

# How to save the liberal world order

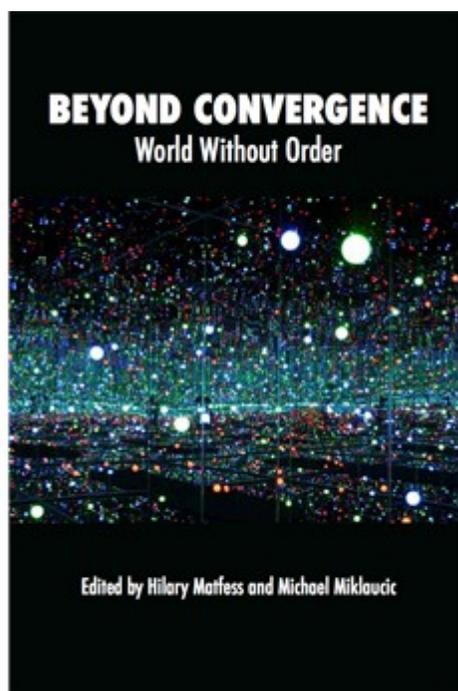
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The world order based on the Peace of Westphalia is faltering. The emergence of the Islamic State to attract fighters from all over the world, the growth of global trafficking networks, and the proliferation of gangs across Latin America all shed light on cracks within the liberal, Westphalian global order. The role of states as the primary unit in global affairs appears to be receding: the Fragile States Index finds that one-third of countries around the world earned a “high warning” label or worse. And as the power of states has weakened, a number of nefarious non-state actors have gained influence. There is ever more evidence that these actors are working with one another and with criminal states to undermine the rule of law—and of the emergence of a highly adaptive and parasitic alternative ecosystem, based on criminal commerce and extreme violence, that has little regard for what we commonly conceive of as the public interest or the public good.

*Beyond Convergence: World Without Order*, just published by the National Defense University’s Center for Complex Operations, seeks to understand the dynamics of this emerging world order. In four sections, the book provides images of a dystopian future if these trends are left unchecked, discusses the convergence between criminal, drug, and terrorist networks, outlines the new “battlefields” where the fight for the preservation of Westphalian sovereignty is taking place, and closes with policy-relevant solutions to address the emerging threats to the world order. *Beyond Convergence* asserts that the assumption of the long-term durability of the Westphalian system—and the assumption that its successor will build on the historical trajectory of ever-improving global governance norms—are misplaced.

Though the Westphalian system of global governance has always been an aspirational model—and a geographically limited one at that—it remains a model worth preserving. Under the Westphalian system, economic growth has surged and the quality of life has flourished. In the 368 years since the Peace of Westphalia established this rule-based system based on sovereign equality, the world has experienced an unprecedented surge

across a range of quality of life indicators: life expectancy has surged from below 40 to over 70 years, per capita gross domestic product increased from around \$600 to over \$10,000 per year, and literacy has increased from less than 10 percent to over 80 percent of the global population. Rather than abandoning the Westphalian system in favor of an untested, and likely less capable, system, we must cultivate global partnerships to reform and strengthen the system.



The chapters in our volume, contributed by thought leaders from across the policy and academic communities, refute the argument that “terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime have existed since time immemorial, and that their modern iterations represent nothing new.” They reveal the effects of unprecedented game changers, including dramatic technological advances, the democratization of terrorist violence, and the availability of vast quantities of cash, on the efficacy of non-state and anti-state actors.

Cartels and gangs, as well as terrorists and globally networked insurgents, can now out-man, out-spend, and out-gun the governments of the countries where they reside. They can communicate across the globe in real time, using widely available and inexpensive technology. The November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attackers used satellite phones, internet

communications, and global positioning systems, under the direction of Pakistan-based handlers to carry out an atrocious binge of murder and terror. The string of ISIL attacks across Europe in 2015 and 2016 further illustrates the global consequences of this technological acceleration. International travel has never been easier or cheaper than it is today, and would-be terrorists, traffickers, launderers, and even assassins can fly nearly undetected from continent to continent, in the sea of traveling humanity.

**T**he book's seventeen chapters cover an array of subjects—from Nils Gilman's discussion of the "twin insurgency" that is assaulting states, to Jessica Stern's discussion of ISIL's organizational survival strategy, to Raj Samani's contextualization of the state of global cybercrime. But a number of common themes emerge:

The first is that American confidence that the end of the Cold War also denoted the end of the global ideological struggle was premature. As these essays show, across the globe, the contemporary paradigm of governance consisting of democracy and liberalization is being challenged. This challenge emanates not only from China, despite the media attention focused on this purported rivalry, but also from gangs and cartels in Latin America and nonstate actors in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Disillusionment with "Western" and "American" ideals is a powerful motivator for a number of groups taking aim at the Westphalian system.

The second is that new technology not only reduces the "capacity gap" between conventional and unconventional forces, but also introduces new vulnerabilities to America's security and that of its allies. Communications technology, which has been a force for democratic change, has also proven to be a powerful enabler for recruitment to groups like ISIL, and facilitated its ability to coordinate attacks in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, and across the Levant. Further, the innovations that have made life easier for affluent Westerners, including personal computers and web- or cloud-based technologies, are increasingly being exploited by criminal groups to gather funds and collect valuable personal information.

Third, many of the states within the international community are at a severe handicap in their efforts to mitigate the unprecedented threats to their sovereignty. Their weakness is

exacerbated by networked adversaries, of either the terrorist, insurgent, or criminal types, which eat away at state institutions—and more importantly, erode the social contract between governments and the governed. The proliferation of weak, fragile, and failed states leaves big holes in the rule-based system of sovereign states, thus weakening the system, and rendering vulnerable all the gains that flow from that system.

**We** argue that strong states, led by trusted, capable governments that are accountable to their populations, are the most effective line of defense against these threats. While “state-building” has become anathema in some circles, it is clear that improving state governance is a necessary corrective measure in the fight against endemic insecurity. Learning from our previous endeavors and identifying effective means of building partner capacity is necessary if the United States is to remain a global leader. Exporting democracy, defined merely by elections, without corresponding rule of law and economic development, will likely exacerbate the disruptive dynamics already at play.

*Beyond Convergence* outlines what is at stake in the global governance crisis, identifies which groups are responsible for the erosion of the world order, and describes the way forward to prevent the liberal democratic order from becoming a historical relic.

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