

DECONSTRUCTING OUR DARK AGE FUTURE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL PAUL M. PHILLIPS
United States Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

Lieutenant Colonel Paul M. Phillips
United States Army

Colonel (Retired) Jerome J. Comello, Ph.D.
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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Since the end of the Cold War, security analysts have built a veritable cottage industry dealing in gloomy global futures. The rise of so-called super-empowered transnational actors whose competition with states threatens to deepen critical sovereignty deficits is central to many of these assessments. Consequently, observations of fragmented political authority, fluid territorial boundaries, divided loyalties, amongst other discomfiting trends, represent the decline of the Westphalian state system and portend a new Dark Age. This strategy research paper (SRP) proposes, however, 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 non-state actors to compete with nation states. Moreover, this SRP concludes that because our 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.

DECONSTRUCTING OUR DARK AGE FUTURE

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, 1968¹

Darkness and Dense Gloom

To many observers, almost two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union the post-Cold War world's future remains scary. In an increasingly multi-polar world, rapid advances in technology and globalization have dangerously empowered non-state actors who compete for legitimacy with states and undercut long-held constructions of national autonomy and sovereignty. The community of nation states, ensnared by their 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 easily appear the sky is falling, and that 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 might not be the case.

Adjudged 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 imagined aftermath of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union was often described in comparable terms, and the

rise of Adolf Hitler in the interwar years raised similar warnings.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. True, worrisome social and environmental trends should be cause for concern. Patterns in global terrorism, competition for dwindling resources, and mounting perceptions of inequality, amongst 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 paper proposes that the Westphalian state system 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 non-state actors to compete with nation states. Moreover, I conclude that because our 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 much less an empirical reality than academic shorthand.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 over the past century it has become a guiding principal 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 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 towards international law, international organizations and collective security to counter balance-of-power theories of world politics, often with a view towards defining the role of the new League of Nations.¹⁰ Casting states as rational actors whose interactions were bound by law and convention, 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-20th 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 no accident; 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 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, 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 semi-autonomous actors that had already existed.¹⁴ Andreas Osiander notes that even before the war the Hapsburg Emperor only exercised direct control over his family's dynastic lands and that under the concept of territorial jurisdiction, subordinate princes of the realm actually enjoyed control over their individual estates.¹⁵ After the ink was dry, the Hapsburg's German princes were no more legally able to conclude treaties with foreign powers or to separate from the empire than they were before the war started, and these limitations were understood and fully acknowledged by Europe's independent powers.¹⁶ In point of 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' magic wardrobe.¹⁷

Even if we acknowledged 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 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 each version is distinct, they are not mutually exclusive.¹⁸ Also, these 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 it.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 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: 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 buys in to 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 towards Washington's favored democratic governance model, strength and resilience depends a great deal on whether the ruled 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 our 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 with control of most of the world's monetary markets. Apart from access to capital, these states command sufficient military strength to support their claims, either singly or in concert with other states. Possessing viable landmasses and having societies forged by the long process of social heat and pressure, these strong states are generally more resilient in the face of changes to the international system.

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

The state as described in this paper 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 our international system is merely ascribed.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 steady state, rather than a decline into disorder. If the system is not melting down, are so-called non-state actors as significant for the long-term future as they appear to be for the present?

Non-State Actors: Dark Age Boogeyman

In the early 1970s, political scientists conceptualized the non-state actor (NSA) to fill gaps in state-centric theories of international politics.²⁸ Those earlier studies noted that NSAs and their activities sometimes imparted an effect on state decision making, but scholars stopped short of suggesting NSAs wielded significant power. Put simply,

an NSA is any polity that is not a government. But because this definition could, in theory, extend to just about all non-government groups – from international terrorists to domestic animal protection leagues – it is best to limit our discussion to those who operate in the international realm, the domain of the state.²⁹

Today, 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 expressed in two ways. First, the NSA gradually accumulates 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. Non-state actors employing this means include private military companies (PMCs), transnational corporations (TNC) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and might be called non-hostile NSAs.³¹ By a second and more overt route the NSA can engage states in a contest for power. These actors include private militias, global terrorists, insurgents, drug cartels, etc., 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 governments, and are thus capable of exploiting fissures in the international system.

This view of the awesome threat posed by NSAs is flawed for three reasons. First, this view treats the NSA as new phenomena and ignores the historical fact that such polities are an old and enduring component of the international system's human terrain. Second, it falsely assumes that states are static, moribund and non-enterprising and that, similar to the "underdog" in a giant global judo match, NSAs can easily leverage a state's weight against them. Third, and most importantly, this view

misleadingly elevates the hostile NSA to the status of a state competitor by discounting advantages they derive from their own state sponsors.

Non-Hostile NSAs and the State: A Symbiotic Relationship. Long before the opening of Westphalia's "majestic portal" states co-existed with NSAs and employed them to economize the defense and promotion of state interests. For instance, today's PMCs had as their antecedents the 16th Century German *Landsknecht* mercenary bands and the Italian *condottieri*. Early-modern English and French rulers preferred to use native trained militia to fight their wars. But both routinely relied on foreign mercenary free companies to fill out their levies or to compensate for the relative weakness of their own troops – even though contemporaries considered the hiring of these contractors as potentially dangerous.³² The rise of modern standing armies did not obviate the occasional need to contract soldiers. The British famously hired thousands of rent-a-troops from German states like Hesse-Kassel – the so-called Hessians – to quickly fill out their forces fighting revolutionaries in North America. And 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 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 in their security engagement plans, freeing regular troops to perform core functions. And this practice is not restricted to strong states. In his study of private security forces in West Africa's civil conflicts, Herb Howe concluded that private security firms can stabilize weak states by providing a ready-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 17th Century. Perhaps the most famous of them, the Honorable East India Company (EIC), 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 EIC, granting private companies trading preferences or monopolies was a commonly accepted economic expedient to develop colonial possessions that extended into the early 20th Century. For example, in the 1890 charter to Cecil Rhodes' 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 state's colonies.³⁷

The activities of these early TNCs were not always strictly limited to a given colonial boundary. Instead, chartered companies could become useful stalking horses for state policy objectives. For instance, in 1895 imperial wildcatter 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 Government did precious little to impede it because Rhodes' 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 towards a state's interests they are still potentially troublesome wildcards. The ancient mercenary outfits were notorious for playing both sides against the middle,³⁹ and their modern PMC descendants can cause great embarrassment to their associated state in similar ways. In 1998, the arms smuggling activities of the British mercenary 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 in the performance of their state-contracted services.⁴⁰ The same holds true for proto-TNCs. In 1891, an unauthorized BSACo invasion of Portuguese East Africa to secure a deep water port for land-locked Rhodesia threatened Anglo-Portuguese relations. And 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. But in reality, the ability of non-hostile 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. Losses of potential government contracts, alterations to beneficial tax structures, revocations of operating licenses, threats of legal action, or interruptions of financial transactions are just a few of the measures states can take to tame otherwise ill-disciplined NSA behavior. States can also employ diplomatic agreements with other states as a classic antidote to hurtful freewheeling. For example, the BSACo's port-seeking enterprise

moved London to conclude a friendship accord with Portugal both as a confidence building measure and as a check against the company's unauthorized ventures.⁴²

In employing non-hostile NSAs, states do not yield 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 agents of the state and so their continued non-state label becomes counterfactual. Even if some NSAs sought to compete with their state masters, states of all stripes enjoy a veritable menu of enforcement mechanisms for reasserting their authority and preeminence. And 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, to security analysts, the modern hostile NSAs are the real bad guys in the Dark Age thesis. Superficially, this type of NSA threat appears awesome because as so-called transnational actors they work outside the international system's established norms to tangle with the state. Scratch that surface, however, and like their non-hostile cousins we more often discover that far from the super-empowered non-state competitor, state patronage in one way, shape or form underwrites their viability and success.

Hostile NSAs – those lacking state sponsorship – have existed for centuries. Perhaps the most compelling archetypes, however, were the various anarchist movements of the late Victorian era. In the 30 or so years before World War I, an unprecedented wave of terrorist violence spread throughout Europe. During that period, 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 1892-1894, 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 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 Western leaders.⁴⁵

Though their terror attacks were widely spread, there was no universal anarchist doctrine motivating the violence beyond a generally common desire to replace political power with natural authority.⁴⁶ Also, in spite of international efforts to link the disparate perpetrators, evidence of a broader 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. And 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 20th Century anarchist violence started to peter out; a turnaround in a long global depression relieving worker poverty and the rise of socialist political movements seeking change in more traditional ways was to some degree responsible for the decrease in violence.⁴⁸ But even as the early anarchists drifted away

from terrorism, a long succession 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 to weaken rivals from within. In the 18th 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 period saw multiple uses of hostile NSAs by both sides, including Washington's support of anti-Soviet Mujahedeen 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 upside-down contests with more commanding rivals. 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 objective.

State support of hostile NSAs falls generally along a continuum ranging from the supply of arms, munitions and training at the high end down to the provision of sanctuary at the low end. Iran's relationship with the Shiite militia group, Hezbollah, offers the most forceful example of high-end state support. During Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel, the Shiite militiamen not only fired thousands of modernized Katyusha

rockets from their bases in Southern Lebanon, they also launched two sophisticated radar-guided cruise missiles to attack an Israeli surface combatant and a merchant vessel.⁵¹ While the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) succeeded in destroying large portions of Hezbollah's ordnance stockpile, militarily the contest was inconclusive. Moreover, there is general agreement that, at a minimum, Hezbollah "won the war of narratives" over their more sophisticated IDF opponent.⁵²

For some observers, this so-called NSA victory over a modern state underscores their warnings of impending global chaos. But in so doing, 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 kitted-out Hezbollah's impressive arsenal and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) advisors created the command and control center that coordinated the militiamen's missile fire; in some cases IRGC members even pushed the button.⁵³ Hezbollah has long served as the *de facto* "Iranian Western Command" in Teheran's long-distance war with Tel Aviv, and some have interpreted the militarization of Southern Lebanon as a strategic check to any Israeli attack on Iran's emerging nuclear infrastructure.⁵⁴

Not all state support for hostile NSAs occurs on the Iran-Hezbollah scale. Laying at the opposite end of the state-support continuum, though no less fundamental, is the provision of sanctuary. Collective action scholars 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 could include venues as modest as cafes, hair salons and safe houses. But on an international level, these sanctuaries become more insulating, ranging from the refuges offered terrorists on the lam to state-sponsored reservations 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 range of their enemies. In some measure, al-Qaeda's earlier successes as a global terrorist organization must be credited to the protection they 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 assess the activities of Hezbollah and other such state-supported groups as strictly transnational.⁵⁶ Rather, we must evaluate them as asymmetric extensions of traditional interstate politics. While these NSAs may have their own politics or agendas, the enhanced effects they can have on their opponents cannot be separated from the advantages of state sponsorship. For the dissident, state support certainly offers access to more lethal technologies and free spaces, even if it does not guarantee success. Al-Qaeda's 9/11 coup cost them and their Taliban sponsors their state refuge. And some argue Hezbollah's apparent 2006 victory over the IDF was pyrrhic.⁵⁷ Also, for the state, the employment of malevolent proxies offers no assurance its policy objectives 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 to direct confrontation with 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 decline because this arrangement, as we have imagined it, has 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. Yes, over 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. And 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 our nation's 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 after 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 the world's production of manufactured goods and accounting for fully a

third of all exports, post-war America was the necessary engine for rebuilding and modernizing not only war-ravaged Europe, but the world.⁵⁹ Furthermore, anxious that the absence of widespread prosperity would end in 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

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 evoke opposition and conflict where the benefits of globalization fail to take root.⁶² In effect, depending upon one's point of reference, 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 has empowered a greater number of states to pursue interests that increasingly challenge American hegemony. In spite of NATO ties, Western European states often pursue 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 capital markets that have historically underwritten American power. Smaller and more focused regional powers, such as

Syria, North Korea, Iran and Venezuela, more and more challenge America's leadership by engaging in international criminal activity or by proliferating dangerous technologies. And even flyspeck troublemakers, like Sudan, Zimbabwe and Eritrea, have felt unconstrained 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 risks ripping apart at the seams.⁶³

In the context of U.S. 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 informs 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 defeating efforts to prioritize.⁶⁵ Finally, an abiding belief in universally applicable moralistic and legalistic norms confers for 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 confrontation in what has been termed idealist Realism.⁶⁷

Impatience and the need for speedy solutions to a never-ending string of perceived crises could explain the growing militarization of American foreign policy. And our unshakable belief in universally applied norms and values might underpin what some assess as a one-size-fits-all approach to problem solving.⁶⁸ Fundamentally, there

is no difference today in how Washington solves problems from how it did so 50 years ago. And that American approach to problem solving 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 of our actions might be seen as bothersome or even harmful tilting at geopolitical windmills. While presently no individual state can practically oppose American power, our efforts to “be everywhere” “all the time” risks a debilitating imperial overstretch laying bare our 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 pole position, to survive 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 we once believed 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 seize emerging opportunities in a changing international system.

The return of multi-polarity is a long-overdue blessing in disguise. Shaped properly, the rise of other credible powers could permit Washington to more widely

distribute the responsibility of collective security to a more diverse and culturally relevant audience. Shepherding – not resisting – the emergence of multiple spheres of influence within a re-conceptualized normative framework, one moving beyond simple Wilsonian idealism, could co-opt potential troublemakers and might offer a better vehicle for expanding global prosperity by increasing the number of empowered stakeholders. Such a system could, over time, evolve into a practical security council of states reflective not of ancient wartime relationships, but of the distribution of actual global power. Most importantly, the United States could devise a transition away from the draining role of world policeman to one more befitting a global ombudsman. This shift could at once conserve American power for the long haul while insulating us from ultimate responsibility. Finally, such a system would more effectively highlight state troublemakers and allow us to focus our 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 multi-polarity can be particularly troubling because as Americans we have long considered our 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.

Endnotes

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* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University 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: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2008), 6-8.

⁴ Read Bain, "What is this Crisis?," *Philosophy of Science* 20, no. 1 (January 1953): 22-30 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

⁵ An example relating the First World War to a return to Dark Ages is recounted by Arnold J. Toynbee, "The Issues in British Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (May-Jun 1938): 406 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008). 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: Yale University Press, 1934), as reviewed by Harry E. Moore, *Social Forces* 13, no. 4 (May 1935): 609-610 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

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 Theodore Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages," in *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Readings*, ed. Paula Findlen (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 219, http://books.google.com/books?id=qVTLJKLkCIC&dq=paula+findlen+the+italian+renaissance&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=pGjPHvBMTZ&sig=Wfs6V2wA4muYYvH_e4laRs0a_1I&hl=en&ei=dP6ISfLqJ4OftwfMI8nYBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result#PPA219,M1 (accessed December 06, 2008).

⁷ Stephen D. Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security* 20, no. 3 (Winter, 1995-1996): 117 in JSTOR (accessed December 02, 2008).

⁸ Williams, *From the New Middle Ages to a New Dark Age: The Decline of the State and U.S. Strategy*, and William S. Lind, "Fourth Generation War," in *Military Reform: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Winslow T. Wheeler and Lawrence J. Korb (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, August 2005) in Praeger (accessed December 10, 2008).

⁹ Andreas Osiander, "Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited," *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (September 1998): 410 in JSTOR (accessed December 06, 2008). Also Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Affairs* 50, no. 1 (January 1974): 28 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

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, no. 6 (November 1928): 361-368, in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

¹¹ Pfaltzgraff, "International Relations Theory: Retrospect and Prospect," 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, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 251-287, in Wilson OmniFile (accessed December 07, 2008).

¹³ Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," 147.

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

¹⁵ Ibid. Osiander quotes 18th-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 19th 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 that this was somehow constituted sovereignty. However, I note this limitation assaults directly modern notions of sovereignty and reinforces the legitimacy of the Hapsburg imperium. For van Creveld's analysis, see Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 86.

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

¹⁸ Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," 118-119.

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 country 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, no. 2 (June 1995): 147 in JSTOR (accessed December 09, 2008).

²² Quoted in Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30.

²³ Ibid, 38.

²⁴ Ibid, 78.

²⁵ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University 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 no. 6 (November 2006): 723-40, in Wilson OmniFile (accessed December 15, 2008).

²⁶ Of those 28, 22 are in Africa. See Susan E. Rice, "Index of State Weakness in the Developing World," The Brookings Institution, http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index.aspx (accessed December 15, 2008).

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

²⁸ See Thomas J. Volgy, "Review: The Web of World Politics: Non-State Actors in the Global System," *The Western Political Science Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (December 1976): 658-659 in JSTOR (accessed December 08, 2008).

²⁹ Both Volgy and 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 the NSAs and their interactions. See Volgy, "Review: The Web of World Politics: Non-State Actors in the Global System," and Peter Willetts, "Transnational Actors and International Organizations," in *Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 2d ed, ed. John Baylis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A.M. Henderson and Talcot Parson, trans. (New York: Free Press, 1964), 164, quoted in Herbert M. Howe, "Private Security Forces and African Stability: The Case of Executive Outcomes," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 1998): 308 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

³¹ Willetts, "Transnational Actors and International Organizations," refers to companies and NGOs 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, no. 440 (February 1996): 24-26 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

³³ States largely recognized letters of marque and reprisal as extending combatant status to merchant vessels. See U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8.

³⁴ Howe, "Private Security Companies and African Stability: The Case of Executive Outcomes," 26.

³⁵ L.S. Sutherland, "The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics," *The Economic History Review* 17, no. 1 (1947): 24 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008).

³⁶ Peter Gibbs, *History of the British South Africa Police, Vol 1* (Salisbury, Rhodesia: British South Africa Police, 1972), 8.

³⁷ For a discussion of Portugal's stab at commercial administration see Barry Neil-Tomlinson, "The Nyassa Chartered Company: 1891-1929," *The Journal of African History* 18, no. 1 (1977): 109-128 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008). For an exhaustive 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, no. 1 (November 1970): 146 in JSTOR (accessed December 05, 2008). 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 uses of mercenaries included their treacherousness. See Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. N.H. Thompson (New York: Courier Dove Publications, 1992), 31.

⁴⁰ Ed O'Loughlin, "Sandline Scandal Arms Shipment Reaches Forces," *The Independent*, May 22, 2000, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/sandline-scandal-arms-shipment-reaches-forces-715976.html> (accessed January 19, 2009). Karen DeYoung, "Blackwater Chief Defends Firm," *The Washington Post.com*, October 03, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/02/AR2007100201037.html> (accessed January 19, 2009).

⁴¹ Galbraith, "The British South Africa Company and the Jameson Raid," 153.

⁴² Lawrence James, *The Savage Wars* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 54.

⁴³ Matt Carr, "Cloaks, Daggers and Dynamite," *History Today* 57, no. 12 (December 2007): 30 in Wilson OmniFile (accessed February 01, 2009).

⁴⁴ Richard Bach Jensen, "The International Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol," *The Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 2 (April 1981): 324 in JSTOR (accessed January 20, 2009).

⁴⁵ "The Anarchists: For Jihadist, Read Anarchist," *The Economist.com*, August 18, 2005, http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=4292760 (accessed February 01, 2009).

⁴⁶ R.B. Fowler, "The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought," *The Western Political Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 1972): 743, in JSTOR (accessed January 20, 2009).

⁴⁷ Carr, "Cloaks, Daggers and Dynamite," 30.

⁴⁸ Jensen, "The International Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol," 340.

⁴⁹ Thomas G. Fraser, "Germany and the Indian Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 2 (April 1977): 255 in JSTOR (accessed January 20, 2009).

⁵⁰ Louise Richardson, "Global Rebels: Terrorist Organizations as Trans-national Actors," *Harvard International Review* (Fall 1998): 1-2, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb137/is_4_20/ai_n28713371/pg_1?tag=content;col1, (accessed February 07, 2009).

⁵¹ Michael Coffey, "Hezbollah's Improved Arsenal," July 21, 2006, in *Military Periscope* (accessed January 20, 2009).

⁵² Shai Feldman, "The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment," *Middle East Brief* 10 (September 2006): 2, <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB10.pdf> (accessed February 08, 2009).

⁵³ Anthony Cordesman, *Preliminary "Lessons" of the Israeli-Hezbollah War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, August 17, 2006) in Praeger (accessed 20 January 2009).

⁵⁴ Feldman, "The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment," 5.

⁵⁵ Francesca Polleta, "'Free Spaces' in Collective Action," *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (February 1999): 1 in JSTOR (accessed January 20, 2009).

⁵⁶ Richardson, "Global Rebels: Terrorist Organizations as Trans-national Actors," 5.

⁵⁷ Feldman, "The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment," 2. Feldman argues increased international scrutiny and a resulting UN resolution may have cost Hezbollah tactical flexibility in Southern Lebanon.

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

⁵⁹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 358. Also, Harold James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 31.

⁶⁰ James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire*, 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, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 52.

⁶³ Stewart Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threat: Fact or Fiction?," *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 2006): 27-28, http://www.twq.com/06spring/docs/06spring_patrick.pdf (accessed February 11, 2009).

⁶⁴ Whitcomb, *The American Approach to Foreign Affairs: An Uncertain Tradition*, 59-63.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 70.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 14, 41-42.

⁶⁷ Beyer, *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire*, 106.

⁶⁸ Patrick, "Weak States and Global Threat: Fact or Fiction?," 48.

⁶⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 514.