enjoy unrestricted sovereignty. Nor are they equal. In fact, the sovereignty of a great number of the states in the international system is merely ascriptive.[27] Because these imperfect conditions have more or less existed since long before 1648, it may be more helpful to think of any observed chaos in the international system as the natural condition, rather than a decline into disorder. If the system is not melting down, are so-called nonstate actors as significant for the long-term as they appear to be for the present?

Nonstate Actors: Dark Age Wild Cards

In the early 1970s, political scientists conceptualized the nonstate actor (NSA) to fill gaps in state-centric theories of international politics.[28] Those earlier studies noted that NSAs and their activities sometimes had an effect on state decisionmaking, but scholars stopped short of suggesting NSAs wielded significant power. Put simply, an NSA is any polity that is not a government. Because this definition could, in theory, extend to almost

> *The community of nation-states, ensnared by bureaucratic inertia and dwindling capacities, cannot keep pace with agile malefactors.*

all nongovernmental groups, from international terrorists to domestic animal protection leagues, it is best to examine only those that operate in the international realm, the domain of the state.[29]

Security analysts often cast NSAs as cunning rivals who threaten to undermine the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force and the enforcement of its societal order.[30] This rivalry is normally expressed in two ways. First, NSAs gradually accumulate legitimacy through the state's willing transfer of some powers to them. At first only supplementing the state, NSAs make slow encroachments on state prerogatives that undercut the state's free hand. Nonstate actors employing this means include private military companies (PMCs), transnational corporations (TNCs), and nongovernmental organizations, and might be called nonhostile NSAs.[31] By a second and more overt route, other types of NSAs can engage states in a contest for power. These actors include private militias, global terrorists, insurgents, and drug cartels, and might be labeled as hostile NSAs. When combined with the high-tech forces of globalization, NSAs of both types are viewed as more agile, innovative, and entrepreneurial than state government, and are thus capable of exploiting fissures in the international system.

This view of the threat posed by NSAs is flawed for three reasons. First, it treats NSAs as new phenomena and ignores the historical fact that such groups are an old and enduring component of the international system's human terrain. Second, it falsely assumes that states are static, moribund, and nonenterprising and that, similar to the "underdog" in a giant global judo match, NSAs can easily leverage a state's weight against the government. Third, and most importantly, this view misleadingly elevates hostile NSAs to the status of a state competitor by discounting the advantages they derive from their own state sponsors.

Nonhostile NSAs and the State: A Symbiotic Relationship

Long before the opening of Westphalia's "majestic portal," states coexisted with NSAs and employed them to economize the defense and promotion of their interests. For instance, today's PMCs had as their antecedents the sixteenth-century German *Landsknecht* mercenary bands and the Italian *condottieri*. Early English and French rulers preferred to use

trained native militia to fight their wars. Even so, both routinely relied on foreign mercenary free companies to fill out their levies or to compensate for the relative weakness of their own forces, even though contemporaries considered the hiring of these contractors potentially dangerous.[32] The rise of modern standing armies did not obviate the occasional need to hire forces. The British famously hired thousands of mercenaries from German states such as Hesse-Kassel, the so-called Hessians, to quickly supplement their forces fighting revolutionaries in North America. Those revolutionaries followed suit. Not only did the American Continental Congress commission privateers to threaten its opponent's commerce, the framers of the new republic's constitution also gave Congress the power to grant letters of marque and reprisal should the nation once again need to contract a navy.[33] In modern times, states have successfully integrated PMCs into their security engagement plans, freeing regular combatants to perform core functions. This practice is not restricted to strong states. In his study of private security forces in West Africa's civil conflicts, Herbert Howe concluded that private security firms can stabilize weak states by providing a readily trained and professional force to a struggling government.[34]

Today's TNCs also have deep roots, stretching back to the chartered private stock companies of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the most famous of them, the Honourable East India Company, established a powerful symbiotic relationship with the British government that contributed to the stability of both actors while lubricating the economic engine of empire.[35] Although London eventually dissolved the company, granting private firms trading preferences or monopolies was a commonly accepted economic means of developing colonial possessions that extended into the early twentieth century. For example, in the 1890 charter to Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSACo), the Crown acknowledged ". . . the existence of a powerful British Company, controlled by . . . Our subjects . . . ," empowered to promote good government, suppress the slave trade, preserve peace and order, and maintain a police force.[36] Other colonial powers, such as Germany and Portugal, followed suit, establishing what amounted to commercial contracts for the administration of each nation's colonial possessions.[37]

The activities of these early TNCs were not always strictly limited to a given colonial boundary. Chartered companies could be useful substitutes to achieve state policy objectives. For instance, in 1895, Rhodes organized an invasion of the neighboring independent South African Republic in the Transvaal, ostensibly to liberate foreign gold miners from Boer oppression. The British government of Joseph Chamberlain did not officially support what would become known as the Jameson Raid, but as details of the foray's planning came to London's attention, the British gov-

ernment did precious little to impede it because Rhodes's intention aligned with Britain's desire to effect a regime change in the Transvaal.[38]

True, contracting out the state's responsibilities is certainly not all "beer and skittles," because even if the NSA bears no hostility toward a state's interests they are still potential wild cards. The ancient mercenary outfits were notorious for playing both sides against the middle, and their modern PMC descendants can cause great embarrassment to their associated state.[39] In 1998, the arms-smuggling activities of a British firm, Sandline International, almost ended the career of Britain's foreign secretary, and in 2007 the American security firm Blackwater Worldwide was charged with indiscriminately killing Iraqi civilians.[40] The same holds true for proto-TNCs. In 1891, an unauthorized BSACo invasion of Portuguese East Africa to secure a deepwater port for landlocked Rhodesia threatened Anglo-Portuguese relations. The 1896 failure of the Jameson Raid undermined confidence in Chamberlain's government.[41]

Given their potentially unpredictable behavior, employing private agents to conduct regime affairs may appear to be a dangerous ceding of authority. In reality, the ability of nonhostile NSAs to erode state control, let alone threaten a state's existence, is dubious because in these relationships states, whether weak or strong, usually retain the upper hand to shape the playing field to their benefit. Withdrawal of potential government contracts, alteration to beneficial tax structures, revocation of operating licenses, threat of legal action, or interruption of financial transactions are just a few of the measures states can take to tame ill-disciplined NSA behavior. States can also employ diplomatic agreements with other states as a classic antidote to harmful freewheeling. For example, the BSACo's port-seeking enterprise caused London to sign a friendship accord with Portugal both as a confidence-building measure and as a check against the company's unauthorized ventures.[42]

In employing nonhostile NSAs, states do not cede power. Instead, they deputize NSAs, conferring upon them certain responsibilities as a measure of economy to enlarge the span of state control. Essentially, once employed, these NSAs become symbiotes or agents of the state, and their nonstate label becomes counterfactual. Even if some NSAs sought to compete with their state sponsors, states of all stripes enjoy a veritable menu of enforcement mechanisms for reasserting their authority and preeminence. Although the tactics of their terrorist cousins are far more bold and deadly, a similar dynamic holds true for hostile NSAs.

Hostile NSAs: The Enemy of My Enemy

Determined, violent, networked and techno-savvy, for security analysts, the modern hostile NSAs are the true bad actors in the Dark Age scenario. Superficially, this type of NSA threat appears invincible because as so-called transnational actors they work outside the international system's established norms. Like their nonhostile cousins, however, we often discover that far from the super-empowered nonstate competitor, state patronage shapes or underwrites their viability and success.

Hostile NSAs—those lacking state sponsorship—have existed for centuries. Perhaps the most compelling archetypes were the various anarchist movements of the late Victorian era. In the 30 or so years prior to World War I, an unprecedented wave of terrorist violence spread throughout Europe. Anarchists assassinated not less than eight heads of state and made numerous attempts on others. Alfred Nobel's 1862 invention of dynamite, the "giant powder," "democratized the means of violence," and so-called *dynamitards* bombed theaters, restaurants, and public institutions seemingly at will.[43] From 1892 to 1894, 11 bombs exploded in Paris, and in 1893 some 20 Barcelonans were killed when a bomb exploded in a city theater.[44] Even the United States was not immune; bombs exploded in police stations, and in 1901 an anarchist's bullet took the life of President William McKinley. While most "Propagandists of the Deed" focused their efforts on the ruling class, the broader middle class was not immune. Viewed as complicit in the excesses of the state, hundreds of common citizens joined the "illustrious corpses" of political leaders.[45]

Though their terror attacks were widespread, there was no universal anarchist doctrine motivating the violence beyond a generally common desire to replace political power with natural authority.[46] In spite of international efforts to link the perpetrators, evidence of a coordinated conspiracy failed to materialize.[47] In effect, these anarchists were the quintessential hostile NSA, being both opposed to and unsupported by the state. Ironically, anarchist disunity and disorganization trumped their access to the then-advanced technology of high explosives. Their lack of desire or ability to attract and harness the power of a sponsor made them ill-equipped to achieve their goals in a system ruled by powerful states.

In the first few years of the twentieth century, anarchist violence started to decline. A turnaround in a long global depression that relieved worker poverty and the rise of socialist political movements seeking change in more traditional ways were to some degree responsible for the decrease.[48] But even as the early anarchists drifted away from terrorism, a long succes-

sion of dissident groups—from Fenians, to Communists, to today's jihadists—adopted their methods.

The "Propaganda of the Deed" certainly links these modern dissidents with the old anarchists, but any similarity goes no further because the hostile NSAs that concern us most all derive significant support from state sponsors. States have long engaged hostile NSAs as extensions of their foreign policies. For instance, states can support armed insurgent groups as a means of weakening rivals from within. In the eighteenth century, Bourbon France's support of Scottish Jacobite rebels was intended to divert British power, as was Imperial Germany's sustainment of Irish and Indian separatists before and during World War I.[49] States might also use hostile NSAs as proxies in an indirect effort to compete with their rivals when direct confrontation is too costly. The Cold War saw multiple uses of hostile NSAs by both sides, including Washington's support of anti-Soviet mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan and Moscow's support of European and African terrorist groups.[50] Finally, states may use NSAs as asymmetric multipliers of state power in unbalanced contests. The Taliban's support of al Qaeda terrorists against the United States, Iran's support of Hezbollah fighters against Israel, and Eritrea's support of separatist rebels against Ethiopia all serve as examples of this strategy.

State support of hostile NSAs falls generally along a continuum ranging from the supply of arms, munitions, and training at the high-end to the provision of sanctuary at the low-end. Iran's relationship with the Shia militia group, Hezbollah, offers the most forceful example of high-end state support. During Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel, Shia militiamen not only fired thousands of modernized Katyusha rockets from their bases in southern Lebanon, they also launched two sophisticated radar-guided cruise missiles against an Israeli warship and a merchant vessel.[51] While the Israel Defense Forces succeeded in destroying large portions of Hezbollah's ordnance stockpile, militarily the contest was inconclusive. There is general agreement that, at a minimum, Hezbollah "won the war of narratives" over its more sophisticated opponent.[52]

For some observers, this so-called NSA victory over a modern state underscores their warnings of impending global chaos. But in making this declaration, they fail to appreciate the source of Hezbollah's strength: its dependent relationship with Iran, and to a somewhat lesser extent, Syria. Hezbollah did not create out of whole cloth its impressive array of modern weapons, nor did it independently develop the tactics, techniques, and procedures to employ them. Instead, Iranian weapons completed Hezbollah's impressive arsenal, and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps advisers created the command and control center that coordinated the militiamen's missiles.

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In some cases, corps members even fired the weapons.[53] Hezbollah has long served as the de facto "Iranian Western Command" in Tehran's long-distance war with Tel Aviv, and some have interpreted the militarization of southern Lebanon as a strategic check to deter an Israeli attack on Iran's emerging nuclear infrastructure.[54]

Not all state support for hostile NSAs occurs on the Iran-Hezbollah scale. Lying at the opposite end of the state-support continuum, though no less fundamental, is the provision of sanctuary. Scholars who study collective action have long acknowledged that dissidents need to establish a "free space" or safe haven to organize, plan, and mobilize their opposition activities beyond the control of the dominant group.[55] Domestically, these havens might include venues as modest as cafes, hair salons, and safe houses. On an international level, these sanctuaries become more insulating, ranging from the refuges offered to terrorists to state-sponsored camps from which hostile NSAs recruit, train, equip, and attack. Relatively protected by the international system's normative constraints on direct interstate aggression and the conventional military forces of their host, sanctuary is a significant force multiplier that allows hostile NSAs to operate out of reach of their enemies. In some measure, al Qaeda's earlier successes as a global terrorist organization can be credited to the protection it received from the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Thus, like the Kaiser's support of Sikh and Sinn Fein terrorists or the Bourbons' support of Scottish pretenders, we cannot conclude that the activities of Hezbollah and other such state-supported groups are strictly transnational.[56] Rather, we should evaluate them as asymmetric extensions of traditional interstate politics. While these NSAs may have their own political beliefs or agendas, the enhanced effects they can have on their opponents cannot be separated from the advantages of state sponsorship. For terrorists, state support certainly offers access to more lethal technologies and sheltered spaces, even if it does not guarantee success. Al Qaeda's 9/11 strike cost them and their Taliban sponsors their state refuge. Some argue Hezbollah's apparent 2006 victory over Israel was pyrrhic.[57] Also, for the state, the employment of malevolent proxies offers no assurance its policy goals will be met. In fact, the empirical record demonstrates that employing proxy

agents results in few triumphs, no matter how determined the effort. But even as the smallness of the modern world consigns the tactic of plausible deniability to the dustbin, employing hostile NSAs to do one's dirty work is usually a cheaper alternative than directly confronting rivals, if only because the risk of reprisal is relatively small.

Are We Closer to the End, or the Middle?

The Westphalian state system is not in fact in decline; this arrangement, as we have imagined it, never really existed beyond a proposed behavioral model exemplifying the American experience. Instead, territoriality, sovereignty, and equality, the guiding principles of that ideal system, have always been transactional, if not entirely illusory, because effective global enforcement mechanisms simply do not exist. It is true that during the course of several centuries states have evolved customary practices intended to moderate aggressive policies or regularize interstate behavior. While these conventions have become increasingly more sophisticated and in some instances durable with time, their observance remains subject to the vagaries of individual state interests. In a world preoccupied with survival, strong states still do what they can, and weak ones continue to suffer what they must.

What is in decline is the ability of the United States to dominate the global environment unchallenged. For almost a century, American policymakers and theorists have considered US power as essential to maintaining international security and prosperity. Woodrow Wilson categorically rejected European power politics and believed that America's mission was to create a world order dedicated to the promotion of "liberal, democratic, and capitalistic values of order, law, and harmony."[58] The United States' emergence following World War II as the international system's most powerful state placed it in an unprecedented position to effect significant global change. Commanding more than half of the world's production of manufactured goods and accounting for fully a third of all exports, post-war America was the essential engine to rebuild and modernize war-ravaged Europe and the world.[59] Furthermore, concerned that the absence of widespread prosperity would cause a repeat of the economic disaster of the interwar years, American policymakers inextricably bound the nation's economic power to its security policy, a policy most obviously embodied in and reinforced by the success of the Marshall Plan.[60] Against the backdrop of the Cold War specter of nuclear annihilation, the United States assumed the mantle of benevolent hegemon, the indispensable rule maker and enforcer.[61]

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American power, however, is paradoxical. According to Joseph Nye, on one hand the international community demands Washington's leadership, as well as its dependence and interdependence through the processes of globalization. On the other hand, these processes invoke opposition and conflict where the benefits of globalization fail to take root.[62] In essence, depending upon one's point of view, the United States is at once the solution and the problem.

The absence of an overarching global threat and the diffusion of globalization's prosperity have empowered a greater number of states to pursue interests that increasingly challenge American hegemony. In spite of NATO ties, West European states often have policies that run counter to Washington's goals. Russia has, for the moment, rationalized its post-Soviet domestic politics as well as harnessed its oil and natural gas wealth, enabling Moscow to once again offer muscular responses to perceived American encroachments. Industrial China, India, and Brazil are assuming, by gradual and steady steps, a greater share of the capital markets that have historically underwritten American power. Smaller and more focused regional powers, such as Syria, North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela, increasingly challenge America's leadership by engaging in international criminal activity or by proliferating dangerous technologies. Even unaffiliated minor nations, such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Eritrea, have felt unconstrained in their efforts to all but quit the international community to pursue seemingly self-destructive domestic policies that risk regional destabilization. Add to this Washington's post-9/11 anxiety that spillovers from weak and failing states will promote the spread of pandemic disease, transnational terrorism, and special weapons proliferation, and the international system might seem as if it will rip apart at the seams.[63]

In the context of US national and strategic culture, Washington's expansive response to these changes appears predictable. Roger Whitcomb observes that for Americans a sense of exceptionalism, a propensity to see problems as dichotomous, and a preference for speedy solutions often inform unilateral approaches, placing the United States increasingly in conflict with others.[64] Additionally, the tendency to frame all challenges as crises can lead to treating each issue as a discrete strategic problem that

defeats efforts to prioritize.[65] Finally, an abiding belief in universally applicable moralistic and legalistic norms confers onto Americans a sense of legitimate purpose.[66] From this viewpoint, Americans are prone to evaluate changes in the international system, even natural ones, as potential evils requiring immediate response in what has been termed idealist Realism.[67]

Impatience and the need for speedy solutions to a never-ending string of perceived crises are possible sources of the growing militarization of American foreign policy. The United States' unshakable belief in universally applied norms and values might underpin what some observers assess as a one-size-fits-all approach to problemsolving.[68] Fundamentally, there is no difference in how Washington solves problems today from how it did 50 years ago. The American approach to problemsolving in no small measure contributed to the security and prosperity of the post-war world. What has changed, however, is the geopolitical landscape. When viewed from the perspective of the rest of the world, many US actions might be seen as bothersome or even harmful tilting at geopolitical windmills. While no individual state can currently oppose American power, America's efforts to "be everywhere all the time" risk a debilitating imperial overstretch laying bare the nation to a concert led not by some imagined transnational entity, but by one or more rising state rivals. As Paul Kennedy observes, like every great power occupying the global prime spot, to thrive the United States has to balance its perceived security requirements with the means it possesses to meet them, as well as its ability to preserve and grow the technological and economic engines of that power.[69]

In this light, focusing national efforts on the wrong threat, particularly given the United States' ever-widening span of commitments, could break those crucial engines of power in rapid fashion. Committing enormous resources, for instance, to prop up every failing state on the small chance that not doing so would enable a terrorist group to develop a weapon of mass destruction seems an inordinate expenditure when one recalls the former belief that the United States could have survived a limited nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. Given the high stakes involved, a better alternative to focusing exclusively on threats might be to capitalize on emerging opportunities in a changing international system.

The return of multipolarity is a long-overdue blessing in disguise. Shaped properly, the rise of other credible powers may permit Washington to more widely distribute the responsibility of collective security among a more diverse and culturally relevant audience. Shepherding—not resisting—the emergence of multiple spheres of influence within a reconceptualized normative framework, one moving beyond simple Wilsonian idealism, has potential to co-opt potential troublemakers and might offer a better ve-

hicle for expanding global prosperity by increasing the number of empowered stakeholders. Such a system might, over time, evolve into a practical security council of states reflecting not ancient martial relationships, but instead the distribution of actual global power. Most importantly, the United States would be empowered to devise a transition away from the draining role of world policeman to one more befitting a global ombudsman. This shift can at once conserve American power for the long haul while insulating the nation from ultimate responsibility. Finally, such a system would more effectively highlight state troublemakers and allow the United States to focus its finite resources on real rather than imagined threats.

Profound changes in the international system have always been cause for concern and always will be. The decline of the indispensable hegemon and the return to multipolarity can be particularly troubling because Americans have long considered their leadership in a unipolar world the best guarantor of security and prosperity. Any shift in the global order threatens to collapse our well-ordered society because, like our medieval ancestors, we see ourselves as the time's latest achievement. It is more likely, however, that we are still somewhere in the middle.

NOTES

1. Morris Bishop, *The Horizon Book of the Middle Ages* (Boston: American Heritage, 1968), 11.

2. Many have promoted these themes, but a good overview of this genre appears in Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 394.

3. Phil Williams, *From the New Middle Ages to a New Dark Age: The Decline of the State and U.S Strategy* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2008), 6-8.

4. Read Bain, "What Is This Crisis?" *Philosophy of Science*, 20 (January 1953), 22-30.

5. An example relating World War I to a return to the Dark Ages is recounted by Arnold J. Toynbee, "The Issues in British Foreign Policy," *International Affairs*, 17 (May/June 1938), 406. The Dark Age warning relating to the rise of Hitler's national socialism also featured prominently in O. W. Riegel, *Mobilizing for Chaos* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1934), as reviewed by Harry E. Moore, *Social Forces*, 13 (May 1935), 609-10.

6. Fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch generally is credited with formulating the concept of a dark age, corresponding generally to the early Middle Ages (c. 500-1000). See Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" in Paula Findlen, ed., *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Readings* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2002), 219.

7. Stephen D. Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security*, 20 (Winter 1995-96), 117.

8. Williams; and William S. Lind, "Fourth Generation War," in Winslow T. Wheeler and Lawrence J. Korb, eds., *Military Reform: A Reference Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007).

9. Andreas Osiander, "Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited," *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (September 1998), 410. See also Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Affairs*, 50 (January 1974), 28.

10. A wonderful contemporary example of utopian reasoning is contained in Philip Kerr, "The Outlawry of War," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 7 (November 1928), 361-68.

11. Pfaltzgraff, 29.

12. The Holy Roman Emperor concluded the Peace of Westphalia with the King of France and the Queen of Sweden, and these countries acted as guarantors primarily of the religious aspects of the treaties. One should note that France and Sweden were already independent powers before the wars and remained so after. Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization*, 55 (Spring 2001), 251-87.

13. Krasner, 147.

14. Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth."

15. Ibid. Osiander quotes eighteenth-century German legal scholar Johann Jacob Moser as defining *Landeshoheit* as "a right pertaining to [rulers] and empowering them in their lands and territories to command, to forbid, to decree, to undertake, or to omit everything that . . . pertains to any ruler, inasmuch as their hands are not tied by the laws and traditions of the empire, the treaties with their local estates and subjects, the latter's ancient and well-established freedoms and traditions, and the like." Osiander also notes that some German scholars identified the lack of strictly sovereign terms in the modern sense in the treaty as one reason a unitary German state failed to develop until the late nineteenth century.

16. Ibid. Martin van Creveld interprets this differently, stating that because the treaty gave the subordinate German princes the power to make alliances so long as these treaties were not directed against the emperor, this was somehow constituted sovereignty. In the author's view, this limitation directly assaults modern notions of sovereignty and reinforces the legitimacy of the Hapsburg imperium. See van Creveld, 86.

17. Ibid. Also, the reference to the wardrobe used as the magic portal from the real world to the magical Kingdom of Narnia is from C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

18. Krasner, 118-19.

19. Ibid., 117.

20. Ibid., 147. It is not surprising that Krasner notes the United States, with its indigenously derived institutions, is a strong state conforming more neatly to the Westphalian model, especially when one considers American IR theorists likely had their own nation in mind when deriving the model.

21. "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must." Steven Forde, "International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism," *International Studies Quarterly*, 39 (June 1995), 147.

22. Quoted in Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 30.

23. Ibid., 38.

24. Ibid., 78.

25. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 21. Much more recently, the term "quasi-state" has been used to describe subregions of states that have broken away and where dissidents exercise de facto jurisdiction, even though they are not recognized by the international community. See Pal Kolsto, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States," *Journal of Peace Research*, 43 (November 2006), 723-40.

26. Of those 28, 22 are in Africa. See Susan E. Rice and Stewart Patrick, *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2008), http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/ 02_weak_states_index.aspx.

27. Ossiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth."

28. See Thomas J. Volgy, review of *The Web of World Politics: Non-State Actors in the Global System*, by Richard W. Mansbach, Yale H. Ferguson, and Donald E. Lampert, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 29 (December 1976), 658-59.

29. Both Volgy and Peter Willetts noted the term NSA could include so many groups as to render the term hopelessly ambiguous. Willetts provides a very good summary of contemporary thought on NSAs and their interactions. See Volgy; and Peter Willets, "Transnational Actors and International Organizations," in John Baylis, ed., *Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (2d ed.; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

30. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: Free Press, 1964), 154, quoted in Herbert M. Howe, "Private Security Forces and African Stability: The Case of Executive Outcomes," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36 (June 1998), 308.

31. Willetts refers to companies and nongovernmental organizations as examples of legitimate NSAs.

32. David Potter, "The International Mercenary Market in the Sixteenth Century: Anglo-French Competition in Germany, 1543-50," *The English Historical Review*, 111 (February 1996), 24-26.

33. States largely recognized letters of marque and reprisal as extending combatant status to merchant vessels. See US Constitution, article 1, section 8.

34. Howe, 26.

35. L. S. Sutherland, "The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics," *The Economic History Review*, 17, no. 1 (1947), 24.

36. Peter Gibbs, *History of the British South Africa Police*, Vol. 1: *The First Line of Defense, 1899-1903* (Salisbury, Rhodesia: British South Africa Police, 1972), 8.

37. For a discussion of Portugal's attempt at commercial administration, see Barry Neil-Tomlinson, "The Nyassa Chartered Company: 1891-1929," *The Journal of African History*, 18, no. 1 (1977), 109-28. For an ex-

haustive treatment of Germany's colonial involvement in Tanzania, see Juhani Koponen, *Development for Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884-1914* (Helsinki: Studia Historica, 1994).

38. John S. Galbraith, "The British South Africa Company and the Jameson Raid," *The Journal of British Studies*, 10 (November 1970), 146. When the raid failed, the Chamberlain government immediately took steps to separate itself from the fray.

39. One of Machiavelli's many cautions against the use of mercenaries included their treacherousness. See Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, N. H. Thompson, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 31.

40. Ed O'Loughlin, "Sandline Scandal Arms Shipment Reaches Forces," *The Independent*, 22 May 2000, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/sandline-scandal-arms-shipment-reaches-forces-715976.html; Karen DeYoung, "Blackwater Chief Defends Firm," *The Washington Post*, 3 October 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/02/AR2007100201037.html, A18.

41. Galbraith, 153.

42. Lawrence James, *The Savage Wars: British Campaigns in Africa, 1870-1920* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 54.

43. Matt Carr, "Cloaks, Daggers, and Dynamite," *History Today*, 57 (December 2007), 30.

44. Richard Bach Jensen, "The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol," *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (April 1981), 324.

45. "For Jihadist, Read Anarchist," *The Economist.com*, 18 August 2005, http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=4292760.

46. R. B. Fowler, "The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought," *The Western Political Quarterly*, 25 (December 1972), 743.

47. Carr, 30.

48. Jensen, 340.

49. Thomas G. Fraser, "Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-18," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (April 1977), 255.

50. Louise Richardson, "Global Rebels: Terrorist Organizations as Trans-national Actors," *Harvard International Review*, 20 (Fall 1998), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb137/is_4_20/ai_n28713371/pg_1?tag=content, 1-2.

51. Michael Coffey, "Hezbollah's Improved Arsenal," *MilitaryPeriscope.com*, 21 July 2006.

52. Shai Feldman, "The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment," *Middle East Brief*, no. 10, September 2006, http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB10.pdf, 2.

53. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Preliminary "Lessons" of the Israeli-Hezbollah War* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 17 August 2006).

54. Feldman, 5.

55. Francesca Polleta, "'Free Spaces' in Collective Action," *Theory and Society*, 28 (February 1999), 1.

56. Richardson, 5.

57. Feldman, 2. Feldman argues increased international scrutiny and a resulting United Nations resolution may have cost Hezbollah tactical flexibility in southern Lebanon.

58. Roger S. Whitcomb, *The American Approach to Foreign Affairs: An Uncertain Tradition* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 44.

59. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 358. Also, Harold James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 31.

60. James, 31.

61. Ibid. Charles Kindleberger, himself a player in the Marshall Plan, and others conceived the hegemonic stability theory to explain the utility of the benign superpower.

62. Cornelia Beyer, *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008), 52.

63. Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threats: Fact or Fiction?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 29 (Spring 2006), http://www.twq.com/06spring/docs/06spring_patrick.pdf, 27-28.

64. Whitcomb, 59-63.

65. Ibid., 70.

66. Ibid., 14, 41-42.

67. Beyer, 106.

68. Patrick, 48.

69. Kennedy, 514.