

Allison's technique is to draw a very bleak picture, not out of fatalism but to demonstrate that it is possible to avoid the worst outcomes. If the various and generally sensible policy prescriptions he offers are followed then all should be well, and we can relax. He has used the same technique before. In 2004, Allison explored the possible ways in which terrorist groups might be able to get hold of a nuclear device or build their own and then use them to cause carnage. He reported his "considered judgment, on the current path, a nuclear terrorist attack on America in the decade ahead is more likely than not." Without determined action, largely to make sure that weapons and fissionable material were kept secure, a disaster was almost certain. With the right action the catastrophe could be prevented. This formula has an evident attraction as a way to dramatize dangers and influence policy, for no one wishes to be accused of complacency on such grave matters as these. But it also risks playing down the numerous factors that already make any great power war incredibly risky and exaggerating the differences that sensible policy initiatives can make when something happens that neither side wanted but soon escalates out of control. **PRISM**

A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order?

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Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, is an innovative thinker in the field of American foreign policy and international relations. In his recent work, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order*, Haass proposes updating the current world order—that has been with us seemingly since time immemorial, having originated with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648—to help alleviate world disorder.

In this new world order, respect for sovereignty and the inviolability of borders would be supplemented by "sovereign obligation," whereby states would be responsible for developments within their borders that affect other states, such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, and cyberhacking. Haass views sovereign obligation as a form of realism, the emphasis of which is "less on what another country is (or does within its borders) as it is on what it chooses to do beyond its borders,

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that is, in its foreign policy.” Governments would be “expected not just to live up to agreed upon behaviors but also [to] make sure that no third party carried out prohibited actions from their territory and that any party discovered to be so doing would be stopped and penalized.”

It is indisputable, as Haass argues, that “states individually or collectively have not just the right but the obligation to act against terrorism as well as against states that harbor or otherwise support terrorists.” There is an element of common benefit that will work—and which sounds very much like the concept of collective security. In the context of international organizations, and establishing coalitions to deal with vexing and dangerous cross border issues, states can work together effectively without giving up sovereign rights.

Haass believes that for countries to implement sovereign obligation, governments need to forge coalitions of countries as well as nonstate actors. The United Nations is not a practical venue because its concept of sovereign equality—one country one vote—at the General Assembly is not representative of global strength and power. Furthermore, the Security Council excludes not just nonstate actors but also significant countries, such as India and Germany, and no major power will submit a matter for disposition by the Council that would, in effect, diminish that major power’s sovereignty. Haass instead advocates the use of consultations to help build legitimacy for sovereign obligation. For example, Haass suggests that it would be essential to include Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Facebook as participants on cyber issues, as well as involving nonstate actors such as major domestic pharmaceutical companies

and nongovernmental organizations on global health issues.

In a world in which Russia regularly violates the sovereignty of other states, including by cyberhacking and outright invasion, and North Korea brazenly launches missiles in contravention of international law, it is difficult to see how sovereign obligation can be implemented or enforced. Arguably most states would perceive sovereign obligation as a limitation on their sovereign rights, and regretfully in failed states such as Syria sovereign obligation does not have efficacy. Further, one wonders how these ideas can be applied to nonstate actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda.

Haass’ proposed new world order appears to be very limited in scope regarding the enforcement of human rights within sovereign states. He favors overlaying a system similar to the Helsinki Accords (or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) on the Asia–Pacific that would, among other things, reduce the chance of accidental military incidents and escalation. However, Haass does not want the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords to be replicated for the Asia–Pacific region since this would not be acceptable to China and other countries and “if pushed on them could make it that more difficult to put into place arrangements that would reduce the odds of conflict in the region.” This is especially disappointing because the Accords, as well as the use of sanctions, have proved effective in achieving significant human rights gains—even in a world of sovereign states.

After discussing regional responses to world disarray, Haass turns to the United

States, which he believes will likely remain the most powerful country in the world. He argues that “a large portion of the burden of creating and maintaining order on the regional or global level will fall on the United States” and that America cannot remain aloof. Haass argues, however, that the United States must put its own house in order. He then proceeds to discuss various domestic issues, including the need to address America’s debt problem, which urgently require resolution. It would appear that this is a reprise of Haass’ previous book, *Foreign Policy Begins At Home: The Case for Putting America’s House in Order*. The basic premise was “either the United States will put its house in order and refocus what it does abroad, or it will increasingly find itself at the mercy of what happens beyond its borders and beyond its control.” So perhaps Haass is suggesting that the United States and other countries cannot move forward with sovereign obligation without first resolving their domestic issues.

A World in Disarray was written prior to the U.S. Presidential election in 2016 and, accordingly, does not account for momentous developments since the election of President Trump, to include Haass’ depiction (on a cable TV program) of the “unstructured informality” of President Trump’s foreign policy. The impact of Brexit, the bombing of Syria by the United States, the rising threat posed by North Korea, and the increasing influence of Russia, among other developments, have significantly altered the world political scene.

It would appear from President Trump’s emphasis on “America First”—retreating from trade commitments and climate obligations—together with the uncertain

futures of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, that the tendency is clearly far from the direction of the United States adopting (or encouraging other states to adopt) sovereign obligation. On the contrary, the reliance on traditional sovereign rights as a shield for aggression and violence seems to be increasing worldwide, rather than receding.

What is needed is the strengthening of the collective security principle which has underpinned the post–World War II period; Haass also is right that the United Nations needs to be reformed. Even if limited, sovereign obligation has the potential, at the very least, to reduce world disarray if applied discretely and effectively. United States policy will of course be a key element in determining whether Haass’ proposed new world order can in fact be effectuated. [PRISM](#)