



Consummation from The Course of Empire, by Thomas Cole, 1835 – 1836. New-York Historical Society. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

THE RENEWAL OF GLOBAL ORDER

MARK AMSTUTZ

In September 1990, when President George H.W. Bush raised the possibility of a “new world order”—a global society where “the rule of law...governs the conduct of nations,” and “in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the UN’s founders”¹—few could have imagined that two decades later the contemporary international community would be littered with failed and fragile states, widespread terrorism, and pervasive regional and global instability.

A glance at the international news in mid-2016 reveals a troubled world. Many states have become fragile because leaders have been unwilling or unable to develop democratic institutions, nurture a pluralistic political culture, or devise and implement policies that ensure domestic tranquility and prosperity. Corruption in many medium- and low-income states is pervasive, and religious and ethnic tensions are widespread, accounting for much of the global mayhem. In Syria, for example, the bitter civil war between the government forces of President Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite Muslim, and Sunni rebels persists, leaving in its wake millions of displaced people and more than four million refugees. The rise of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq poses even more serious challenges since the goal of Islamic jihadists is to replace existing nation-states with a transnational caliphate. In Turkey, a group of military officers carried out an unsuccessful coup against the Islamist government of its strongman, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, because of their deep opposition to the dismantling of secular democratic institutions. And in Libya, the failure to establish a functioning government after toppling the dictatorial regime of Muammar Gaddafi has resulted in a vacuum of authority that has been filled by a variety of local and regional leaders, including IS militants. The United States helped bring about an independent South Sudan in 2011, but the new state has been unable to consolidate power because of ongoing conflict between its Dinka and Nuer tribes, as well as economic tensions with Sudan, its northern neighbor. Meanwhile, the populist, authoritarian regimes in Venezuela and Zimbabwe have impoverished most citizens and

undermined the credibility of their respective governments.

COLD WAR STABILITY

While the current international order is increasingly chaotic, we should resist nostalgia, believing that the past half-century was a time of peace and tranquility. To begin with, the Cold War era involved an intense ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the proxy wars resulted in great suffering and destruction. Additionally, the superpowers' large arsenals of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons posed great danger to world security. Despite the intense arms competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, world order remained relatively stable. This order derived not from the peaceful disposition of the superpowers or from the work of international organizations but from the danger posed by a nuclear confrontation. Although the danger of an unintentional or accidental use of a nuclear weapon posed an existential threat throughout the Cold War, global order was nevertheless sustained through nuclear deterrence—namely, the promise of nuclear retaliation for carrying out major aggression. Peace was a byproduct of the strategy of prevention by threat. Defense officials referred to the condition as mutual deterrence, the consequence of which was “strategic stability.” For this reason, Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis characterized the Cold War era as “the long peace.”²

There was also another benefit from the Cold War era: superpowers took great interest in their allies' affairs as well as in other territories they considered to be within their respective spheres of influence. This meant

that crises and political instability typically led major powers to try to influence events, lest an enemy take advantage of the instability and shift the balance of power. Thus, conflicts in Central American and Southern African states in the 1980s were not simply indigenous political disputes but were also part of the East-West ideological battle between democracy and communism. If the Cold War had not ended, it is unlikely that Yugoslavia would have ruptured, that Somalia would have imploded, or that Germany would have been unified.

Although the end of the Cold War brought a significant expansion in democratic governments and global economic prosperity in its immediate aftermath, the collapse of the old order unleashed dynamics that have subsequently undermined world order. In particular, the post-Cold War era has spawned a variety of forces that have challenged the authority and capabilities of nation-states. Before addressing threats to the contemporary global political order, it is important to sketch briefly the fundamental structure of the contemporary international system.

THE WORLD'S CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

Fundamentally, the international community is a society of independent nation-states. Although the state is as old as humankind, the rise of the nation-state dates from the mid-seventeenth century when a set of peace treaties brought to an end the religious wars that had decimated central Europe. This collection of treaties—known as the Peace of Westphalia—inaugurated the modern nation-state by giving political leaders supreme

authority, including the right to decide the state's official religion, within their territorial boundaries.

At the time that the nation-state emerged in 1648, governments were autocratic. The significant contribution of Westphalia was that it affirmed the need for centralized authority to ensure domestic peace. This development was subsequently supplemented with the claim that a government's chief task was to secure and protect individual rights. According to theorists, such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill, people were endowed with basic human rights, and these could best be secured through a limited, representative government that was accountable to its people. Such accountability could best be ensured through the rule of law and periodic, free elections. The emergence of constitutionalism thus marks an important step in the ongoing evolution of the modern nation-state. Finally, governments greatly expanded their socio-economic services in the early twentieth century. Influenced by socialist thinkers, Western governments began providing limited medical and social services to address basic human needs. This development, which greatly expanded the scope of government, culminated with the emergence of the modern welfare state in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. According to the new doctrine, human rights involved not only political rights but also entailed social and economic benefits as well.

Although a variety of different nation-state systems exist in the contemporary world, the dominant model is the liberal democratic state—a limited, constitutional regime that makes human rights a priority. The widespread

international acknowledgement and acceptance of individual rights and democracy does not mean, however, that the world has necessarily become more democratic or that human rights are more secure now. Rather, it simply means that these values have become normative—providing ideals to be fulfilled. The emergence of more than one hundred human rights treaties in the past half-century testifies to the pervasive influence of human rights discourse.

The world's constitution—the United Nations Charter—is based on independent sovereign states, each equal and independent. According to the Charter, the peace and prosperity of the world are to be advanced by sovereign member-states fulfilling their responsibilities domestically and internationally. Domestically, states are expected to protect and advance people's human rights; internationally, member-states must honor the sovereign independence of other states by not interfering in their internal affairs and by pursuing peaceful relations. Aggression, as Michael Walzer has observed, is a criminal act that must be repulsed and punished.³ When threats to peace arise, the UN Charter specifies that the world's leading powers (the Security Council) must determine and respond to such threats.

The UN system does not specify how regimes should be constituted. While the UN Charter Preamble sets forth the moral purposes of the organization—including the fundamental freedoms of people—it is agnostic on the nature of government. Governments can be autocratic or democratic, parliamentary or presidential, military or civilian. What is paramount is that states carry out their responsibilities



domestically by advancing the wellbeing of their own people, and by fulfilling their commitments to other states by honoring their sovereignty and by pursuing peaceful conflict resolution.

This, in brief, is the basis of the so-called Westphalian political system of nation-states. For the UN model to work properly, however, states must be capable and responsible in fulfilling their duties. This presumes that states are both good and strong—that is, willing to carry out their duties and capable of doing so. Ensuring that states are able and accountable involves the never-ending of building and sustaining humane nation-states.

It is important to recognize that the decentralized system of states does not assure equality or justice. Since each state has the freedom to pursue its own economic and political interests, different resources,



Destruction from *The Course of Empire*, by Thomas Cole, 1836. New-York Historical Society. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

capacities, and policies frequently result in significant inequalities. Moreover, since UN membership does not presuppose a particular type of government, some regimes are inclined to disregard liberal democracy, human rights, and religious freedom in order to consolidate power. Indeed, numerous regimes have been unable or unwilling to protect people's human rights. As a result, both the General Assembly and the Security Council have adopted resolutions that affirm the conditionality of sovereignty. According to the so-called Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, when a state is unwilling or unable to halt atrocities, it is the responsibility of the international community to carry out protective measures.

Clearly, the current Westphalian global order is under significant stress, with state failure being one of the major impediments

to a stable international community. In *World Order*, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argues that revitalizing the nation-state is a critical task in renewing world order. This task, he suggests, involves two dimensions—the management of power (historically through the balance of power) and the quest for legitimacy. “Any system of world order, to be sustainable, must be accepted as just,” he writes.⁴ In view of the growth of failed states and the rising threats to the nation-state, the renewal of global order remains a major challenge.

TANGIBLE THREATS TO THE NATION-STATE

One factor that has undermined state sovereignty is globalization. Economic globalization, facilitated by technological advances and the declining cost

of international transport, has contributed to a dramatic rise in world trade. And because of the increasing specialization of production, the cost of manufacturing goods has plummeted, giving workers the opportunity to purchase more and better goods. Financial globalization has also made possible the transnational movement of capital and financial resources, contributing to increased international lending and more foreign direct investment. Additionally, the increasing technological interdependence, made possible by the Internet, has also undermined the capacity of government to regulate transnational flows of goods, services, and knowledge. While most states have always maintained some openness to other states, globalization has challenged the capacity of governments to regulate their territorial borders. To a significant degree, borders are now more porous, and sovereignty is less robust.

Another development that has contributed to the decline of state sovereignty is the rise of transnational problems. Such concerns include drug cartels, human trafficking, money laundering, terrorism, pandemics, climate change, and the protection of endangered species. Because of increased international mobility, which facilitates the spread of disease and illicit activities, confronting global issues cannot be carried out successfully by one country. Cooperation and coordination among relevant states is essential. As a result, addressing global issues must be spearheaded not only by international governmental organizations but also by specialized nongovernmental organizations.

Third, the nation-state is being undermined by the rise of

Islamic radicalism. Two aspects of this movement have been especially problematic. First, Islamic radicalism has justified the use of terror to advance its goals of undermining the capacity of the liberal democratic state. The massive attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 demonstrated the extent to which Islamic terrorists were willing to sacrifice their own lives to cause widespread destruction in open, democratic societies. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Islamic radicals have continued to carry out destructive attacks on civilians throughout the world in order to foment climates of fear and advance their agendas, including within Western democracies, such as Belgium, Britain, France, and Spain. In the second aspect, Islamic radicals have not only sought to undermine the liberal state but to replace it with a caliphate—a global monistic religious order. While the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq remains a relatively minor contemporary development, its impact poses a major threat to the contemporary global order of secular nation-states.

Finally, the nation-state is being threatened domestically by the declining capacity of governments to address and resolve major problems. Regardless of how well one considers the overall economic and social health of the American people, there is a widespread perception that U.S. government institutions have failed to address and resolve persistent national concerns. Although the nation's large federal debt has continued to rise inexorably, the government has been unable or unwilling to bring spending under control. Similarly, efforts to address the long-term sustainability of its national health care and

retirement systems have proven ineffective to date. And despite the presence of more than 11 million unauthorized aliens living in the country, the government has been unable to develop a coherent and enforceable immigration system that meets the needs and wants of citizens while also ensuring that its immigration laws are enforced fairly and expeditiously.

In *The Fourth Revolution*, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge argue that part of the problem of modern democracies is that they have attempted to do too much. The scope of government is too large, and some of their services are inefficient and even ineffective. As a result, they argue that the state should do fewer things and do them well.⁵ In short, if confidence in government is to be restored, the authors argue that the states should be “reinvented” by implementing major reforms that both reduce the scope of the state and increase institutional effectiveness.

INTANGIBLE THREATS TO THE NATION-STATE

The nation-state is also being undermined by changing values and beliefs. One of the important changes is the shift in values resulting from economic and social modernization. According to Robert Inglehart, modern societies are concerned with material values, such as economic growth. Once countries become economically prosperous and their people achieve a high level of security and economic well-being, their concerns shift from objective, instrumental values to subjective, post-materialist values.⁶ This shift, which occurs because people in post-modern society have more resources and leisure to reflect on how to maximize meaning in



life, weakens society's concerns with material interests. Instead, people take up more individualized, subjective interests that undermine communal solidarity and nationalism.

A second threat—one associated with economic progress—is the shift in allegiance from the nation to the international community itself. This development is especially noticeable among prosperous, well-educated urban elites, whose political concerns begin to shift from narrow, national concerns to transnational issues and problems. As a result, progressive elites begin adopting a globalist or cosmopolitan perspective of the world—one that de-emphasizes states and gives primacy to transnationalism or even supranationalism. Unlike the nationalist perspective, which regards the nation-state as the foundational community for nurturing social and political bonds, globalists view the world as a coherent moral community rooted in the equality and dignity of all human beings. Since



Desolation from The Course of Empire, by Thomas Cole, 1836. New-York Historical Society. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

the current world system of states fosters inequalities and injustices, globalists believe that a more humane global order can be advanced by shifting authority from the state to civil society organizations and transnational institutions.

The most significant experiment in transferring authority from the state to an international organization is the European Union. The EU, which originally emerged as a way to facilitate trade in order to inhibit war, has gained increased political influence through its unelected, bureaucratic institutions that regulate the movement of money, goods, and people across member-states' territorial boundaries. This experiment in "pooled sovereignty," to use a term coined by Henry Kissinger, has brought about significant social and economic integration, but the effort to circumscribe the state has begun to backfire.

The EU project currently faces a number of major problems.

First, there is a growing concern that the EU institutions are undemocratic and do not represent the values of citizens. Second, EU institutions have been unable to adequately address and resolve major economic and social problems, including persistent high unemployment in the region, significant economic inequalities between northern and southern states, and major financial problems in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Third, the explosive migration of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere into prosperous European countries threatens the open immigration system established by the EU. Finally, the recent decision by Britain to exit the EU (Brexit) further undermines confidence in the ongoing efficacy of the supranational European project.

Third, identity politics can also impair the solidarity of nation-states. Fundamentally, identity politics seeks to celebrate a group's religion, ethnicity, gender, or related attribute.

Such politics may be appropriate as means of overcoming persistent discrimination. But when it becomes institutionalized, it can threaten the moral coherence of nations. For example, the intractable animosity between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland and the deep distrust between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq illustrate the dangers of a politics rooted in identity. Similarly, the political divisions among tribes and clans in African countries also illuminate the challenges of building peaceful, coherent communities when particular political and cultural identities predominate.

Finally, the emergence of concepts like diversity and multiculturalism, which are widespread among educated Western publics, can also pose a threat to communal solidarity. The problem with such concepts is that, by celebrating the unique attributes of a group's gender, religion, ethnicity, and culture, they impair communal solidarity and become a source of conflict and division. At a fundamental level, the notions of multiculturalism and diversity capture the need to acknowledge and accept the variety of people's diverse cultural backgrounds and different ethnicities and religions. In a democratic society, what matters is the fundamental equality and dignity of persons, not their religion, ethnicity, or culture. Thus, when multiculturalism is used to celebrate the distinctive features of particular groups and cultures, it can undermine the unity of a community. When the notion of multiculturalism first emerged in the 1980s, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. argued that such a belief was a threat to a democratic nation because it elevated cultural diversity above

communal solidarity.⁷ In his view, the U.S. motto—*e pluribus unum* (from many into one)—captured the correct balance between plurality and unity. It did so by emphasizing the need to move from diversity to solidarity, from plurality to unity. The problem, then, with multiculturalism and diversity is that they can undermine the moral coherence of community. When used to describe the plurality of cultures, religions, and ethnicities, such concepts are useful because they acknowledge the diversity of God's world. But as an ideology, they can undermine the fundamental moral imperative of proclaiming human equality.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH & THE NATION-STATE

How should Christians view the nation-state? Is the global system of states consistent with a Christian worldview? Although the Bible does not provide guidelines for how states or the world should be organized, it provides general principles to structure moral reasoning on public affairs. This journal's recent foreign policy declaration, in its summer 2016 issue, bears importantly on these questions, and I will continue along its trajectory. To begin with, God has instituted government to provide social order within human communities. From a biblical perspective, government is divinely ordained in order to promote domestic peace and foster communal justice. The state is not simply a human construct but an institution rooted in God's fundamental created order. In Romans, Paul writes that persons should be "subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God" (Rom. 13:1). And the writer of 1 Peter declares: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every

human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right" (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff argues, based on a careful review of Scripture, that government is divinely instituted "as part of God's providential care for his human creatures."⁸

Although the dominant political community in the world today is the nation-state, the Bible does not specify what type of political organization should be normative. Scripture nevertheless provides a number of basic principles that can guide political reflection about states and the international community. Some of the most important insights about social and political life come from Christian anthropology. From a Christian perspective, human nature involves two dimensions—the dignity of persons and the universality and persistence of sin. Because human beings bear God's image, they are worthy of respect and are entitled to dignity. Although people differ in their capabilities and resources, they are fundamentally equal, regardless of gender, income, social class, or education. Given the inherent worth of persons, political theorist Glen Tinder argues that the "idea of the exalted individual" is one of the most important elements of Christian political thought.⁹ It is an important belief, he suggests, because it provides the justification for human freedom and the claim of individual rights. Thus, since people matter, a state's legitimacy will depend in part on how well it protects human dignity and secures human rights.

A second dimension of Christian anthropology is the totality and universality of human sin.

According to Scripture, the corruption of humans is total, affecting all people and all of a person's being. Since sin taints reason, human judgments are necessarily imperfect and provide at best a proximate guide to ethical action. This does not mean that morality cannot contribute to justice but only that human actions will always be subject to partiality and self-interest. One of Reinhold Niebuhr's most lasting contributions to Christian political ethics was his belief that moral ideals and progressive ideologies could never fully overcome the pride and self-interest associated with individual and collective action. Modesty and humility were therefore essential in pursuing morally inspired political initiatives.

Since a Christian view of human nature acknowledges both the inherent dignity of persons and the pervasive nature of sin, the challenge in state building is how to devise a government that governs effectively yet remains accountable to its citizens. James Madison, whose views of government were deeply influenced by Christian assumptions of human nature, describes the central challenge of state building in "The Federalist No. 51" as follows: the great challenge in creating an effective state is "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." Fundamentally, then, a Christian view of the state will necessarily call for a government that is both capable and beneficent, strong and good. Government must have the coercive power to ensure accountability for wrongdoing and to advance communal wellbeing. But government must also be self-limiting in order to remain subject to the law.



Consummation from *The Course of Empire*, by Thomas Cole, 1835 – 1836

Since the protection of human dignity is fundamental, a constitutional democracy based on principles of popular sovereignty, limited government, rule of law, and consent has considerable advantages over other forms of government. This is so because a constitutional regime is more likely to advance and protect human dignity than a dictatorship. To be sure, democracy is not a perfect system. As Winston Churchill noted in a speech to the British Parliament in 1947, democracy was the worst form of government except for its alternatives. In his wise reflection on democracy titled *The Children of Light & the Children of Darkness*, Reinhold Niebuhr makes a compelling case for such government, observing that “man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”¹⁰

Since God’s love is universal and impartial, how should love of one’s nation be reconciled with the love of strangers from foreign nations? When love of one’s nation—nationalism—becomes excessive and disregards the

interests of those beyond one’s territorial boundaries, it can foster inequality and injustice. Since social bonds contribute to human wellbeing, nationalism is desirable when it fosters social trust and communal solidarity and when citizens contribute to the common good of the nation. But when nationalism becomes the highest good, it can hinder the development of just relationships within the country and impair peaceful, stable relations with other peoples. For Christians, defining the scope of legitimate nationalism is therefore a challenging task—one that involves allocating commitments to the church, one’s nation, and the world itself. While allegiance to God is absolute, it is not always clear how to appropriate the claims to each temporal community. The divine command to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s is fundamental. But this principle does not solve the problem of how to appropriate satisfactorily the demands among competing loyalties. This is especially the case in defining legitimate allegiances to the nation and to the international community.

In light of the above, how should Christians regard the international system based on nation-states? Historically, the Roman Catholic Church supported a universalist concept of the world, one that went back to Constantine and the fusion of religious and imperial authority. Thus, when the nation-state emerged in the mid-seventeenth century, the Vatican strongly condemned the rise of sovereignty and the fracturing of global society. The Protestant Church, by contrast, supported this development since it provided a way of ending religious wars that had decimated Central Europe. Despite Catholic opposition to sovereign states, the nation-state became institutionalized and widely accepted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and now provides the political foundation for the international community.

Two divergent perspectives—globalism and nationalism—nonetheless still continue to influence how religious elites think about global order. For some Christians, the universalist message that the Church is a global community where all believers are “one in Christ” encourages them to support a cosmopolitan global society. A cosmopolitan world is one where people are viewed as “citizens of the world” rather than citizens of specific nation-states. In such a world, people’s wellbeing takes moral precedence over the interests of states. For globalists, the hope for building a more coherent, peaceful world is a task that will necessarily entail building stronger transnational bonds through civil society organizations and transnational associations.

For other Christians, the decentralized system of nation-states is not only morally legitimate

but is also preferable to its alternative. Although a fractured system presents a number of challenges in maintaining peace and fostering international justice, the state system provides a means of nurturing social solidarity within political communities, fostering accountability between people and government, and sustaining a tolerable order through the balance of power among states. Those who defend the existing communitarian system rightly claim that people achieve their human fulfillment through participation in proximate communities, including friends, families, churches, associations, neighborhoods, cities, and states. Social bonds are not created and sustained with abstract promises but through tangible behaviors that manifest love and solidarity. We can dream of a better, more cohesive global order, but in the meantime, sovereign governments must carry out the responsibilities of maintaining order and securing fundamental freedoms. I have argued elsewhere that, in addressing international migration concerns, a communitarian perspective offers a morally preferable approach to a cosmopolitan perspective.¹¹ Jonathan Haidt, a psychologist, has similarly suggested that a nationalist perspective is preferable to globalism in understanding contemporary challenges in world politics.¹²

Christians can hope for a more coherent world, but the present challenge is how to strengthen world order to ensure peace and prosperity within and among nations. Since any effort to strengthen contemporary world order must build on existing political institutions, not the dreams of a future international community, the task at hand is how to strengthen fragile states and how to assist others

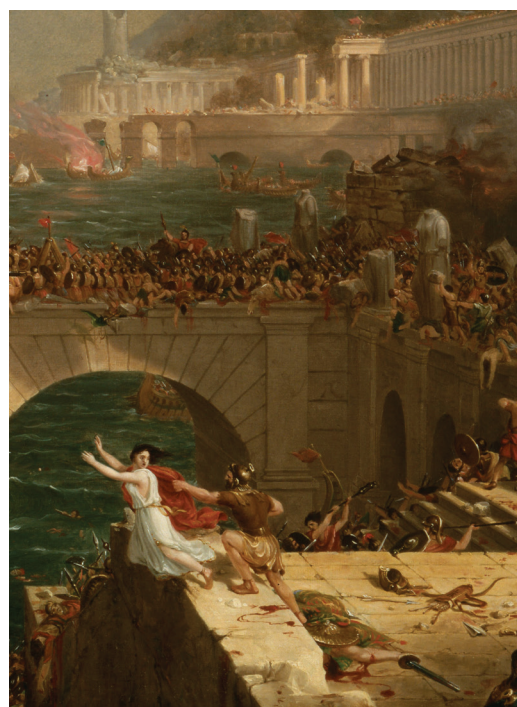
in fulfilling their responsibilities toward their own people and to the international community itself. Thus, the task of renewing world order will necessarily entail nation-states.

THE RENEWAL OF NATION-STATES

In view of the legal and moral legitimacy of nation-states, how should developed democracies help foster a more stable and humane global order? More specifically, how can major powers contribute to strengthening fragile states and improving the human rights capabilities of others?

The process of developing and sustaining capable nation-states involves two distinct tasks—state-building and nation-building. The first involves building governmental institutions required to make, change, and enforce rules within its territorial boundaries. State building involves the creation of institutions that are both effective and legitimate—that is, they have the capacity to carry out assigned tasks and have the support of the people. This endeavor entails creating values and institutions that enable a government to function. Historically, moral ideals and political concepts like individual rights, religious freedom, self-determination, and free elections have provided the foundation for democratic systems. This is followed by the creation of institutions, such as independent courts, representative legislatures, and elected executives.

The second task—nation-building—involves nurturing a people with shared political ideals and common aspirations. Given the dynamic nature of nationality, developing and sustaining a national identity is



a difficult and never-ending quest. How individuals become a nation who shares political ideals typically presupposes a people with a similar language, a common culture, and shared history. Without a binding commitment toward a community, there can be no nation—no sense of a “we,” to differentiate from “them.”

This task, a far more difficult one than state-building, is chiefly an indigenous process that proceeds slowly through time. Historically, states preceded the creation of nations. Typically, political leaders with access to military force established control over a specified territory, and in time people within that territory developed common values and a shared political identity. In the early twentieth century, President Woodrow Wilson challenged this traditional process by proclaiming the inherent right of a people (nation) to pursue political self-determination. In time, the claim of political self-determination was accepted as a central premise of the contemporary



Destruction from The Course of Empire, by Thomas Cole, 1834.

international system. Despite its broad support, this claim poses a threat to existing states composed of different national groups, tribes, clans, and religions. The dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s resulted when its diverse peoples—Serbs, Croats, Muslims, and others—demanded self-determination. It is also the ongoing tension within Iraq between different Islamic sects and also between Arabs and Kurds.

Although scholars have sought to understand the process by which capable democratic states develop, the subject remains pretty much a blank slate. As Francis Fukuyama has noted, our knowledge of how to create “self-sustaining indigenous institutions” is limited.¹³ What is clear is that national identity is not fixed but evolves as ideas shift and living patterns change. Similarly, the creation and sustenance of institutions is similarly dynamic, subject to both development and decay.

In the mid-1970s, some commentators worried that Britain’s institutions would be unable to resolve the country’s major social economic problems. But once Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, she reinvigorated the country’s institutions, resulting in a renewed confidence in the state. The economic and social transformation of Singapore—essentially a small territory, much of it swamp-land—similarly attests to the importance of skilled political leadership and accountable institutions. Despite its multi-ethnic composition and lack of natural resources, Singapore has become one of the most modern and effective nation-states. To be sure, Singapore lacks some of the liberties associated with modern democracies, but its strong and accountable institutions have brought about impressive social, educational, and economic outcomes.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS

How should the United States respond to the wars, terrorism, and ethno-religious disputes undermining states in many regions of the world? First, the United States should resist the temptation of healing fractured nations. Nation-building in deeply divided territories is too complex to be undertaken by external forces. The United States should help and advise governments on how to foster inclusive, pluralistic politics, but such a task cannot be undertaken in a short period of time. To nurture pluralism and toleration within society requires time, education, and the adoption of modern, instrumental values. It is chiefly an indigenous process.

Second, the United States should provide limited assistance in state-building. Such aid

should help fragile, legitimate governments with strengthening their political organizations and mediating institutions, such as labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations, business enterprises, and educational institutions. Since strong states depend on a vibrant civil society, external assistance can help strengthen non-governmental organizations that serve important social and economic sectors of society.

Third, the United States should support domestic democratic initiatives where they exist, but it should be reluctant to carry out democratizing programs in deeply fractured communities or countries with underdeveloped political parties and weak mediating institutions. As Dankwart Rustow noted long ago, the first step in developing a democratic society is the creation of national unity.¹⁴ Without a strong sense of communal solidarity, the competition and conflict endemic in democracy will destroy the very community it seeks to serve. In short, human rights and individual liberties are important, but without communal order, advancing human liberties is impossible. Order is the precondition for developing democratic institutions.

Fourth, the United States should provide foreign aid to fragile nations. Given the pervasive nature of corruption in modernizing societies, such aid should be conditional on the maintenance of robust accountability procedures. Most assistance should be allocated to non-governmental organizations to meet basic educational, health, and socio-economic needs. From a democratic perspective, the strengthening of civil society is indispensable in fostering socio-economic development. In order for external aid to

contribute to sustainable development, however, two conditions are necessary: first, the foreign aid initiatives must have strong indigenous support and leadership, and second, such aid should involve robust financial accountability.

Fifth, the United States must continue its military campaign against terrorist networks that are undermining the nation-state. In particular, the U.S. needs to intensify its military campaign against radical Islamic movements and jihadist networks. To date, the greatest threat from Islamic radicals has been focused on Middle Eastern societies. But the growth and institutionalization of Islamic radicalism throughout the world has spawned many different jihadist groups. Such terrorist groups have already inflicted significant harm in the United States, Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain. Arguably, the most dangerous development has been the rise of the Islamic State, which influences large areas of Syria and Iraq and parts of Yemen and Libya. At the time of this writing, IS maintains two urban strongholds—Raqqa and, though this likely isn't the case for much longer, Mosul. If the spread of radicalism in the West is to be halted, the United States must defeat IS.

Finally, the United States needs to devise a strategy for strengthening world order. Such a strategy would make the renewal of fragile or failed states a priority. The current national security strategy, set forth by the Obama administration in February 2015, addresses a number of developments that are impairing contemporary nation-states.¹⁵ But the strategy outlined in the document provides a broad list of goals but fails to prioritize

them. Obama identifies a wide range of concerns, including nonproliferation, regional security, economic prosperity, trade, climate change, cyber security, and global health, but there is no coherent strategy to advance global order. The strategy emphasizes the role of multilateralism in pursuing global goods. However, little attention is paid to the danger arising from fragile states. If global order is important to the wellbeing and security of the American people, the next administration must devise a more compelling strategy that focuses on world order based on the renewal of nation-states.

In sum, I have argued that strong, good states are essential in sustaining human rights and prosperity. Although the UN global order has no central authority to resolve conflict, the Westphalian system of sovereign states has considerable advantages over a weak, diffuse international community of transnational networks, global associations, and international governmental organizations. To be sure, the existing order allows significant inequalities in power and wealth, but when states are governed effectively they can contribute to domestic order and economic prosperity, inhibiting international tyranny. To advance the global common good, major powers must be powerful and liberal—that is, capable of influencing other states and democratic in order to foster responsible domestic and international behaviors. There is no guarantee that human rights, prosperity, and peace will be advanced in global society. But if nation-states are important in securing such global goods, the United States should make the renewal of nation-states a priority so that a more stable global order can be achieved. P

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(Endnotes)

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