

## ALGORITHMS OF WAR

**A**S THE NAPOLEONIC WARS came to an end, the French liberal Benjamin Constant envisioned a new age of commerce, legality and representative government, in which the traditional war-making powers of the state would wither away. The militarism of the old regime and its revolutionary nemesis had proved ineffectual before a polity based on sound credit and unbridled money-making. As the returns to conquest in the European theatre sharply declined, societies would come to insist on taxing themselves in parliaments and settling their scores on the market. Comparable predictions were offered after the resounding Western victory in the half-century Cold War. The transition to an international order based on capitalism, elections and human rights seemed to form a global trend-line extending into the far future. In this scenario, however, the obsolescence of military force was never seriously considered. The us would preserve the hegemony it had won in the struggle against Communism by protecting the entire zone of affluence against sundry threats in the coming era of globalization. Neutralization of Russia as a great power through NATO encirclement and financial inducements; regulation of China's entry into the world market through checkpoints at the wto and the Taiwan straits; effortless direction of the IMF and World Bank by the Treasury Department; stepped up harassment of rogue regimes, with or without UN enabling clauses; even hostile takeovers of crony capitalisms by Wall Street—all were welcomed by Western opinion, as stock in America soared to all-time highs, under a President who explained that the time of power politics had passed.

This feel-good dictum, however far from the realities of the Washington Consensus, conveyed the relaxed tone of unchallenged primacy. The arrival of a new Republican Administration in 2001 altered the atmosphere: although posting at the outset no far-reaching departures from the

doctrinal innovations of the Clinton era, its harsh improvisations off a familiar script grated nerves in allied capitals. Then came the thunderbolt of 9/11, transforming—to all appearances—the domestic and international scene. A global spectre had materialized, conveniently replacing the galvanizing power of the Soviet threat; and one over which easy victories could be scored to plebiscitary acclaim. Stoking anti-terrorist panic, an invigorated executive team proceeded to implement a replay of the Reagan revolution: massive tax cuts, a new arms build-up, and a determined effort to shift the centre of gravity of the whole political system at home yet further to the right. Abroad, outright military conquest has regained its lustre, as American arms have swept to Kabul and Baghdad, and strikes against Tehran and Pyongyang are contemplated as sequels.

Washington's new 'unilateralism' has naturally aroused disquiet in the ranks of traditional allies and clients, reduced with few exceptions to the role of impotent onlookers. In the eyes of its critics, this is an administration that lives entirely off the momentum of the fortuitous conjuncture of September 11, and seeks to institutionalize it. From its inception the coherence and viability of this audacious enterprise has been the subject of an ongoing controversy amongst pundits, journalists, academics and anti-war demonstrators around the world. For many, the policies of the Bush regime represent a fundamental and bewildering break with the—on balance, rational and benign—international role played by America since 1945, whose achievements came to full fruition in a post-Cold War setting under the last Democratic administration. Typically, in this perspective, Clinton's rule is looked back at longingly, as the halcyon days of a humane and responsible Pax Americana, whose abandonment since has been a brutal disappointment. But—so runs the reassuring message—a return to earlier norms of leadership, a multilateralism more respectful of traditional allies and international institutions, can be expected over time as the sense of domestic emergency fades away, or practical difficulties mount overseas. The current adventurism should be seen as an unsustainable spasm, a neo-conservative coup alien to the underlying spirit of the republic.

Philip Bobbitt's *The Shield of Achilles* gives little comfort to such hopeful prognoses.<sup>1</sup> Its aim is to situate contemporary developments in a long

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<sup>1</sup> *The Shield of Achilles. War, Peace and the Course of History*, Foreword by Michael Howard, Knopf: New York 2002; henceforward SA.

saga unfolding from the Renaissance to the present, whose turning points are periodic revolutions in military affairs that throw constitutional forms into flux, as warring states confront unprecedented strategic alternatives. In excess of 900 pages, the book was probably conceived in the mid-90s when the author—a constitutional lawyer doubling as a deterrence theorist—began to formulate a sweeping critique of the force structure inherited from the Cold War, in contentions over what was to be done with this awesome arsenal after the historic adversary it was designed to overwhelm had ceded the field. *The Shield of Achilles* offers, among other things, a panorama of the debate in Washington over the aims, priorities and instruments of American foreign policy from Desert Storm to Enduring Freedom.

The identity of its author is of more than incidental significance. Bobbitt is not a Republican but a Democrat, and no ordinary Democrat at that. A nephew of Lyndon Johnson, whose father ran LBJ's radio stations, he is a scion of a Texan political elite that has produced such bi-partisan insiders as John Connolly, Lloyd Bentsen or Robert Strauss. His career has been an effortless spiral between academic and political appointments, tracing the profile of a figure at the highest reaches of overlapping establishments. Holder of a chair in constitutional law and international relations at the University of Texas, not to speak of concurrent appointments in history at Oxford and war studies at King's College, Bobbitt is also a member of the American Law Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Pacific Council on International Policy and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In Washington, he served successively as Associate Counsel to the President under Carter, Counsel to the Senate Iran-Contra Committee under Reagan, Counsellor on International Law at the State Department under Bush Senior, and Director of Intelligence on the National Security Council under Clinton.

### *The Clinton catalyst*

If Bobbitt's opinion of such various masters of the American state is uniformly glowing,<sup>2</sup> one stands out for especial admiration. Clinton,

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<sup>2</sup> See the revealing interview with Bobbitt by Andrew Billen in *The Times*, 24 June 2002: 'Perhaps we should be reassured that having spent so long so close to power, he has concluded that it is, in the main, wise and benign, that Gerald Ford was "just a wonderful man", Carter not the vacillating indecisive president portrayed and Reagan—from Bobbitt's access to his private correspondence—a master of detail'.

although at first slow to grasp the issues at stake before him, and at times ill-served by his speech-writers, was the statesman who steered the United States towards an entirely new conception of international relations, a change 'of a magnitude no less than Bismarck's'. The turning point in this revolution was the President's decision to intervene, first in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, overriding the anachronistic fetishes of national sovereignty, and the UN legalisms enshrining them, in the higher interests of humanity and the Western community. Bobbitt devotes a passionate chapter of his book to these episodes, in which he was evidently an ardent actor behind the scenes. He has since explained how he proposed to Clinton a justifying doctrine for such operations on a global scale. 'The us would intervene when the threat to our vital strategic interests was overwhelming and imminent; or when significant strategic interests and humanitarian concerns coincided; or, when a vital strategic interest was absent, humanitarian concerns were high and strategic risks were low'.<sup>3</sup>

In offering the most systematic theorization of American imperial interventions to date, *The Shield of Achilles* makes clear that the major ideological innovations powering them are the creation of the Clinton, not of the Bush Presidency. Here the key development was the proclamation of the legitimacy of military intervention—regardless of national sovereignty or absence of aggression—to defend human rights, to stamp out terrorism, or to block nuclear proliferation. In the name of the first, Clinton launched a full-scale war on Yugoslavia; of the second, bombed Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan; and of the third, came within an ace of unleashing a pre-emptive attack on North Korea in 1994 (holding off only for the reasons that have so far also restrained Bush—fear of the consequences for Seoul). The Republican Administration, for all its glaring contrasts of style, has essentially operated within the same framework. The principal difference has been tactical—the lesser extent to which it has concerted with its European allies—rather than juridical: the degree to which it has cast aside previous constraints of international law.

It is in keeping with his role under Clinton, therefore, that Bobbitt should have been an eloquent apologist for the invasion of Iraq by Bush, since in his view the Ba'ath regime richly merited attack by just the criteria he had laid down at the time of Bosnia. Saddam was at once an arch-violator

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<sup>3</sup> 'What's in it for us?', *Guardian*, 7 June 2003. See further SA, p. 339.

of human rights, a seeker of nuclear weapons, and—crucially—a holder of strategic assets vital to the us. ‘The West’s interest in prising Iraqi oil out of Saddam’s hands was at least as important a motivation to the us/uk as making the benefits of oil pay for ordinary Iraqis’, he has explained. ‘It was Saddam’s great wealth, derived from oil revenues and put in service of his relentless pursuit of wmd, that made his removal so imperative’.<sup>4</sup> Temporarily out of office in Washington, Bobbitt thinks the Bush Administration would have done better to insist more openly on the pre-emptive nature of its assault on Baghdad—to prevent rather than destroy Iraqi nuclear weapons—and should have appointed some distinguished Democrats to Cabinet positions, to manifest national unity in the war against terrorism.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, basing himself in London where his numerous academic stints have afforded him contacts at all levels of the local establishment, he has been tireless on behalf of the Blair government, in broadsheets, talkshows and on websites, firming up British opinion for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The role of informal adviser and courtier at Downing Street is curiously apposite, since the living embodiment of the unity of the Clinton and Bush periods is the uk’s social-democratic Prime Minister, an eager apostle of the war aims of both Presidents.

### *Poetry and piety*

If such is the political significance of the career, what is the intellectual character of the work that has been its fruit? *The Shield of Achilles* sets out to present the military interventions of the post-Cold War decade as the latest chapter in the history of Civilization. The literary pretensions of the work are striking enough—the title refers to the ekphrastic passages from the Iliad in which an archaic world of epic strife is presented in microcosm on a hero’s shield. The author subscribes to that ancient dictum: ‘War is the father of all things’—or, as he puts it in more modern idiom, ‘No less than the market and law courts, with which it is inextricably intertwined, war is a creative act of civilized man, with important consequences for the rest of human culture’.<sup>6</sup> If the pathos of

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<sup>4</sup> *Guardian*, 7 June 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Talking of the War on Terror last summer, he complained: ‘We are not treating it as a war. If we, in America, were treating it as a war there would be Democrats in the War Cabinet. One of the first things Roosevelt did was bring in Henry Stimson and Frank Knox to be Secretary of War and Secretary of the Navy’: interview with Billen, *Times*, 24 June 2002.

<sup>6</sup> SA, p. xxxi.

the battlefield permeates the book, projecting a heroic vision of war without end, the lyre punctuates its progress. Poems, set in italics, introduce each of its six parts. Their relationship to the arguments that follow is quite adventitious, their rhetorical function lying elsewhere. The selection is preponderantly Eastern European, comprising an anthology of despair on the ravages of modern fanaticism, interspersed with an occasional patriotic ode. The scent of an older *Kulturpessimismus* wafts from these pages. The historian Michael Howard, amidst an otherwise extravagant encomium that prefaces the work, at one point incautiously compares it to Spengler's *Decline of the West*. But Bobbitt's is a more upbeat text. Milosz, Holub, Brodsky, Herbert, Szymborska, laced with a dollop or two of Larkin and Auden, are there to raise the tone. They do not get in the way of a sturdy inventory of the world-historic victories of the West, and the contemporary means of extending them.

The extraneous poetics do little, in fact, to conceal the author's cultural limitations: though French and German phrases occasionally decorate its pages, the bibliography of *The Shield of Achilles*—some three hundred items—is, with a handful of unlikely exceptions, monolingual. Nor do the oddities of the book stop there. While his depictions of an emerging imperial *Machtpolitik* are typically lucid and dispassionate, Bobbitt can also lapse into the most florid sermonizing: the same author who burns with indignation over the fate of Sarajevo contemplates nuclear first strikes with detachment. The resulting rhetoric is a disconcerting combination of pious Americana and cold-blooded diagnostics. The piety is of the Baptist persuasion, the faith that brought Clinton to his genuflections of atonement with the Reverend Jackson, and continues to inspire his successor. Bobbitt displays it in dedications of a flamboyance that belongs to another epoch. *The Shield of Achilles* is devoted

To those by whose love God's grace was first made known to me and to those whose loving-kindness has ever since sustained me in His care.

An earlier work, *Constitutional Fate*, opens with the words:

I would like to say 'This book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, the trick of a cheat, for it would not be rightly understood. I mean simply that it came at the end of another's suffering and is intended to serve a value I cannot name that is other than mere self-regard. Insofar as I have failed to be in harmony with this value, my book will fall short of the vision it is an attempt to express.

Such flourishes of postmodern unction sit ill with a pagan militarism. But *The Shield of Achilles* suffers from graver defects than its value dilemmas, or faults of taste. It is a work, to put it mildly, of uneven historical literacy. Purporting to offer a scholarly narrative covering the past five hundred years of (exclusively) Western history, what it in fact offers is a sequence of stylized facts selected to illustrate a lesson or an argument. The real form of the book is that of so many parables—edifying or minatory as the case may be—from the past, after the fashion of popular writers like Barbara Tuchman rather than serious historians in the tradition of Hintze or Bloch. Symptomatic of this mode are uplifting portraits of great, neglected figures whose lives can offer moral inspiration to present actors. Two of these are picked out for such *Boy's Own Paper* treatment in *The Shield of Achilles*, each a lengthy excursus occupying space wildly disproportionate to the ostensible purposes of the analytic scheme: Castlereagh and Colonel House. The first features, logically enough, as the clairvoyant architect of the counter-revolutionary settlement at the Congress of Vienna, whose lonely wisdom lights a beacon to contemporary statesmen in the aftermath of the twentieth century's Waterloo.

The second, Woodrow Wilson's palace familiar, was less successful at Versailles, but nonetheless helped steer America towards its future global destiny. In this case, the role model is closer to home. For House too was a Texan, operating half in the political daylight of electoral machinations, half in the shadows of diplomatic intrigue, yet possessed of a visionary attachment to a 'world made of law' according to us specifications. Bobbitt dwells with especial admiration on The Inquiry, the secret body of 126 experts assembled by House in the wake of the October Revolution, 'to collect the data that would provide the factual and analytical basis for an American-directed settlement' in Europe. What the United States needs today, he explains, is a comparable 'Vision Team', also to be convened in secret, but now including not just lawyers and scientists as in Wilson's day, but also business executives, to offer true strategic guidance to the Presidency.<sup>7</sup> The candidate for House's position is not hard to guess.

Digressions like these might be bracketed as quirks, however revealing, in a text whose force of argument lies elsewhere. A more serious difficulty is posed by the structure of *The Shield of Achilles*, the general

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<sup>7</sup> SA, pp. 399, 315.

organization of which is opaquely jumbled and overextended. The contrast with John Mearsheimer's recent *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, a model of clarity and economy, is stark in this respect, as in others.<sup>8</sup> Ostensibly divided into two parts, 'State of War' and 'States of Peace', the book obeys no coherent logical or chronological order. It starts with a section on the period 1914–1990; recedes to 1494–1914; jumps forward again to the 1990s and future prospects; swerves sideways to Colonel House and then skips to Bosnia; wheels back to the early 16th century; and works forward once again to the present—finally topping off the menu with imaginary scenarios for the 21st century, complete with an epilogue on the Twin Towers which reiterates George VI's prayers to the Lord in 1939: 'May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all'. Bobbitt explains he originally intended to write two volumes, then decided to amalgamate his themes into one. The result is an overweight construction, in which the individual sentences are lucid, even elegant, but their sum becomes corpulent and flabby—a dropsical mass more likely to limit than to attract or impress its target readership.

### *Strategy and legality*

*The Shield of Achilles* is not, however, reducible to its many weaknesses and eccentricities. As a theoretical work, it possesses one core strength that sets it apart in the strategic literature of the current period. Bobbitt's unusual combination of backgrounds—as constitutional lawyer and weapons expert—has allowed him to combine two perspectives that, as he notes, are normally dissociated: the internal legal—and social—order of states, and their external military and diplomatic constellation. The originality of his book lies in its attempt to address the problem of how to conceptualize the state as, simultaneously, an inwardly and outwardly tested concentration of legitimate public force. In itself, the merit of this enterprise is plain. Bobbitt's way of negotiating it is the most significant criterion for judging the book. Here the architrave on which his account of the succession of modern state-forms as a coherent series depends—the notion that allows him to unify their inner and outer fields as a single system—is that of 'constitution'.

Domestically, of course, this is a familiar part of the political lexicon, denoting the juridical framework of state power within any given

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<sup>8</sup> See Peter Gowan's essay on this important work, 'A Calculus of Power', NLR 16, July–August 2002.



social order: in pre-modern societies, accepted by custom or tradition; in nearly all modern ones, codified in written charters. Bobbitt's key move is to extend its application from the intra-state to the inter-state arena. *The Shield of Achilles* posits a succession of international legal regimes that established the norms of war and diplomacy from late medieval times to the twentieth century:

It is my premise that there is a constitution of the society of states as a whole: that it is proposed and ratified by the peace conferences that settle the epochal wars previously described, and amended in various peace conferences of lesser scope; and that its function is to institutionalize an international order derived from the triumphant constitutional order of the war-winning state.<sup>9</sup>

Bobbitt conceives of these historic peace conferences—Augsburg, Westphalia, Utrecht, Vienna, Versailles—as constitutional conventions following protracted violent conflicts, where the signatories agree to accept the fundamental precepts, over which they will then contend during the next Long War. The conferences that set the rules for this game sanction the strategic doctrine of a hegemonic state whose internal arrangements have proven themselves as the most effective mode of mobilizing and deploying forces.

Two features of this theoretical construction should be noted at the outset. The first is a fundamental equivocation at the level of historical causality. Do strategic—that is, military—revolutions typically give rise to new legal configurations, first within states and then between them? Or is it rather the emergence of juridical innovations within states that ultimately ensures victory on the battlefield? Formally, Bobbitt—viewing the *raison d'être* of state power as in constant movement between the intertwined imperatives of domestic order and foreign dominance—appears to allow for either possibility, without concerning himself to establish any particular dialectic between them. On closer inspection, however, a basic contradiction in his construct becomes clear. On the one hand, he asserts the primacy of internal developments: ‘over the long run, it is the constitutional order of the State that tends to confer military advantage by achieving cohesion, continuity and, above all, legitimacy for its strategic operations’—hence ‘international law is a symptom of the triumph of a particular constitutional order within the individual states of which that society consists’.<sup>10</sup> On the other, he insists that it is the external

<sup>9</sup> SA, p. 483.

<sup>10</sup> SA, pp. 209, xxix.

matrix that is decisive: “The reason epochal wars achieve in retrospect an historic importance is because however they may arise, they challenge and ultimately change the basic structure of the State, which is, after all, a war-making institution”—hence ‘an epochal settlement recognizes and legitimates the dominant domestic constitutional order because that archetypal order has been forged in the conflicts that are composed by the peace settlement’.<sup>11</sup>

So formulated, the two postulates are incompatible. In the narrative they unchain, there is little doubt which has the upper hand. Although Bobbitt’s primary background, and the bulk of his previous writing, is in constitutional law rather than deterrence theory, in *The Shield of Achilles* it is war and its outcomes that hold front stage. The central claim of the book is that ‘constitutional’ authorizations periodically mutate in a remorseless geopolitical field of selection, whose history is a sequence of Long Wars, lasting anywhere from thirty to eighty years. The pressure to adopt the latest military innovations leads to a shift in the domestic epicentre of decision-making to those who can most effectively mobilize the newest weaponry, altering the inherited norms of rulership and warfare to their advantage. From the early modern inception of the era of warring states, governments have sought to emulate those innovations that seem to explain the success of their ascending rivals.

This *Primat der Aussenpolitik* is qualified, but not rescinded, by the acknowledgement that domestic revolutions can redefine the strategic goals of states within this field. Aspiring powers seek to emulate the constitutional prototype of the hegemonic state. Weighed down by an older constitutional inheritance, most fail to adopt the winning strategic innovations of an era, and are either annexed, neutralized, or drop back in the race. In each designated period, the author spotlights only those states that represent the sleek line of historical advance, relegating the rest to irrelevance. Constitutional history unfolds as a sequence of decisive attributes of legitimate force—‘princely’, ‘kingly’, ‘territorial’, ‘state-national’ and ‘national-state’—which ultimately comprise a stylized genealogy of the contemporary neoliberal militarism onto which the narrative will debouch.

In this procession, weaponry and diplomacy are what matter. They, not jurisprudence, institute a new legitimacy. Bobbitt accompanies his main

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<sup>11</sup> SA, pp. 333, 502.

story with a perfunctory subplot that offers to track the evolution of theories of international law across the same five hundred years. Vitoria, Suárez, Gentili, Grotius, Wolff, Vattel, Austin are passed in hasty review as so many exemplifications of their periods. Just how unserious this sideline in the book is, in fact, becomes clear when it reaches modern times—the inter-war period of the twentieth century. At this point Bobbitt manages to discuss Kelsen without apparently being aware of *Das Problem der Souveränität und die Theorie des Völkerrechts*, and Schmitt without having heard of *Der Nomos der Erde*, the classic study of epochal epistemes in international law, supposedly his topic here—instead floundering out of his depth in divagations on the Frankfurt School. It would be unfair to make too much of the crassness of such sections. For what these glosses on jurists from Salamanca to the New Haven School suggest is a rather modest role for this tradition in defining the terms of statecraft. Perhaps this is because Bobbitt ultimately regards the precepts of international law not as valid norms, binding on great powers, but as a repertoire of elastic formulas, idioms and rationalizations—essentially a loosely scripted, diplomatic language game. Revealingly, he asks at one point, ‘would the history of the twentieth century have been any different if there had been no international law?’, noting—if not endorsing—the caustic judgement of Dean Acheson that ‘the survival of the state is not a matter of law’.<sup>12</sup>

### *Ambiguating constitutions*

If violence and legality are thus by no means on an equal footing in Bobbitt’s account of inter-state relations, how does the latter fare in the domestic evolution of states? Here an anomaly immediately strikes the eye. In no country in the world does the constitution loom larger than in the United States. But for American history to fit Bobbitt’s schema, there would have had to be at least three successive constitutional orders—juridical transformations corresponding to the state-nation, the nation-state and today’s market-state. Even were the Founders to be credited with inaugurating a nation-state proper, skipping the first stage (a line of argument Bobbitt’s account of the Civil War appears to disallow), a second constitution would still seem to be in train, or in order, as the market-state takes form. This would certainly be an incendiary thought for a culture in which the charter of 1787, give or take its handful of subsequent amendments, is treated as a virtually sacred

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<sup>12</sup> SA, pp. 642, 654.

document. Bobbitt hastens to disavow it.<sup>13</sup> The Constitution is not, after all, to be touched.

What this reveals, of course, is that Bobbitt's usage of the term 'constitution', at home no less than at large, is essentially tactical and metaphorical. It refers to no tangible charter of rights or firm principles of law, but to dispositions of another kind. Beneath the rhetorical surface of the text, an abrupt dismissal of normative illusions suggests a preference for a more concrete jurisprudence. Bobbitt's conception of a 'constitution' collapses the distinction between hard facts and legal norms. In *The Shield of Achilles* the term refers in practice to a mode of distributing power, wealth and status—a 'regime' in the Aristotelean sense—whose *telos* can be expressed in the form of a legitimating maxim. But it loses nothing by illicit association with its traditional meaning. The slippage from one to the other is integral to the progression of the book.

### *From the Renaissance to the Great War*

Bobbitt begins his historical narrative proper in the prelude to the so-called 'military revolution' from 1560 to 1660. This period witnessed a tenfold increase in the size of armies, the introduction of musket-armed infantry, new schemes of recruitment and drilling, an improvised financial apparatus for the raising and provisioning of troops, and fiscal centralization to keep up with runaway costs. The great monarchies of the sixteenth century began this arms race by emulating the post-feudal miniature polities of the Italian peninsula, earning them, in Bobbitt's account, the Machiavellian title of 'princely state'. Although attributing the rise of the latter to the secular ethos of the Renaissance, he nonetheless has the Counter-Reformation Hapsburgs epitomize its constitutional form. Loosely grounded in its core state territory, this Austro-Hispanic dynasty vied for European primacy with its Valois counterpart for half a century before being forced to a partition of its inheritance and an abandonment of the most grandiose Imperial ambitions at the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555.

The next era of inter-state war erupted along the front lines of continent-wide religious strife. Bobbitt sees the battlefields of the Thirty

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<sup>13</sup> 'I should emphasize that such a transformation does not mean that the present us Constitution will be replaced': SA, p. 213.

Years War as the testing grounds of an emerging 'kingly state' whose canonical status was eventually ratified at the Treaty of Westphalia. The powerful, separate branches of the Hapsburg clan, residing in Madrid and Vienna, fall out of view, as does the Dutch Republic, whose heyday is transferred, implausibly, to the following century. The seventeenth-century revolutions of the United Provinces and England do not perturb the author's image of an age of ascendant absolutism. Richelieu and Gustavus Adolphus are the two heads of this emerging world, whose constitutional formula is *cuius regio eius religio*. The subsequent reign of the Sun King is regarded as the apogee of this kingly state—in Bobbitt's typology, a dynastic regime fused to a core state territory, clamping down on confessional strife, and practising a predatory fiscalism. The wars of the coalition that contained the military and dynastic aggrandizement of Louis XIV established, in turn, the constitutional form of the 'territorial state' whose vested interest in the balance of power was recognized as a fundamental norm of war and diplomacy at the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713. Eschewing the courtly pomp and dynastic ambitions of Versailles, states defined by Bobbitt as 'territorial' were distinguished by their tolerance, legal rationality and growth-promoting mercantilism. In the classical decades of cabinet warfare, the triumvirate of Great Britain, the United Provinces and Prussia held the fort against a slowly declining Bourbon monarchy.

The constitutional innovations that moved states up the European power hierarchy in the next era of international relations were the legacy of republican upheavals. The French Revolution forged a model of government-orchestrated mass mobilization, subsequently adopted by the most innovative states to re-emerge from Napoleonic occupation. The Hegelian-Clausewitzian figure of 'the state-nation', arising from a drastically pruned old European state-system, claimed to be the ethical embodiment of a historic people. Bobbitt rehearses the story of the Congress of Vienna as a diplomatic convention contending over the security rights and obligations of the Areopagus of Great Powers, in a concert torn between restoration and reform. The story of Castlereagh offers his first tale of a visionary statesman at odds with blinkered contemporaries unwilling to abandon the *status quo ante*. Bobbitt's figure is a conceit of a certain genre of history in which the author ventriloquizes some improbable colossus of world history, comparable in this respect to Kissinger's Metternich, or Calasso's Talleyrand.

Expatriation on his misunderstood genius cannot, however, entirely conceal the aporia of the narrative at this point. Supposedly enshrining the state-nation as the legitimate constitutional form of the new era, in reality, of course, the Congress of Vienna sealed the crushing of its most advanced embodiment—which ought, according to Bobbitt’s scheme, to have been the victor—in France, and the triumph of its negation, dynastic legitimism, across the larger part of the Continent, from Alexander I at one end to Ferdinand VII at the other. What these rulers would have made of their presumptive dedication to the ‘state-nation’ can be left to the imagination.

For Bobbitt, the transition to the next stage of the ‘nation-state’ is an artefact of the mid-century industrial revolution that brought the landscapes of Manchester to the US and the European continent. Suddenly widening discrepancies in the velocity of troop transport, firepower and scale of provisioning proved decisive in a series of wars of national unification won by Prussia, Piedmont and the Union. These constitutional settlements set the mould for an emerging political universe in which statehood eventually became a populist project of welfare promises, mass education and universal conscription. But the full package only came together in a slide towards total war, as the official state nationalisms of the Great Powers moulted into more militant creeds. Out of the First World War there then sprang the Russian Revolution and Mussolini’s March on Rome, as well as Wilsonian idealism, opening a historic conflict between drastically different models of legitimate nation-statehood.

### *Guilty Germany*

The introduction of this axis of division breaks, however, the coherence of the narrative a second time, and more critically. In his accounts of earlier peace conferences, the legitimating norms of the inter-state order were invariably settled not too long after the genesis of the ascendant constitutional paradigm. But at Versailles this constitutive power fails to materialize because of the presence of irreconcilable *ideological* divisions, between regimes belonging to same populist family. Liberal Democracy, Communism and Fascism were the three faces of the twentieth-century nation-state: as opposed to the constitutions that precede it, there are no concrete universals that embody this ideologically divided genus. As a result of the intensity of this internecine struggle, the entirety of

the twentieth-century Long War—from 1914 to 1990—unfolded without a foundational international settlement. In history according to *The Shield of Achilles*, consensual norms of ‘nation-state’ sovereignty only become system-wide with the conclusion of this Long War at the Peace of Paris in 1990—and then immediately begin to dissolve. Or so it would seem. The discrepancy in the narrative is not registered, let alone addressed by the author.

In this story, Wilsonian internationalism is taken to epitomize the liberal-democratic conception of a nation-state based world order. Bobbitt claims that the purity of American motives was never more in evidence than in Wilson’s decision to intervene, which turned back the German offensive of 1918; even more than the later anti-Hitler coalition, this was a moral enterprise *par excellence*. Now is the moment for Colonel House to emerge from the wings. Bobbitt recounts with gusto how, circumventing traditional diplomatic channels, Wilson’s confidant was dispatched to uplift the Old World. He does not allow any Jamesian irony to spoil the tale of this bustling American envoy. The story repeats a lesson from an earlier chapter: just as Castlereagh had sought to coax the Holy Alliance towards the emerging norms of the semi-parliamentary state-nation, so now House attempted to move them to an understanding of the highest ideals of the new nation-state. But myopic European belligerents clung to their obsolete prerogatives, disfiguring the future envisioned by Wilson.

Historians who adopt this view usually fault the victorious Entente for abandoning the historic convention of diplomatic amnesty, and attaching unsustainable war-guilt charges to the terms of defeat. By contrast, Bobbitt seeks to conjoin the noble preambles of Wilson to the wintry ultimatums of Clemenceau: in his view, not only had Germany started the Long War, it was destined to remain an essentially criminal aggressor until it met with crushing, punitive defeat. The most bizarre single feature of *The Shield of Achilles* is its resurrection of a 1914-vintage scarecrow of the Huns. Bobbitt’s judgements on the Prusso-German Reich consist of a series of astonishingly ignorant assertions. Chief amongst them is the claim that this state was already *fascist* in 1871. Hence, he solemnly informs the reader that: ‘the basic continuity in German history between 1871 and 1945 lay in its substantive goal: the defence of a fascist constitutional system against liberalism and socialism’.<sup>14</sup> Thus he suggests that

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<sup>14</sup> SA, p. 26.

had the victors not imposed such heavy burdens on the Weimar Republic, the Nazis would simply have come to power at an earlier date, and so enjoyed a decisive advantage in the inevitable war to come. The notion that the Weimar Republic collapsed in part due to the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty warrants scarcely even a dismissal.

Anachronistic as it seems, this animus towards German militarism, in a work that otherwise treats the assorted rapacities and manoeuvres of the Great Powers with *sang-froid*, has a contemporary resonance. One need only think of the rhetorical usages of appeasement, designed to make the equation between Hitler and Saddam Hussein. Embedded coverage of German history constitutes the low point of *The Shield of Achilles*. Elsewhere Bobbitt is quite capable of intellectual independence. He has no difficulty, for example, in acknowledging that the United States was consistently on the offensive against a weaker Soviet Union during the Cold War, and finds that record wholly commendable, praising, for example—though here perhaps family loyalties come into play—his uncle’s war in Vietnam and invasion of the Dominican Republic as meritorious episodes in the battle against Communism.<sup>15</sup> Although where necessary he allows himself to be moved by officially sanctioned victimologies, they never entirely bewitch his judgement, as he often alternates these with the harshest nostrums. Indeed he confesses to be looking forward to a near future in which the norms justifying great-power intervention will no longer have to be couched in the language of defence—the now obsolete idiom of the sovereign nation-state.

### *Dawn or dusk at Paris?*

Bringing a close to the pre-history of the present, Bobbitt portrays what he calls the Peace of Paris—the ‘Charter for a New Europe’ adopted by the CSCE in late 1990—as the diplomatic stage upon which the liberal-democratic constitutional norm of the victorious West finally achieved the universal recognition it missed at Versailles. The importance of this moment for the architecture of Bobbitt’s narrative is decisive: it is the true hinge of contemporary history, on which the present continues to turn. Yet just at this crux, the third and most fundamental aporia in his construction breaks open. For on the one hand, the Peace of Paris signals

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<sup>15</sup> The Vietnam War ‘contributed to the ultimate Alliance victory’; the intervention in the Dominican Republic was ‘one of the most successful pro-democracy acts of the period’: SA, pp. 9, 59, 474.



a new constitution of the society of states, based on worldwide legitimation of democracy, human rights and the market economy. As such it provides the empowering charter for military interventions to secure these norms wherever they are too grossly defied. As Bobbitt puts it:

The Peace of Paris ought to settle this constitutional question for the society of states: no state's sovereignty is unimpeachable if it studiously spurns parliamentary institutions and human rights protections. The greater the rejection of these institutions—which are the means by which sovereignty is conveyed by societies to their governments—the more sharply curtailed is the cloak of sovereignty that would otherwise protect governments from interference by their peers. US action against the sovereignty of Iraq, for example, must be evaluated in this light.<sup>16</sup>

So too, he adds, the Peace of Paris strips the mantle of national sovereignty away from any government seeking nuclear weapons that fails to conform to its norms, warranting pre-emptive strikes against the delinquent.<sup>17</sup> In this register, the Charter of 1990 appears as the lineal successor of the Congress of Vienna, setting the terms of legitimate diplomacy and war for an entire epoch, the period ahead.

The briefest glance at the text of the Charter, however, makes clear that the 'Peace of Paris' bears no relation to this construal. It expressly rules out the actions Bobbitt would have it endorse. 'In accordance with our obligations under the Charter of the Nations and commitments under the Helsinki final act,' declared its signatories, 'we renew our pledge to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or from acting in any other manner inconsistent with the principles or purposes of these documents. We recall that non-compliance with obligations under the Charter of the United Nations constitutes a violation of international law'.<sup>18</sup> That this was no mere *clause de style* can be seen from the reaction of the figure who was historically speaking its most significant

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<sup>16</sup> SA, p. 680.

<sup>17</sup> 'No state that does not derive its authority from representative institutions that coexist with fundamental rights can legitimately argue that it can subject its own people to the threat of nuclear pre-emption or retaliation on the basis of its alleged rights of sovereignty because the people it thus makes into nuclear targets have not consented to bear such risks. At a minimum, the Peace of Paris stands for this': SA, p. 680.

<sup>18</sup> See 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe': [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org)

signatory—given that most of the document was standard boiler-plate for Western politicians—namely Gorbachev: who denounced both NATO's attack on Yugoslavia and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.

But if even the most tendentious reading could not make the Peace of Paris into an open-ended Enabling Law, empowering the us to maraud at will in the name of human rights and the prerogatives of the nuclear club, can it really be the dawn of the new international system the epoch requires? At other moments, no doubt sensing its limitations, Bobbitt offers a very different diagnosis, casting the Charter of 1990 in precisely the opposite light. In this version, far from defining a new world order at the end of History, the contracting parties at Paris would have ratified the international norms of a constitutional framework in decline. For at the very hour of its triumph, the bell was tolling for the liberal-democratic nation-state. An entirely new political form, the market-state, has since arisen to supplant it. Bobbitt underscores the drastic nature of this mutation, expressing the difference between the two in the simple, icy formula: the market-state ceases to base its legitimacy on improving the welfare of its people.<sup>19</sup>

Instead this new form of polity simply offers to maximize opportunities—to 'make the world available' to those with the skills or luck to take advantage of it. 'Largely indifferent to the norms of justice, or for that matter to any particular set of moral values so long as law does not act as an impediment to economic competition',<sup>20</sup> the market-state is defined by three paradoxes. Government becomes more centralized, yet weaker; citizens increasingly become spectators; welfare is retrenched, but security and surveillance systems expand. Bobbitt etches the consequences imperturbably. The grip of finance on electoral politics may become so complete as to erase the stigma of corruption. Waves of privatization will continue to roll over the state, eventually dissolving large parts of it into a looser, shifting ensemble of subcontracted and clandestine operations. (Recalling his stint as an advisor to the Senate investigation of the Iran-Contra Enterprise, Bobbitt calls for a jurisprudence more discerning of the fine lines separating capitalism from crime.)

Public education will implode as parents seek to augment the human capital of their children with early investments in private school. Inequality and crime could grow to Brazilian proportions. Civil liberties

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<sup>19</sup> SA, pp. 222 ff.

<sup>20</sup> SA, p. 230.

will have to be reconceived to accommodate far-reaching anti-terrorist dragnets. Some of the fictions of citizenship will gradually give way to more realistic weighted voting systems. Representative government itself will become increasingly nominal as media plebiscites openly assume the function of securing the consent of atomized multitudes. National security spin doctoring will become so pervasive as to engender a new epistemology of managed opinion.

### *Travails of the market-state*

As the end-point of his demi-millennial narrative, the market-state sets the stage for Bobbitt's prescriptions for the West today. But though he depicts it graphically enough, he offers no coherent explanation of its origins. Five factors, we are told at the outset, have given a quietus to the nation-state: human-rights norms, weapons of mass destruction, transnational pestilences, global finance and the internet. In another enumeration 'environmental threats, mass migration, capital speculation, terrorism and cyber interference' are the challenges that phased it out.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Bobbitt remarks 'the market-state is a constitutional adaptation to the end of the Long War and to the revolutions in computation, communications and weapons of mass destruction that brought that to an end'—only to withdraw the claim as hastily as it is made: 'I have not argued, and do not wish to argue that the State has changed in the precise ways it has *because* of strategic challenges to itself'.<sup>22</sup>

The transition to the market-state is thus simply invoked: no real effort is made to explain it as feedback from a revolution in military affairs. Nor, on the other hand, is there any attempt to account for it in terms of the world economic upheavals of the last thirty years, the fiscal crisis of the welfare state, or the ideological sea change brought on by the defeat of Communism. Nowhere, in fact, is the underlying slackness in the causal joints of *The Shield of Achilles* more apparent than here, at the most critical point in its exposition.

Even the chronology of its origins remains curiously vague. If any two architects of the market-state were to be named, Thatcher and Reagan would be the obvious choices—the pioneer of privatization, and the unleasher of financialization on a world scale. In the United States, the agenda of the Reagan Administration to reflate American power

<sup>21</sup> SA, p. xxii.

<sup>22</sup> SA, pp. 228, 234.

through rearmament and a vast shakedown of organized labour was no mere paroxysm of the late Cold War: the employer offensive and militarism of the eighties signalled the advent of a new political order in which we are still living today. For Bobbitt, however, ‘President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher were among the last nation-state leaders’, because their legitimacy still rested on their claim to improve the welfare of their peoples. In scrapping this relic, by contrast, ‘Bush and Blair are among the first market-state political leaders’.<sup>23</sup>

On this reading, no symbol could have been more apt than Thatcher’s fall from power at the very moment she was signing the ‘Charter for a New Europe’ in Paris in November 1990, when she was ignominiously ousted in her absence by her own party in London. Of the two antithetical accounts of the Peace of Paris that Bobbitt musters, there is little doubt which informs more of the narrative. The media splash of that month, soon forgotten, was not the inauguration of a new constitutional order, but the passing of an old one.<sup>24</sup> In short order, a series of post-Cold War crises and disasters dissipated its illusions, creating states of emergency in which the us not only claimed the sovereign right to decide on the interpretation of international law, but increasingly to make and break it at will. The first Gulf War, with its rhetoric of American leadership in the international community, looked as if it would be the inaugural event of the coming era, but ultimately turned out to be a false dawn.

For in the Balkans, the UN proved a broken reed, and the homilies of Paris offered scant guidance. Far from displaying any united purpose, the newly minted market-states fell into lamentable disarray. Bobbitt’s account of the Yugoslav crisis shifts the focus from the axial relationship of social structure and strategy to the *mise en scène* of Western public indignation over the fate of Bosnia—that is, from hard to soft power. Although keenly aware of the plebiscitary nature of modern governance, Bobbitt often collapses the world into its journalistic representation. His

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<sup>23</sup> SA, p. 222. Elsewhere, in keeping with the overall oscillation of his account at this point, he pays due tribute to the founders: ‘Within the most prominent market-states, the groundwork was laid by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who did so much to discredit the welfare rationale for the nation-state’: p. 339.

<sup>24</sup> A glance at Plate III, which offers a heraldic diagram of successive international orders, each pivoting at mid-point on its respective peace treaty, makes it clear that the ‘Peace of Paris’, situated far to the right of the axis of modal settlement, does not fit the series: SA, p. 346.

selective reconstruction of the break-up of Yugoslavia rehashes the official lessons of Atlantic internationalism. It is a story of European appeasement, American hesitation and international indifference in the face of genocide, exposing the incompatibility of human rights and nationalism. In this myth of origins, the villainous Boutros-Ghali—impertinently pointing to the far greater enormities of Rwanda—expresses the shocking sophisms of a dying inter-state order. Western collusion in those events is passed over with unruffled composure.

Fortunately, in the end Clinton saw the light and acted to check Milošević. Thus in practice the turning-point was Rambouillet rather than Paris. Not the pieties of the Concert of Powers, but an ultimatum by the United States was the moment at which the international architecture inherited from the Cold War started to be reshaped.<sup>25</sup> Since then, the field of manoeuvre of the American state has steadily widened. The limits of the possible are still being boldly redefined. In Bobbitt's terms, the American regime is the detonator of an expanding legal universe of market-states, bursting asunder an old international order based on the nominal recognition of the sovereignty of all nation-states. The norms of twentieth-century treaty and alliance structures are thus in flux. This disorder is not, however, the transitional manifestation of a constituent power at work, but a new, protean mode of imperial authority that is dispensing with the very form of universal legal rules and adopting a jurisprudence based on flexible strategic guidelines.

### *American supremacy*

In that sense, treaty conferences are mere chapter headings in the annals of history: their meaning comes from what follows. Since the declarations of Paris, the us, as the undisputed champion of the neo-liberal market-order, has had to take the lead in rewriting the rules of property, war and peace. This has entailed exposure to the risk of being held accountable to the rules of one's own making. But Bobbitt believes that the problem can easily be circumvented by a prudent insistence on flexibility and exemptions. Treaties on land mines, a human-rights court, chemical and biological weapons, anti-ballistic missiles and emissions that do not sufficiently safeguard America's interests, should be discarded without qualms. "The United States is simply not in the same

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<sup>25</sup> See SA, p. 468, though Bobbitt appears not to register the contradiction in his account.

position as other states, and therefore should not be shamed by charges of hypocrisy when it fails to adopt the regimes that it urges on others.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to those who see in the contemporary imperialism a freak storm brought on by neo-conservative hubris, Bobbitt vividly sketches the long-term logic of American expansion.

The United Nations is only one pillar of a now tottering international dispensation: in this age of creative destruction, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the IMF, the OSCE, the European Union and even NATO itself will either be reformed, or decline into irrelevance. The emerging world of market-states mirrors its domestic social shape: it is openly run by highly selective clubs in which rank is apportioned in strict accordance to financial and military clout. The legitimating maxim of these planetary oligarchies is 'to each according to his abilities'. Although Bobbitt occasionally rehearses some of the mantras of globalization, the age we are entering is portrayed as a scene of gated affluence surrounded by immiseration, violence and epidemic disease, with little alleviating Homeric joy. The characteristic promise of the age of nation-states was economic development for backward, 'late-coming' regions, but Bobbitt suggests that this too is now being rescinded. The terms of trade between advanced and backward regions are at present as bad as they were during the Great Depression; the possibility of leapfrogging development under conditions of protection is now closed off.

In this landscape, the US now enjoys uncontested supremacy. How long will it last? Bobbitt is at pains to dispel the suspicion that the constitution of all market-states must be modelled to American specifications. Europe and Asia currently have their own variants, expressing different cultural lineages and slightly diverging public priorities. Thus there are at present, he suggests, a trio of market-state forms—'entrepreneurial', 'managerial' and 'mercantile'—that represent the familiar dominants of the OECD: the Anglo-Saxon street, the Rhenish stakeholder model, and Japan Inc. Here each is graced with its own verdant image: the Meadow (US), the Park (Germany) and the Garden (Japan). Bobbitt sketches their respective traits with an air of impartiality, as if all were of equal standing, and any might ultimately prevail over the others.

But, as one might expect, this is little more than a gesture. The mercantile and the managerial variants, Japan and Germany, divide the legacy of

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<sup>26</sup> SA, p. 691.

the nation-state; the first retaining a traditionalist ethos of group responsibility, the second, interest-group cooperation and social justice. Only the entrepreneurial version—the us—approaches the pure model of the market-state, and therefore is set to out-compete the others. ‘Its multiculturalism, its free market, and its diverse religious make-up—all of which resist the centralizing efforts of the nation-state—and, above all, its habit of tolerance for diversity give it an advantage over other countries in adapting to this new constitutional order’.<sup>27</sup>

This, of course, is far from capturing the unique position of the United States in the international system, where Washington can use its massive military advantages to forestall the verdict of the world market on the increasingly unstable economic foundations of its primacy. In the inter-war era, major European states were willing to accept American arbitration of their affairs in large part because they were massively in debt. The us exercised an awesome creditor veto on any international debt settlement that would have brought an end to this destabilizing circulation of money in the world economy. Today the situation is reversed. If American hegemony is accepted by potential rivals, it is in part because however poorly most national economies have fared in the past thirty years, the affluent of all countries have shared in the bounties of unbridled financial markets, and continue to look to American capitalism as the horizon of the future.

But more fundamentally, they have reason to fear that in practice they have little choice in the matter. For however ‘irresponsible’ its macro-economic policies may be, the difficulties and risks of trying to impose fiscal discipline on the us look prohibitive, since American deficits now form the principal source of the demand that drives the world economy. The us market is the key to the export economies of the rest of the world. For the moment, this is the basic check on the tendency of an anarchic inter-state system to throw up balancing coalitions against what might otherwise be a destabilizing concentration of power at the apex of world politics.

Bobbitt’s concerns lie elsewhere. Economic calculations surface only desultorily in *The Shield of Achilles*, and the typology of the market-state

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<sup>27</sup> SA, p. 242. Moreover, ‘the entrepreneurial model offers the United States the best chance of developing, marketing and “selling” the collective goods that will maintain American influence in the world’: p. 292.

has little incidence on its argument. The historical narrative it constructs is essentially an erratic, grandiose prologue to contemporary strategic debates in Washington. At this point, the discussion moves to the canonical national-security briefs that defined the aims of the American state at moments when it confronted the option between fundamentally different stances towards competitors and enemies; and surveys the alternatives that are now circulating inside the Beltway. Here Bobbitt's account is terse and controlled, setting out with exemplary clarity the range of doctrines currently on offer: a new nationalism (Buchanan), a new 'internationalism' (Brzezinski), a new realism (Kissinger), a new evangelism (survivors of Clinton), and 'the new leadership' of the sole remaining superpower (Krauthammer). Reproaching each with proposing only a set of policies for the us state, Bobbitt calls for a more long-term paradigm to define its strategic outlook in the twenty-first century. But in practice, his recommendations differ little from the 'new leadership', the most aggressive of all agendas for contemporary American empire.

This position has the merit of candour. Bobbitt has no time for customary hypocrisies about international law or the United Nations. 'The universal view of international law is flawed in two important respects', he notes: 'It mixes the equality of states, a legal concept, with the decision to use force, a strategic concept, in a way that is fatal to both'. Were the UN General Assembly ever to demand 'economic concessions and constitutional reform consistent with a universal mandate', the result would either be contradictory, since the Security Council retains the character of a Concert of great powers, or perilous, because of the demagoguery of vast majorities.<sup>28</sup> Like the League before it, the UN has spawned a 'second generation of failures, that is, a new wave of crimes shielded by sovereignty'. The future lies rather with another Congress, like Utrecht or Vienna, to create 'a constitution for a society of market-states that will resemble those of corporations, which allow for weighted voting based on wealth'.<sup>29</sup> But that time is still far off. Meanwhile, the United States must act as it can, to 'devise a strategy of long-term dominance over peer competitors that will enable it to prevail in conventional confrontations as well as to field expeditionary forces'.<sup>30</sup>

Recent Bush Administration strategy is based on the expectation that vigorous mobilizations of American-led coalitions of the willing, followed

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<sup>28</sup> SA, pp. 361, 475.

<sup>29</sup> SA, pp. 472, 475, 777.

<sup>30</sup> SA, p. 302.



by earth-shaking victories, will periodically replenish the stock of political pressure available for strong-arming the reluctant and recalcitrant at all negotiating tables. For the moment, the environment appears favourable enough to such designs. Although Washington has sharpened the tone against France and Germany, it has taken an extremely accommodating line towards Japan: recognizing that while Japan subsidizes America's massive and growing debt, conveniently it has no capacity or will to use that leverage. For all the Washington bluster directed at them, the political classes of Paris and Berlin are for the moment quite unwilling to invest in the very costly and risky business of attempting to construct an independent centre of gravity in world politics—and this will continue to be the case unless they are forced down this path. Russia's slow-motion decline appears to require only a modicum of encouraging speeches, encirclement and periodic emergency loans; and unlike the old Soviet Union, China is thoroughly integrated into an American-dominated world market, in which it seeks only to expand, without excessive disruption.

### *Adversaries*

But this very freedom from external balance-of-power constraints contains the danger of a wilful exaggeration of threats and a casual underestimation of obstacles. The discipline that a nuclear-armed Soviet Union once imposed on America's rulers has evaporated. The rhetoric of the Republican Administration is an ominous anticipation of what might happen in the event of a world economic downturn. Yet even an escalation of hostilities between the us and China or Russia, or Europe or Japan, would be unlikely to reverse one of the central sociological trends of the post Second World War era: the decline of mass militarism in Western Europe and Japan after forty years of heavy casualty warfare, a process that eventually reached the us during the high point of its Indochinese operations. The enormous conscript citizen armies of the Great Power nation-state were either destroyed in the immediate aftermath of the War or discredited in the last decades of colonialism. The raising of overarching nuclear umbrellas, the advent of consumerism, the cultural neutralization of nationalist pathos in public life, the final collapse of rural social strata from which both officers and soldiers were recruited and the break-up of traditional gender roles sealed the fate of an older Great Power politics. The only military interventions now capable of soliciting domestic acclamation are those that demand

no heavy sacrifices of the home front. It is now well understood, as ballooning American deficits testify, that under no circumstances can the social segment extending from the wealthy to the super-rich be asked to bear the costs of empire.

Bobbitt recognizes this irreversible change, although confessing ambivalence towards it—a nostalgia which ‘I feel more than most’.<sup>31</sup> *The Shield of Achilles* can in part be read as a swan song to this older militarism of state-nations and nation-states. But it is also a distinctively postmodern call for yet another heroic age. The book repeatedly, if inconclusively, raises the question: should we brace ourselves for wars between the American, European and Japanese variants of the market-state in the twenty-first century, like those between liberal democracy, Fascism and Communism in the twentieth? Two years into the First World War, Lenin declared that imperialism was not simply a policy: it was the structural logic of world-market competition refracted through the field of Great Power rivalry. Bobbitt never goes so far, but there are hints in *The Shield of Achilles* that the neoliberal ‘constitutional’ upheaval of the last two decades may now be assuming its true geopolitical form, not in the utopias of peaceful Free Trade, but in an abrupt sharpening of inter-state tensions at the top tier of the world power hierarchy.

Here, in a volume whose horizon is otherwise undeviatingly Atlantic—all of whose narrative landmarks take their names from European cities—the focus of anxiety is Pacific. The prospect of Japan acquiring nuclear weapons is, in Bobbitt’s eyes, far more dangerous than that of North Korea. Indeed, he argues, it might be necessary to tolerate the latter in order to avert the former.

It would be a tragedy for the world if, in order to extirpate a North Korean nuclear force with which Japan has learnt to live, we plunged the Korean peninsula into a war that led to the mobilization of Japan’s energy and wealth on behalf of its armed forces. Already the Japanese, with less than 1.5 per cent of GDP, field the world’s third largest defence establishment, and there is no NATO-like institution that links this establishment with the forces of surrounding states.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘The Long War of the nation-state is over, having destroyed every empire that participated in it, every political aristocracy, every general staff, as well as much of the beauty of European and Asian life’: SA, pp. 242, 805.

<sup>32</sup> SA, p. 261; see also p. 687.

By contrast China, which looms large in Mearsheimer's analysis of potential future threats to the United States, is—rather mysteriously—accorded scant attention by Bobbitt.

The need to check the ambitions of would-be rivals, expressly set out for the first time in the Pentagon's Defence Planning Guidance of 1992, and since enshrined in the National Security Strategy proclaimed by Bush in 2002, occupies first place in Bobbitt's global prospectus, which ranks enemies in terms of the dangers they pose to the us, and aims to adjust the force structures made possible by the Revolution in Military Affairs to counter them. Adversaries can be classified in an ABC table. The 'A' group consists of peer competitors: Bobbitt lists Germany, France, Japan and Russia. 'B' comprises mid-level powers on the verge or just beyond WMD potential: Pakistan, India, Iran, Iraq, North Korea. 'C' embraces a more motley category of minor rogue states (Libya, Serbia, Cuba), terrorists, criminals and insurgents. China is left unclassified. *The Shield of Achilles* makes no bones that the top priority is to ensure military superiority over the A-powers. "The greatest threats to American security will come from powerful, technologically sophisticated states—not from "rogues", whether they be small states or large groups of bandits".<sup>33</sup> In keeping with this conviction, Bobbitt has recently expressed his reservations about the 'Axis of Evil' and, true to his Cold War *métier*, asserts that facing the challenge of A-list states is a matter of maintaining nuclear primacy over them, by integrating them under the American shield.

Though ultimately less menacing to the us, because they do not actually threaten the American homeland, B targets pose more immediate risks of nuclear proliferation, and should be dealt with accordingly. In this respect the signature innovation of the last decade is the doctrine, of which Bobbitt has been a foremost champion, foreseeing pre-emptive strikes against states on the threshold of weapons of mass destruction. It is on these grounds that he has applauded the conquest of Iraq. But he anticipates continuing pressure towards proliferation in the B list to compensate for America's overwhelming conventional superiority, and concludes that the use of nuclear weapons will be more likely in the future. No treaties to neutralize the arms races to come are foreseen.

What, then, of C targets? Here a further anomaly becomes visible. The challenges that command Bobbitt's survey of potential dangers to

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<sup>33</sup> SA, p. 315; see also pp. 306, 309.

American hegemony, at force-levels A and B, have virtually nothing to do with the imputed novelties of the market-state. Nuclear weapons were a creation of the Second World War, and the centrepiece of the Cold War, which saw their spread not only to Britain, France and China, but also to Israel and South Africa. They belong to the epoch of the nation-state. It is really only at level C, the least significant, that specifically market-state considerations enter into play. At once artefact and agent of 'globalization', the strengths and weaknesses of the market-state arise from its exposed, porous borders. These are the frontiers across which a fanatical terrorism can snake and strike, dissolving the line separating foreign policy from homeland surveillance.

In his considered inventory of the perils confronting the US, no doubt composed during the Clinton Administration, Bobbitt consigned such threats to a residual category, at the bottom of the ABC hierarchy. But, perhaps sensing the disjunction between his diagnostics of the 'new constitutional order' and his predictions of the rather traditional turbulence awaiting it, he seems to have felt it necessary to up the stakes of jeopardy specific to the market-state, by tacking onto his work a series of lurid futurological scenarios. Supposedly, the inspiration for these came (a suitably market-state touch) from managerial deliberations within Royal Dutch Shell, but in fact they are closer to the pop fantasies of Tom Clancy. Terrorist explosions in the Chunnel and Chartres Cathedral, devastating Water Wars in the Subcontinent, raging pandemics in Africa, chemical attacks on South Korea, world economic collapse, pre-emptive strikes in Central Asia, race riots in Washington—the pages are littered with assorted disasters and death tolls.

None of the theories Bobbitt develops in the book are demonstrated or tested in these phantasmagorias, which even admirers have regretted. But such apparently extraneous flights of fancy have their function. They ratchet up what Mike Davis has called 'the globalization of fear', with images that create the right psychological atmosphere for a draconian doctrine of armed pre-emption at home and abroad.<sup>34</sup> In such

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<sup>34</sup> A passage from Aristotle's *Politics* captures the political dynamics of this hyperbole: 'When danger is imminent, people are anxious and they therefore keep a firmer grip on their constitution. All who are concerned for the constitution should therefore create anxieties, which will put people on their guard, and will make them keep watch like sentinels on night-duty. They must, in a word, make the remote come near.' *Politics*, book V, ch. 8, Oxford 1995.

panic-mongering, *The Shield of Achilles* gives a narrative shape to the nightmares that plague the market-state, rendering them as the cinematic scenery of a heroic twilight of the West.

But like Spengler's version before it, which foresaw the—possibly ominous—arrival of a new Caesar to save a dying civilization, this one too ends with a stoic posture. The West cannot avert the epochal war to come, but it may hope to shape it. The attacks of September 11 provide the United States with a 'historic opportunity' to awaken its citizens to the tasks before them. 'War is a natural condition of the State, which was organized to be an effective instrument of violence on behalf of society. Wars are like deaths, which, while they can be postponed, will come when they will come and cannot finally be avoided'.<sup>35</sup> Adorno's observation that, for all its obvious intellectual crudity, Spengler's thesis stood unrefuted, should be kept in mind.

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<sup>35</sup> SA, p. 819.