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The Primacy of Premodern History

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The study of premodern history would greatly improve our understanding of current and future strategic challenges. Premodern international relations, in fact, have certain characteristics that are reappearing in our times. I underline three such features: the presence of non-state actors, the pursuit of nonmaterial objectives, and the difficulty of diplomacy and deterrence. As a result, international relations were often characterized by conflicts "below the military horizon," timeless violent confrontations rather than wars. The paper concludes with an analysis of current trends that are bringing back some of these premodern traits and suggests several hypotheses for further research.

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Is premodern history useful to an understanding of current security challenges? Much of current literature on security studies seems to answer this question negatively.[1] This implicit avoidance of premodern history may be

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[1] There are, of course, exceptions. See John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1983): 261–85; Myron Weiner, "Security, Stability, and International Migration," *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 91–126; Rey Koslowski, "Human Migration and the Conceptualization of Pre-Modern World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September 2002): 375–99; Kimberly Marten, "Warlordism in Comparative Perspective," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2006/07): 41–73; Victor Davis Hanson, ed. *Makers of Ancient History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), esp. the introduction. For studies of how we think by using historical analogies, see Ernest May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Affairs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

justified because academic efforts to comprehend today's strategic landscape are vibrant, using a range of methods from quantitative to in-depth studies of modern- day cases, and without relying on the study of ancient Greek or medieval history.[2]

I propose, however, that a focus on premodern times may be very useful. Premodern history not only provides a plethora of case studies that have been extensively examined by historians and can be used to test many hypotheses, but also it may offer important and unique insights that may help us understand current and future strategic challenges. By itself, the study of premodern history will not generate revolutionary new theories of asymmetric conflicts, balance of power, or deterrence in a polynuclear world. However, underlining certain characteristics of international relations (such as a decreased effectiveness of diplomacy and deterrence) that were salient in premodern times, and that may recur in the future, may suggest new avenues for research and shed light on the nature of security challenge we face.

The premise of this paper is that international relations in premodern history are in some ways different from those of the modern times and that we are moving toward a strategic landscape that may be more analogous to the former than the latter. For instance, diplomacy and deterrence, both alternatives to the actual use of force, were not as effective in premodern history as in the modern age. Moreover, wars were often less defined, with no clear beginnings and ends, and with a more diffused and unclear frontline. As a result, violence in premodern history was more pervasive and common, both between and within polities.

I begin this paper with a brief description of the salient features of premodern history, focusing on three aspects that are particularly relevant to international relations: political actors, their objectives, and the resulting character of international conflict. In the second part, I delineate current trends, such as the proliferation of strategic actors and the reemergence of religiously motivated goals that are altering the global strategic landscape, creating remarkable parallels with premodern history. I conclude by suggesting potential hypotheses and future research questions drawn from parallels with premodern history.

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[2] For instance, the literature on radical Islamic terrorism has been growing. See Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003); Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (New York: Knopf, 2006). There is also a vast literature studying the motivations of terrorists writ large, not limited to the jihadist kind. See for instance, Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2006); Alan Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

HOW TO DEFINE PREMODERN HISTORY

The definition of premodern history is difficult and imprecise.[3] First, establishing a clear time frame is tricky, but I think it is fair to argue that a common marker for the beginning of modern history, and for our understanding of international relations, is the seventeenth century, namely the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that established the modern state as a political entity with full and exclusive sovereignty.[4] Imperial and church institutions gradually lost their sway over the legal and political life of states, and states gradually consolidated their territorial holdings.

Another marker, with a less precise date but that is therefore more appropriate, is the growing need of states to garner massive resources in order to defend themselves as well as to wage offensive wars—in other words, the rise of the modern centralized state that acquires and manages resources to maintain its security. This process was completed only in the aftermath of the post-World War II decolonization that left the world map cleanly demarcated, even though it never fully eradicated premodern actors.[5] The beginning of this process is even more difficult to date because it was a long trend, but it can perhaps be limited to the period between the end of the fifteenth century (with the battering down of Italian city-states by French and Spanish artillery)[6] and the mid-nineteenth century when the ability to muster

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[3] The difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between different historical periods is clearly shown in two classic books: Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998) and Theodore K. Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance and The March to Modernity* (New York: Perseus Books, 2007). See also William Green, "Periodization in European and World History," *Journal of World History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 13–53; Jerry H. Bentley, "Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World history," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (June 1996): 749–70; Nicola Di Cosmo, "State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History," *Journal of World History* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 1–40; and on the distinction between ancient and medieval history, H. M. Gwatkin, "Constantine and His City," in *Cambridge Medieval History*, eds., J. B. Bury, H. M. Gwatkin, and J. P. Whitney (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), i, 1.

[4] Leo Gross, "The Peace of Westphalia, 1648–1948," *Americal Journal of International Law* 42, no. 1 (January 1948): 20–41; Daniel Philpott, "The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations," *World Politics* 52 (January 2000): 206–45. Stephen Krasner argues that many "modern" traits were present in the Middle Ages, as well as many "medieval" features (for example, compromises of sovereignty) continued after Westphalia. See Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Stephen Krasner, "Westphalia and All That," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, eds., Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Stephen Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1995/96): 115–51. For a review of some arguments critical of establishing Westphalia as a marker, see Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 251–87; Daniel Philpott, "Review: Usurping the Sovereignty of Sovereignty?" *World Politics* 53, no. 2 (January 2001): 297–324.

[5] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 3.

[6] Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi: Storie Fiorentine* no. 64, 1 (Milan: TEA, 1991), 24; see also Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10. On the role of artillery (the "plague of artillery") in the 1494 invasion of Italy, see also Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 50–51, 56.

industrial power became indispensable to being an international actor.[7] If a state wanted to survive, it needed to field well-trained mass armies with increasingly larger amounts of armor, artillery, and corresponding logistical supplies.[8] The competitive nature of the international system forced all political actors to adapt and imitate the most successful among them, the modern nation-state.[9] It took a state to defeat another state. In brief, by premodern history I refer to that long period of time that precedes the seventeenth, and perhaps even the late fifteenth century.[10]

It is undoubtedly problematic to put hundreds of years under a single rubric of "premodern history," which may suggest a uniformity that did not exist as well as a divergence with modern times that may not be quite so dramatic.[11] Indeed, traces of premodern actors appear in the nineteenth century, notably with the fierce albeit ultimately futile opposition of Comanche tribes to the expansion of US power. Similarly, modern-like polities, territorially fixed and hierarchically organized, were present also in ancient times. Furthermore, the existence of transnational groups, whose unity was built upon ideological affinity, created conditions for international instability and protracted conflicts even well after the modern state established itself.[12] Between premodern and modern history, therefore, there is continuity as much as there are differences.

When looking at the differences between premodern and modern international relations, there are at least two possible analytical approaches. One is to examine the systemic aspects of international relations, characterized by anarchy but in premodern history mostly unmitigated by international

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[7] Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 74–92; Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie, *From Crossbow to H-Bomb* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 75.

[8] See MacGregor Knox, "Mass Politics and Nationalism as Military Revolution: The French Revolution and After," in *The Dynamics of Military Revolutions, 1300–2050*, eds., Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 4, 57–73. On the spread of nationalism, and of the mass army, see Barry R. Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 80–124. On the increase of logistical needs, see Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[9] Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 8, 153–80.

[10] State-building was different in other regions, notably Africa and Asia, where the nation-state is not as strong or prevalent as in Europe. See, for instance, Jeffrey Herbst, "War and State in Africa," *International Security* 14, no. 4 (Spring 1990): 117–39; Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[11] Edward Keene makes a similar argument about the possibility of coexistence of international orders by distinguishing two different patterns of international relations since the seventeenth century: the European state system (in short, the Westphalian order) and the extra-European one based on the promotion of civilization to less developed areas. The former was based on the toleration of other actors, deemed equal, while the latter was characterized by hierarchy and the right of European powers to impose political, economic, and social institutions on colonial possessions. Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[12] John Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regimes, 1510–2010* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

law, institutional arrangements, and standing international organizations.[13] As Arthur Eckstein observes, the ancient international system presented an extremely harsh environment that put a premium on ferocity and bellicosity.[14] States were violent and aggressive because the system gave them no other option. The systemic explanation is not exclusive of the second approach, which focuses on the nature and objectives of the actors and the resulting character of conflict. In fact, the conclusion, namely that international relations were characterized by less diplomacy, weaker deterrence, and more violence, is similar in both approaches. The advantage of focusing on the actors is that such an approach may be more relevant to the current strategic environment: the current systemic features are unlike those of premodern times (that is, they are characterized by growing involvement of international organizations, by greater attention paid to international law, and by multilateral agreements), but the actors may be becoming more alike. The international system is modern, but its actors are not. The next section will therefore examine the factors that allowed (and may allow in the future) the rise of stateless actors.

Actors

To the modern eye, the most striking characteristic of premodern history is the diversity and multiplicity of international actors. The spectrum of sovereignty was wider, and in various moments in history empires coexisted and competed with cities, small commercial republics, tribes, and other armed groups.[15] The latter category was particularly premodern, and the growth of the modern state made tribes and other groups gradually irrelevant as strategic actors.[16] During most of premodern history the world was replete with small bands of people, such as pirates or nomadic tribes, that led a predatory lifestyle with very limited territorial possessions but with sometimes dramatic impact on the political fate of geographically fixed states.[17] As Barry Buzan and Richard Little observe, "prehistory reveals the enormous difference made by whether the units in the system are mobile or territorially fixed."[18]

[13] An exception may be the role played by the church in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

[14] Arthur M. Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Arthur M. Eckstein, "Review: Brigands, Emperors, and Anarchy," *International History Review* 22, no. 4 (December 2000): 862–79.

[15] For a description of the various strategic actors in medieval and early modern times, see for instance Daniel Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 70–82.

[16] Joseph Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3–4.

[17] Aldo A. Settia, *Rapine, assedi, battaglie* (Bari, Italy: Editori Laterza, 2009), pt. I, 3–76.

[18] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 160.

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There are three broad factors that caused the proliferation of actors, and in particular of mobile groups, in premodern history. First, military technology was widely available and relatively inexpensive. Second, as a result, the key source of power was control over men, rather than arms or technology. Third, vast regions were characterized by the absence of political control, allowing various societal organizations, especially stateless groups, to develop and prosper.

MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

The first reason for the multiplicity of strategic actors in premodern history was the relative cheapness and availability of military technology. This made it very difficult for states to establish an internal monopoly of force as well as to protect their borders.[19] Even the strongest state or empire had to deal with the presence of a constant, albeit often low-intensity, level of violence. For instance, small groups, with no territorial possessions and limited technical skills, could assault states or empires, and often win against the well-trained and well-supplied imperial armies.[20] Technology was cheap and widely available, making a monopoly of violence by one actor difficult.[21]

The effect of such a situation was that lethality was not dependent on the possession of a state. A small tribal group could acquire and employ weapons that were as effective as those fielded by well-trained and well-supplied imperial armies. Battlefield spoils, trade and technological transfer, as well as indigenous innovation and adaptation, supplied sufficient lethality to such groups to make them strategic actors. A symptom of the danger they

[19] Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Susan Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 103.

[20] For a history of the "barbarian" attacks on the Roman empire, see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); J. B. Bury, *The Invasions of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2006); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Adrian Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). For a more general description of similar challenges, see Richard Bean, "War and the Birth of the Nation State," *Journal of Economic History* 33, no. 1 (March 1973): 218–9. See also Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 166–67; Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), esp. chap. 11, 158–70. Piracy was another recurrent problem in premodern history. See Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Venice and the Uskoks of Senji: 1537–1618," *Journal of Modern History* 33, no. 2 (June 1961): 148–56.

[21] Some even argue that in ancient Greece and Rome nobody had a monopoly on legitimate violence, and most state functions, from coins to law, were fulfilled by local communities. See Andreas Osiander, "Religion and Politics in Western Civilisation: The Ancient World as Matrix and Mirror of the Modern," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (December 2000): 765.

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posed was, for instance, the persistent albeit often futile attempt of states to prevent military technology transfers to foreign tribes.[22]

The "military revolution" of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, grounded mostly in the development of artillery and firearms, altered this situation. It demanded large, well-trained standing armies equipped with increasingly more costly weapons, which in turn required the centralization of state authority and power, indispensable to garner the financial and technological resources upon which modern military strength was increasingly becoming based.[23] From then on, the strategic impact of a political actor was increasingly dependent on the "systematic organization and extraction of taxes from all resources" as much as on the "possession of fire-arms."[24]

Control Over Men, Not Things

Because technological differences between states and non-state actors were not as sharp, to be powerful meant to control people, not things. Control over people meant the ability to supply manpower to armies, and thus be a respectable actor in international relations as well as in domestic politics. Leaders that were capable of coalescing a large group of people around themselves could wage war either for their own interests or as mercenaries for somebody else's interests. Julius Caesar, for instance, observed that in Gaul the "possession of such a following [of warriors] is the only criterion of position and power" that the local population recognizes.[25] The flip side of this logic of power was that to expand a polity meant to extend control over more people, and the acquisition of more territory was only a by-product. As a historian notes, "like the Greeks before them, Romans first ruled people;

[22] See, for example, Charlemagne's policy in Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Lewiston, NY: Broadview Press, 1992), 48. For a description of the Spanish attempts to limit the spread of weapons in North America, see Thomas Frank Schilz and Donald E. Worcester, "The Spread of Firearms among the Indian Tribes on the Northern Frontier of New Spain," *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 2.

[23] See Parker, *The Military Revolution*. Also Carlo Cipolla, *Guns, Sails, and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400–1700* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), esp. chaps. 3–5, 63–184; Brian M. Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Nexon, *The Struggle for Power*, 87–88. For views that stress less the "war-making" capacity of actors, see Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*, 30–33; Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," 278–79.

[24] Andrew C. Hess, "The Ottoman Conquest of Egypt (1517) and the Beginning of the Sixteenth-Century World War," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1. (January 1973): 58, 55–76.

[25] Julius Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 141. Also, Adrian Goldsworthy, "War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, eds., P. Sabin et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2, chap. 3, 81. The Roman political environment was also similar, placing a premium on the ability to employ an army. See Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 12.

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then they dealt with land. Land without people was of no concern, and the proven way to rule people was through patron-client relationship."[26]

This type of patronage continued in the Middle Ages. The sinews of power were the ties that linked different leaders through personal bonds of obligations and rights, establishing a web of allegiances and a hierarchy of power.[27] As Hendrick Spruyt observes, "Feudalism is thus rule over people rather than land."[28] A symbol of the importance of having the people's allegiance was the fact that often kings referred to themselves as leaders of a group (for example, king of the Goths or of the French) rather than of a specific territory. A similar focus on accruing men characterized Comanche tribes, a nineteenth century remnant of a premodern actor. Power was measured not by how much material wealth one possessed, but by how many followers one had accumulated through gifts and demonstrations of martial prowess.[29]

Because manpower mattered more than territorial control, some of the key protagonists of premodern history were stateless, non-territorial groups, such as nomadic tribes or migrating groups. States occupy, control, and administer territory; tribes, mercenaries, or brigands rule over people. Unlike in modern times, these groups were in some cases more than a match for established states and their armies, which in several famous instances (e.g., the AD 9 Teutoburg massacre, the AD 378 battle of Adrianople, the AD 1449 battle of Tu-Mu) suffered devastating defeats at the hand of an apparently inferior enemy.[30] Their effectiveness derived from their leaders' ability to gather a growing number of fighters whose loyalty was to their chiefs and the group, rather than to a territory. The leadership of the chief, in fact, provided these warriors with the possibility of wealth and security, and

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[26] Thomas S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 BC- AD 400* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003), 173. See also Greg Woolf, "Roman Peace," in *War and Society in the Roman World*, eds., John Rich and Graham Shipley (London: Routledge, 1993), 179; Susan Mattern, "Imperial Power in the Roman Republic," in *Enduring Empire*, eds., D. E. Tabachnick and T. Koivukoski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 132–33; Roger Batty, *Rome and the Nomads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 451–52.

[27] See Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) vol. 1, 123–175; Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*.

[28] Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*, 40. See also Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), 19–27; Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 13; Benno Teschke, "Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory," *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 345; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London, New York: Verso, 2003); Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 162.

[29] Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 96–97.

[30] To use Charles Tilly's argument, capital and coercion were separated in ancient times, and a political entity could have one or the other and still be a serious strategic actor in international relations. Commercial city states (for example, Venice) were not better off than groups that were purely coercive in nature (for example, mercenaries or the early Ottomans). The ability to coerce was not necessarily linked to the possession of capital. See also Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 54.

their loyalty was directly correlated to the chief's skill at directing the group toward rich areas.[31] The size of the assaulting group increased with the success of the initial raids, quick and short assaults on specific targets that guaranteed the highest payoff with limited risks.[32] In fact, such groups often avoided large battles because they were too dangerous: a defeat would have discouraged other men, from runaway slaves to new tribes, from joining the warrior group. Military success, or at least absence of military defeats, was a powerful form of social cohesion.[33]

Of course, as in the case of the *ghazis* (Muslim warriors) who established the foundations of the Ottoman Empire, some nomadic tribal groups settled and developed state institutions and administrative capabilities.[34] However, until the fifteenth and sixteenth century military revolution they did not have to do so in order to continue to be important, and in some cases pivotal, actors in international relations. The proliferation of violence allowed the proliferation of actors.

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Ungoverned Spaces

Finally, until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the map of the world was characterized by vast spaces that were unexplored and outside the reach of cities, states, or empires. Such large swaths of ungoverned land allowed different ways of societal organization to arise, prosper, and at times even challenge the more established powers. For instance, until roughly the sixteenth century, several nomadic groups, such as the Huns and the Mongols, erupted on the Eurasian scene from the central Asian steppes.[35] Similarly, as Tacitus recounts in his *Germania*, central Europe in Roman times was populated by tribal groups with limited administrative and economic skills, and certainly without the large bureaucratic apparatus of the Roman Empire.[36] In part these territories were geographically too distant from the main ancient empires, whose expansion was often limited by technological limitations of power projection.[37] But in part these states, whether Rome,

[31] Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 241.

[32] Batty, *Rome and the Nomads*, 23.

[33] See Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*, 311. A similar increase in the size of the raiding force occurred during the Viking and Magyar attacks on Western Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries. Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, 114–15. On the Ottoman *ghazi*, see Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26.

[34] Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[35] René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010 [1970]), esp. xxi-xxx; Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13–43.

[36] Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania* (New York: Penguin, 1970).

[37] Woolf, "Roman Peace," 185.

Persia, or China, could not control directly or even less so indirectly these remote lands because their inhabitants often lacked easily discernible political structures, making negotiations and diplomatic relations difficult. An outright military conquest was difficult because geographic distance stretched the logistical lines while local inhabitants' hit and run tactics sapped the military strength of the invading armies.[38] As a result, these spaces were outside of the interstate system and did not participate in the development of regular interactions.

The existence of these ungoverned spaces allowed the proliferation of strategic actors other than territorial polities. In fact, the actors that arose there had characteristics that states and sedentary groups lacked. They specialized, for instance, in horsemanship and hunting, often leading to a lifestyle that was particularly suited to the development of "natural warriors."[39] Instead of administrators, the steppes developed warriors.

The gradual filling of these spaces by modern states eliminated most of such non-state actors.[40] In part this was made possible by the military revolution, which led to a clash between the artillery of states and the archers of the steppes, resulting in the defeat of the latter. [41] Yet, the expansion of the modern state was never fully achieved. As James Scott has described, even now, regions outside of effective governmental control continue to exist, allowing communities organized in non-territorial ways.[42]

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Objectives

The second difference between premodern and modern history lies in the objectives pursued by the political actors.[43] Even if often motivated by ideological goals, modern interstate wars tend to be about territory because the best and perhaps the only way to achieve those is through expansion of territorial control. In premodern history, on the other hand, conflict tended to be motivated less by territorial demands than by concerns of status and

[38] For a memorable description of these tactics, see Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, ed. Robert Strassler (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 301, 4.47. See also Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[39] David Christian, "Inner Eurasia as a Unit of World History," *Journal of World History* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 173–211; Erik Hildinger, *Warriors of the Steppe* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997), 1–3; Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*.

[40] Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 10–11.

[41] Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*, xi.

[42] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[43] Markus Fischer offers perhaps the best critique of the argument that modern international relations were different from medieval ones. Markus Fischer, "Feudal Europe, 800–1300: Communal Discourse and Conflictual Practices," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 427–66. For a critique of Fischer's argument, see Rodney Bruce Hall and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Medieval Tales: Neorealist 'Science' and the Abuse of History," *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 479–91.

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prestige, by religious disputes and differences, and by the pursuit of violence as a source of social cohesion.

First, because control over men was more important than control over land, conflicts were often over the allegiance of people. Status and reputation were instrumental to garner manpower. For instance, many of the medieval confrontations that shook Europe were about the hierarchy of authority or, in other words, about who controlled whom.[44] The scene of an emperor lying prostrate in front of the pope at Canossa in 1077, acknowledging however briefly the superiority of the head of the Roman Catholic Church over the temporal leader, is a vivid example of this.[45] Similarly, the Byzantine emperor "felt himself to be responsible for Christians living beyond his frontiers," clearly considering his authority to exceed the territorial extent of his empire and seeking the recognition of his status as a leader of a population much larger than the one circumscribed by imperial borders.[46] The Comanches were another group for whom a retinue of men was a metric of political success and power. A successful leader "understood the social arithmetic of wealth: when hoarded, it divided people; when given away, it drew them together."[47]

Not all pursuits of status, however, were instrumental. Individuals and polities defended their prestige and honor as ultimate goals.[48] As Daniel Markey defines it, prestige, the "public recognition of eminence as an end in itself,"[49] appears irrational to modern eyes but played a significant role in premodern times. In fact, in some cases, polities engaged in hubris, understood as "aggressive behavior involving the desire to bring dishonour to the victim."[50] While a perceived offense to one's own honor can be redressed, the pursuit of honor or prestige is never fully satisfied; it is perpetual. Furthermore, it does not always match material calculations of costs-benefits.[51]

Second, religion infused and shaped many objectives pursued throughout premodern history. For instance, religious impulses spurred large and

[44] Cyril E. Hudson, "The Church and International Affairs," *International Affairs* 23, no. 1 (January 1947): 3.

[45] Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance*, 3.

[46] Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

[47] Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 270.

[48] Some argue that pursuit of honor is deeply embedded in human nature and as such is not limited to premodern history. See, for example, a study of the beginning of World War I, Avner Offer, "Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honor?" *Politics and Society* 23, no. 2 (June 1995): 213–41. Also, Donald Kagan, "Our Interests and Our Honor," *Commentary*, April 1997, 42–45;

[49] Daniel Markey, "Prestige and the Origins of War: Returning to Realism's Roots," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 126.

[50] James A. Andrews, "Cleon's Hidden Appeals (Thucydides 3.37–40)," *Classical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (May 2000): 49. See also Gregory Crane's analysis of the role of prestige and status in the conflict over Corcyra, in Gregory Crane, "Power, Prestige, and the Corcyrean Affair in Thucydides," *Classical Antiquity* 11, no. 1 (April 1992): 1–27; and *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[51] Markey, "Prestige and the Origins of War," 159–60.

lengthy projections of power. The Crusades were one such example of a conflict which was, at least in part, "genuinely religious," motivated by the desire to "fight for the cross" and to attain spiritual rewards.[52] An analogous case was the prolonged conflict on the frontier between the Ottoman and the Hapsburg empires, where religiously motivated bands, the *ghazis*, relentlessly assaulted their Christian neighbors well into the seventeenth century.[53] More broadly, even before the rise of monotheistic faiths, religion has always provided a very powerful source of social cohesion and of political motivation.[54] To be clear, for example, wars among Greek city states were not religious in the same way that wars in the Middle Ages were religious.[55] But gods were often invoked to decide whether two polities would be at war or at peace, and alliances were undertaken according to religious alignments.[56]

Finally, in many cases, religion challenged and replaced the authority and power of states and empires by giving rise to groups whose identity and aspirations were stronger than those provided by the political entity of which they were a part.[57] The primary objective of these groups was not to support the polity in which they lived but to maintain at all costs their independence, their unity, and their religion.

Third, violence was a source of social cohesion, and as such it had a self-sustaining rationale.[58] Many groups, such as some nomadic tribes or the *ghazi* of Asia Minor, were aggressive in nature because only by engaging in violence against their neighbors they could attract increasingly larger numbers of followers. The sheer act of violence generated support and brought resources (that is, more manpower) especially when it was directed against groups or states deemed to be culturally and religiously different and inferior.[59] This meant that it was difficult, if not impossible, to dissuade some

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[52] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Book, 1965), 92. See also Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[53] John F. Guilmartin, "Ideology and Conflict: The Wars of the Ottoman Empire, 1453–1606," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 721–47; Gunther Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522–1747* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960); J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 29; Normal Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[54] Religion provided a source of political bonds before Christianity, too. See Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 197; Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 25 and 149.

[55] Osiander writes that "there was no religious war in the pre-christian ancient world, either within communities or between them." Osiander, "Religion and Politics in Western Civilization," 786.

[56] Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, 201.

[57] For instance, the Nestorians, a fifth century heretical sect of the Christian Church, left the Roman empire and moved to its enemy, Persia, in order to preserve their independence and social unity. Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, 41.

[58] Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, 426; Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe*, 22; also Martin Van Creveld, *The Culture of War* (New York: Presidio Press, 2008).

[59] See Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*.

groups from warring. To use early Ottoman history again as an example, the *ghazi* warriors would have received no glory and no new recruits by seeking peace with Christian Byzantium.[60] Furthermore, in many cases war was a source of social advancement inside these nomadic communities, offering younger individuals "opportunities for economic and social advancement that simply did not exist in times of peace."[61]

To sum up, premodern history is characterized by actors pursuing objectives—a rightful position in a hierarchy of authority, the advancement of a religion, or violence as a source of social cohesion—that appear novel or perplexing to our modern eyes. These goals, as well as these actors, did not vanish completely but lost importance over the past three or four centuries, and ceased to be considered as defining features of our modern era.

Character of Conflict

The third distinguishing feature of premodern history was that violence was more pervasive and constant. As a historian put it, there was little warfare but much violence.[62] John Guilmartin observes that "far more common in the broad sweep of history are prolonged conflicts where the transition from peace to war is blurred, where guerilla and positional operations are more important to the outcome than field or naval campaigns of limited duration, and where objectives tend to be total. This type of conflict—the term war is frequently inadequate—tends to end only with the elimination or cultural absorption of the losers."[63] War was often fought without any possibility of a political compromise and without any norms moderating its conduct.[64] Two key tools to manage international relations and to mitigate violent clashes, namely, diplomacy and deterrence, tended to be less effective in premodern history, and in this section I examine why this was the case.

Diplomacy

First, both the process and the outcome of diplomacy were more difficult in premodern times.[65] In terms of process, many scholars consider the Renaissance as the beginning of modern diplomacy, in part because of the

[60] Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople*, 30.

[61] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 97.

[62] Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, quoting a historian of Ireland, 183. See also Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.

[63] Guilmartin, "Ideology and Conflict," 722.

[64] Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, 198–99. See also Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 2; Jack Levy, Thomas Walker, and Martin Edwards, "Continuity and Change in the Evolution of Warfare," in *War in a Changing World*, eds., Zeev Maoz and Azar Gat (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 27, 15–48.

[65] Gat, *War in Human Civilization*, 379.

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development of a professional diplomatic corps at the service of sovereign polities.[66] Although ancient cities and empires exchanged envoys, often considered sacred and inviolable, the process of diplomacy was much more arduous then.[67] This is particularly true of relations among actors of different natures, such as an empire and a nomadic group. Some of these groups were too decentralized and did not have the administrative framework necessary to conduct diplomatic negotiations and then to implement the agreements.[68] Also, the process of diplomacy presupposes a modicum of knowledge—of the social structures, the customs, and the objectives pursued by the other side—among the parties involved, knowledge that was often missing in the case of nomadic groups encountering an expanding empire for the first time. The high mobility and lack of permanence of such groups made it very difficult to acquire information about them, resulting in greater uncertainty and instability in state-barbarian relations.[69] The more difficult it is to know the other actor, the more arduous it is to start the diplomatic process.

Furthermore, in many cases, there could be no diplomatic agreement because the objectives pursued by the different actors were simply incompatible and nonnegotiable.[70] Even when the various parties exchanged envoys, a diplomatic outcome was more difficult to attain. Talking with each other is, in other words, not the same as resolving divergent interests and claims through negotiations.[71] As mentioned earlier, many of the premodern clashes were not about territory, but about issues of allegiance, status, glory, or plunder, all of which are much more difficult to resolve through a negotiated compromise. Religious disagreements in particular complicated the diplomatic resolution of a conflict.[72] These are indivisible questions that lend themselves only to an either/or solution, unlike territorial claims that are relatively easy to adjust and settle by shifting borders and moving populations. Hence, a meeting such as the Congress of Vienna, which through hard bargaining managed conflicting aspirations of the European great powers, was possible in the early nineteenth century and was followed by many analogous agreements, but was a rarity in premodern times.[73] The growing

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[66] Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955; New York: Dover Publications, 1988); Christopher Dawson, *The Dividing of Christendom* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965).

[67] See Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*; Amos S. Hershey, "The History of International Relations During Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *American Journal of International Law* 5, no. 4 (October 1911): 901–933. For an example of the inviolability of envoys, see Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, 54.

[68] Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 56.

[69] A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[70] Diplomacy with tribal groups was often limited to attempts (a) to divide them by favoring one over the other, (b) to bribe them, and (c) to assimilate or convert them. None of these involved settling differences through negotiations. Harold Nicholson, *Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, 1988; reprint of 3rd ed.), 10.

[71] Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, 58.

[72] Nexon, *The Struggle for Power*, 8.

[73] See also Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, 27.

importance of territorial control that characterizes the advent of the modern era made political compromise more feasible in international relations.[74]

This is not to say that there were no treaties or other types of agreements in premodern history. The Persian war that wrecked Greece in the fifth century BC ended with a treaty (the Peace of Callias around 450 BC); the Peace of Nicias (421 BC) negotiated between Athens and Sparta paused their conflict; Rome built a web of treaties with its Latin neighbors; the conflict between the Western and Byzantine empires was mitigated by the Pax Nicephori (AD 803). The list could go on. Nonetheless, often these agreements came after a conflict, merely confirming the results of the war rather than representing a compromise reached at the negotiating table. It was post-victory diplomacy pursued by actors, such as Rome, that believed that peace was possible only after the total defeat of the enemy.[75] Moreover, such agreements represented only a portion of ancient international politics, those dealing with relations among similar actors such as cities, empires, kings, or emperors.

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Deterrence

The weakness of diplomacy was tightly connected to a decreased effectiveness of deterrence. Broadly speaking, a state, or any other actor, can deter an enemy if it can credibly threaten to impose costs upon him.[76] Historically this was achieved by attacking and destroying cities or the source of the enemy's economic welfare (e.g., by burning agricultural fields). But, as described earlier, not all premodern actors were settled, controlling a territory, living in cities, and tilling fields. As a result, such highly mobile, nomadic groups did not present a clear target that could be threatened, and therefore, were less likely to be deterred.

Deterrence was also more difficult because the various political actors had very few ways of communicating their intentions or threats to each other. The absence of permanent diplomatic representatives abroad often resulted in very limited information concerning internal political developments as well as foreign policy decisions of external actors. Moreover, it made it difficult to

[74] Territory can also become an indivisible issue, especially when it assumes quasi-religious connotations. See Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005; Stacie Goddard, "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (January 2006): 35–68; Ron Hassner, "To Have and to Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 1–33; Ron Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 149–66.

[75] Goldsworthy, *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, 112–13.

[76] On deterrence, see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

convey one's own decisions or resolve to the other side. As a result, violent confrontations were almost inevitable.[77]

Finally, it was difficult to deter groups for whom violence was a way of life and a source of power and glory.[78] For such entities, war was preferable because being deterred would have supplied little fame and would have thus weakened their social bonds. The cult of violence that characterized many groups, especially nomadic tribes, many of which had a powerful aristocratic class devoted to war, left no space for being deterred.[79] The Comanches, for instance, engaged in war not simply for material reasons but because the "inner workings of the Comanches society required violent external action."[80]

The ineffectiveness of deterrence, as well as the difficulty of diplomacy, resulted in a strategic landscape where violence was more frequent and pervasive than in modern times. The frequency was due to the ineffectiveness of diplomacy and deterrence, whereas the pervasiveness was made possible by the proliferation and relative cheapness of military technology, which meant that the costs of a violent act tended to be less than the potential benefits. In brief, the result was that violence was much more likely to erupt in premodern times.[81]

At best, the result was a dualism of sorts in international politics with, on the one hand, relations among states or similarly organized polities, and on the other, interactions between states and non-state actors, or between polities of different religious background.[82] This dualism was quite evident throughout the history of the Roman Empire, which through war and diplomacy achieved a degree of stability with the Parthian Empire (a similarly hierarchic and territorially defined polity), but until its very end struggled to pacify the Rhine-Danube frontiers with the Germanic tribes (a loose networks of highly mobile and decentralized groups).[83] In the latter relationship, the

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[77] Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, 59. See also Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), 50.

[78] As Lebow writes, "When the spirit is aroused and honor is at stake, deterrence and compellence are not only likely to fail but help provoke the behavior they are intended to prevent." Richard Ned Lebow, "Thucydides and Deterrence," *Security Studies* 16, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 170.

[79] In fact, in tribal societies there is little or no distinction between the people and the army. Rather, "they do not have armies [but] they themselves are armies ... What we have is warriors." See Van Creveld, *Transformation of War*, 56. On the idea of a warrior class devoted to violence, see also Michael Howard, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 1–20.

[80] Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 39.

[81] M. I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 67. Also, Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*, 42–43, 93; Arthur Eckstein, "Bellicosity and Anarchy: Soldiers, Warriors, and Combat in Antiquity," *International History Review* 27, no. 3 (September 2005): 497; Daniel Deudney, "'A Republic for Expansion': The Roman Constitution and Empire and Balance-of-Power Theory," in *The Balance of Power in World History*, eds., Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little, and William Wohlforth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 166–67.

[82] On the continuation of such dualism in modern times, see Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*.

[83] See also C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), esp. 49–53; Vern L. Bullough, "Rome vs. Persia: A Study of Successful Deterrence," *Journal*

length of war was not under Roman control because the imperial military superiority was insufficient to deter and to inflict decisive and quick defeats on unsettled groups.[84] War was more difficult to prevent and, when started, to mitigate.[85]

WHY IS PREMODERN HISTORY RELEVANT? TWO TRENDS AND THREE HYPOTHESES

This description of premodern history is sweeping and, consequently, imperfect and superficial. Nonetheless, the point here is not to establish the existence of a uniform and clearly demarcated historical period, but only to suggest that some of the complexity of international politics was lost in modern times. Modern, post-Westphalian international relations are no less difficult, tragic, and destructive, but are perhaps more one-dimensional than in the preceding centuries. Premodern times are characterized by a geopolitical pluralism of multiple actors of disparate nature competing with each other, a pluralism only occasionally encountered after the seventeenth century.

Anarchy is certainly the constant throughout history, presenting premodern and modern actors alike with similar dilemmas and uncertainties and forcing them to rely on power to survive. Arguably, as mentioned earlier, the different character of anarchy can explain the variance in the behavior of premodern and modern polities. As Eckstein describes it, the high bellicosity of ancient states was driven by a multipolar anarchical system, unmitigated by laws and norms, that put a premium on brutality.[86] The modern system is no less anarchical but the bellicosity of states is constrained by laws and norms that impose at least reputational costs on brutality, and by the destructiveness of nuclear weapons that serve as a powerful deterrent.

I argue, however, that at least in part the violence of premodern international relations was due to two related factors: the variety of actors and the types of objectives pursued by them. Modern history is characterized by the gradual, even if incomplete, disappearance of these factors. It

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of Conflict Resolution 7, no. 1 (1963): 55–68. Tacitus even claimed that the Germans were more dangerous than Parthia. Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania* (New York: Penguin 1970), 132 (*Germania*, chap. 37). Chester Starr, *The Roman Empire* (NY: Oxford University Press 1982), 174. See also Richard Frye, "The Sassanians," in *Cambridge Ancient History* XII, 473–74.

[84] Michael Whitby, "War," in *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. 2, chap. 9, 320–21.

[85] Another case was the Spanish empire. J. H. Parry writes, "Significantly, the only lasting military defeats suffered by Spaniards were inflicted by wild people living a scattered life in wild country. The Araucanians of southern Chile, the Chichimecas of northern Mexico, the Caribs of the lesser Antilles, having no great temples or capital cities, were less vulnerable, more mobile, mode dangerous." J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 97.

[86] Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy*.

was incomplete because, as some correctly point out, the modern state and the ordering principles that accompanied it (e.g., international law, diplomacy, deterrence) never fully extended to the entire world, creating a dichotomy of sorts that separated the more orderly "peaceful and stable north" from the chaotic and violent "unstable south."[87] Even so, modern history tilted the scales in favor of the stable northern type of international relations in large measure because of technological demands, the disappearance of ungoverned spaces, and a certain ideological domination of the idea of a nation-state.

The continuation of this argument is that a reappearance of some of the factors that made possible the pluralism of strategic actors and that weakened diplomacy and deterrence would signal also a return to an international situation more akin to premodern times. In other words, premodern history is relevant because we may be seeing a reappearance of traits that have been suppressed by the rise and expansion of the modern state.

When and where did these traits reappear?[88] It is as difficult to date the return of these premodern trends as it was to mark the beginning of modern history. In fact, as I suggested, there has never been a moment in history when international relations have been purely "modern," conducted by perfect Westphalian states.[89] Traces of premodern actors remained throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular in the so-called Third World where "wars of empire" have often frustrated imperial forces.[90] Hence, I do not argue that a clearly marked new era of international relations is arising, but rather that some aspects that were recessive over the past two or three centuries may be seeing renewed vitality. The tipping point was probably in the 1950s. The post-World War II period has often been seen as the pinnacle of the modern state, the only actor capable of waging vast industrial wars and the type of polity desired by seemingly every society (as indicated by the decolonization processes).[91] But it is in the same period, from the 1950s on, that wars have also become increasingly less determined by the industrial capabilities of the actors waging it.[92] The decades of the apparent greatest success of the modern state were also the beginning of a trend that started to bring back groups of premodern features. And the past two decades have seen an acceleration of the factors, delineated below, that are

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[87] See Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*. On the "bifurcation" of international relations, see also James Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[88] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for posing this question.

[89] See, for example, the works by Stephen Krasner cited in fn 4.

[90] Douglas Porch, *Wars of Empire* (London: Cassel, 2000).

[91] Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61–81.

[92] Charles A. Jones, "War in the Twenty-first Century: An Institution in Crisis," in *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, ed. Richard Little and John Williams (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2006), 162–90.

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making such premodern-like actors increasingly more lethal and strategically relevant.

These trends—namely, the rise of new actors and the significance of new objectives—are not marking the end of the modern state, and are certainly not altering the anarchic structure of international politics.[93] There is a fundamental continuity in international relations, both from premodern to modern times (namely, international anarchy) as well as since the seventeenth century (the modern state). But these trends, if they continue to develop, have the potential to make the international environment more similar to that of premodern history.

Initially, the geographic extent of these premodern features was limited to the "unstable south," an arc of instability going from Africa through the Middle East and ending in South Asia. It was possible, then, to speak of a "zone of peace" (the modern security landscape) and a "zone of war or instability" (the premodern one), two geographically distinct areas that rarely overlapped. When they did intersect, it was because states of the zone of peace fought wars in the Third World in the twentieth century.[94] This may no longer be the case. In fact, the trends described below may be pointing to the exact opposite happening, namely to strategic actors from the Third World destabilizing or at a minimum weakening the established and until now stable states of the peaceful north. Increased migration, easily accessible technologies, and the geographic proximity of weak states (e.g., Mexico for the United States and North Africa for Europe) are among the elements that are blurring the line between modern and premodern strategic landscapes. I suggest, therefore, that a strategic environment characterized by multiple and diverse actors, resulting in more ferocious international relations, is no longer a purely Third World concern. This is not to imply that the instability and violence of a country like Iraq or Somalia will be replicated in France or Canada. Rather, this may mean that the traditional tools at the disposal of states will no longer be as effective as in the recent past. Diplomacy may not settle disputes, and deterrence may not maintain stability between enemies. Moreover, because of the ability of non-state actors to function and to project force outside of their regions of origin, the geographic extent of these likely changes will be much wider, affecting Europe and North America. In fact, some trends seem to point to a decline in the ability of modern states to provide security and to wield their power as effectively as they had done over the past two or three centuries.

[93] The literature on the decline of the modern nation-state is vast. See for example Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Susan Strange, "The Defective State," *Daedalus* 124, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 55–74; Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Richard Rosencrance, *The Rise of the Virtual State* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Jean-Marie Guehenno, *The End of the Nation-State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

[94] Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, 141.

In what follows, I delineate two potential trends that may make current and future international relations more akin to premodern history. First, several factors are increasing the strategic influence of new actors. Second, new objectives, less amenable to nonviolent resolution, are being pursued. I conclude by drawing three sets of hypotheses: (1) the ability of states to deter is likely to weaken, (2) diplomacy will likely be less successful, and (3) violence may become more pervasive and frequent. These are hypotheses, not analytical descriptions of facts, and all are contested in different degrees by scholars and analysts. But they suggest a set of questions that may benefit from a study of premodern history, as the answers to them may differ whether we look at, for example, fourth century Roman-Germanic or nineteenth century Franco-Prussian relations.

Rise of New Actors

Over the past few decades the world has witnessed a marked expansion in the spectrum of political actors in international relations. These actors effectively compete with the traditional modern state as sources of political expression and wealth, and sometimes of security.[95] Some new actors are above the nation-state, forming large conglomerates of states, such as the European Union that some authors compare to the old Holy Roman Empire.[96] Other actors are small states or even cities (e.g., Singapore or Hong Kong), akin to the commercial cities that flourished in the Middle Ages, and tribes and clans such as those that tore Somalia apart in the early 1990s. And finally, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 brought to the fore the most elusive and yet the most problematic new actor, the transnational networks of terrorists.

There are three related reasons for the increased strategic importance of non-state actors, reasons that mirror the premodern situation.[97]

First, the state may still claim to be the supreme authority over a demarcated territory, but arguably it is losing some of its attributes of power because of a broadly defined globalization.[98] Perhaps this decreased autonomy of the state is most visible in the economic sphere, where traditional policy tools, such as monetary policy, are rendered less influential.[99] But the

[95] See the literature on the "new Middle Ages": Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Jörg Friedrichs, "The Meaning of New Medievalism," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 4 (December 2001): 475–501; Martin van Creveld, "The New Middle Ages," *Foreign Policy* no. 119 (Summer 2000): 38–40.

[96] Harold James, *The Roman Predicament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 118–40.

[97] This section draws on my essay, "The Power of Statelessness," *Policy Review* no. 154 (April-May 2009): 35–50.

[98] Strange, *The Retreat of the State*.

[99] See, for instance, Ben Bernanke, "Globalization and Monetary Policy," remarks at the Fourth Economic Summit, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, Stanford, CA, 2 March 2007, http://www.bis.org/review/r070306a.pdf.

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weakening of the state is also visible in the security sphere, a development that may have even more important consequences than the decline in the economic power of the state. Some have argued decades ago that the state has been undermined by advances in military technology, notably air power and nuclear weapons, because the sheer destructiveness and reach of these weapons weakened the central claim of states that they are the only and best providers of security.[100] The ability of states to deter a nuclear attack by developing their own nuclear weapons, a technical feat that so far has been firmly in the hands of centralized states, has somewhat countered this trend. As every offensive capability (e.g., artillery, air power, nuclear weapons) has been countered by technologies provided by states—and only by states (e.g., fortresses, thicker armor, larger armies, nuclear weapons as deterrent)—the state remained indispensable and continued to be accepted as the main source of security and legitimacy. There is no guarantee, however, that this cycle can be maintained, and it is conceivable that at a certain point states will be incapable of offering countermeasures against a technology (e.g., an attack conducted by cyber means) or a strategic actor.[101] If, for instance, the ability of states to provide nuclear deterrence weakens, such states will have a difficult time justifying their existence and generating allegiance of their populations.

Second, a further reason for the emergence of new strategic actors is the reappearance of ungoverned spaces, analogous to the areas devoid of clear political control in premodern history.[102] Since the early 1990s, many regions, vacated by the superpowers, became heavily destabilized, collapsing into a cycle of violence and turmoil.[103] In sub-Saharan and east Africa, as well as in southeastern Europe and central Asia, states and their governments either disintegrated or lost their ability to impose order within their own territories.[104] Failed states are becoming the modern equivalent of the barbarian lands of central Europe in Roman times or central Asia until the eighteenth century, where empires had limited or no reach, and different forms of societal organization could arise and prosper. These areas, in fact,

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[100] John H. Herz, "Rise and Demise of the Territorial State," *World Politics* 9, no. 4 (July 1957): 489.

[101] The return address problem of non-state actors is particularly problematic for deterrence. For a contrary view, see Caitlin Talmadge, "Deterring a Nuclear 9/11," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 21–34; Michael Miller, "Nuclear Attribution as Deterrence," *Nonproliferation Review* 14, no. 1 (March 2007): 33–60.

[102] Some of the characteristics of ungoverned territories are the lack of functioning state institutions, weak or no monopoly of violence, inability to control borders, and to oppose external interference. Angel Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 7–13.

[103] Robert I. Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 85–96; Michael Desch, "War and Strong States, Peace and Weak States?" *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 237–68. On the impact of external threats on the size of polities, see Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, "War, Peace, and the Size of Countries," *Journal of Public Economics* 89, no. 7 (July 2005): 1,349–50.

[104] For an interesting study of the consequences of a failing state (Jamaica), see John Rapley, "The New Middle Ages," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (May/June 2006): 95–103.

give rise to other ways of organizing social relations, often along tribal and clan lines (such as Somalia) or ethnic and religious affiliation (such as the former Yugoslavia). These deeply rooted associations provide the public goods, from order and security to social services and education (e.g., Hezbollah in Lebanon), that the state has traditionally supplied in modern times. There is a logic to these regions, but it is not the logic of the state as a centralized hierarchical entity. It is the logic of decentralization based on allegiance to leaders rather than institutions, to ancient codes rather than laws, to ethnic and religious bonds rather than states.

These stateless areas can offer a space also to groups of terrorists, such as al Qaeda, that can organize out of the attentive sight of a state.[105] Over the past few years, the cases of Somalia and to a degree Indonesia have been used as examples of this connection between state failure and terrorism, especially of the Islamist kind.[106] Nonetheless, the link between failed states and terrorists should not be exaggerated. Terrorists do not live in a vacuum and can prosper in failed states only if they defeat or coexist with the local tribes and clans, as in the case of Waziristan in Pakistan. In fact, they are more likely to thrive in weak rather than failed or collapsed states. They need the cover of state sovereignty to protect them from foreign intervention and are better off in a society that is relatively stable and not wrecked by uncontrollable violence and crime. Furthermore, terrorist groups can also organize quite effectively within well-functioning states, from Germany and Spain to Saudi Arabia, because states, especially liberal democracies, do not have full control over every aspect of social life. And arguably, these virtual ungoverned spaces have increased across the globe thanks to the widespread adoption of the internet as the preferred tool for communication. The internet is by its very nature difficult to control by a state or any other organization, and it is analogous to the stateless regions of the world because it facilitates the formation of groups transcending borders.[107]

Third, a crucial reason for the emergence of these new actors in international relations is the widespread availability of violence. The proliferation

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[105] See Princeton Lyman and J. Stephen Morrison, "The Terrorist Threat in Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (January/February 2004): 75; R. W. Johnson, "Tracking Terror Through Africa," *National Interest* (Spring 2004): 161–72; Robert Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror," *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2002): 127–40; Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), xi, 92–93; Ray Takeyh and Nicholas Gvosdev, "Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?" *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 97–108.

[106] Another effect of the presence of these ungoverned spaces is the rise in maritime piracy. See Martin Murphy, "Contemporary Piracy and Maritime Terrorism," *Adelphi Paper*, no. 388 (London, UK: International Institute for Strategic Studies), esp. 12–17; Peter Chalk, "The Maritime Dimension of International Security: Terrorism, Piracy, and Challenges for the United States," RAND Monograph 697, 2008, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG697.pdf.

[107] Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/03): 46–49; "A World Wide Web of Terror," *Economist*, 14 July 2007, 28–30; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, National Intelligence Estimate, "The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland," July 2007, http://www.c-span.org/pdf/nie_071707.pdf.

of tools of violence does not refer only to nuclear proliferation, but rather to wider changes that are occurring in military technology and in the tactics of waging wars. There seem to be two parallel trends that make violence more decentralized and available. On the one hand, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are characterized by nuclear weapons, a symbol of technological advancement and industrial capacity of the state. The resources required to build these weapons, and in general to wage war on an industrial scale, are enormous and demand the apparatus of a state to gather and administer them. On the other hand, the technical knowledge is no longer confined to a few states and is being replicated in states that have minimal resources (e.g., North Korea).[108] Offensive technology is increasingly available in the open market for low prices and requires little knowledge on how to operate it.[109] It is becoming clear that one does not need to have the massive resources, the industrial capabilities, and the organization of a state to be a military, and thus political, actor of consequence. The 1995 Oklahoma bombings, the 9/11 attacks, the effectiveness of IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the crude and yet terrifying Qassam rockets in Gaza are all examples of how relatively common, simple, and inexpensive technologies can be adapted into often devastating and politically effective weapons.[110] The lethality of small actors is rising to the point that "super-empowered" individuals, even amateurs, can present serious threats to states.[111]

The use of violence by small, less powerful groups is obviously not new, and modern history is replete with cases of insurgencies, asymmetric wars, and guerrillas.[112] We should be careful therefore in heralding the arrival of a fundamentally new era. Nevertheless, because of the diffusion of technology combined with the inherent challenges of such conflicts, non-state actors, whether individuals or groups, may be becoming more effective and capable of inflicting losses to states and even great powers, often forcing them to retreat. Over the past two decades in particular, there has been a long list of striking setbacks for the forces of industrialized states, incapable of defeating or even mitigating the threat of non-state actors. Russia in Chechnya, the United States in Somalia, Israel in southern Lebanon and Gaza,

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[108] On the diffusion of military technology, see Emily Goodman and Richard Andreas, "Systemic Effects of Military Innovation and Diffusion," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 79–125.

[109] See also Frank G. Hoffman, "Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Nontraditional Wars," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (December 2005): 925–26. For a contrarian argument pointing to the difficulties of nuclear development in authoritarian states, see Jacques E.C. Hymans, "Botching the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 3 (May/June 2012): 44–53.

[110] For the estimated costs of various terrorist attacks, see Report on Al-Qaida and Taliban, UN Security Council, August 2004, S/2004/679, 12, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2004/679.

[111] The "super-empowered" term is from Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 14–15. See also Jeff Howe, *Crowdsourcing* (New York: Crown 2008), esp. chap. 2.

[112] Peter Mansoor and Williamson Murray, ed., *Hybrid Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

and currently the United States in Afghanistan represent clear cases where modern, industrialized powers have encountered stateless groups, and have struggled to find a clear solution to the threat they posed. In the end, most states preferred to retreat, not because of the losses which albeit tragic were not devastating to the security of the state, but because of the recognition that the industrial might at their disposal was of little utility to defeat actors that could not be found, did not rely on large and complex infrastructures, and often fought for nonnegotiable objectives.[113]

Rise of New Objectives

The second feature of the current international environment that makes it similar to premodern times is the fact that many strategic actors pursue non-territorial objectives.[114] They fight for the allegiance and respect of people, for glory and prestige, or for ideological and religious objectives that transcend material calculations.[115] Control over resources is and will continue to be a source of conflicts. But, because of the trends described earlier, many groups no longer need large infrastructures and vast resources to inflict heavy damage on states, to force their enemies to change their behavior, and consequently to be considered strategic actors.[116]

Not only is there no need to seek a state, but also there are serious drawbacks associated with controlling a state. Many groups do not want to be tied down by the constraints of a state, which could force them to moderate their aspirations and reach. Often these objectives carry religious overtones, signaling a revival of religion as a motivating factor in politics.[117] For instance, some experts argue, many terrorist organizations are motivated by religion, rather than ideology, separatism, or nationalism.[118] And many

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[113] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force* (New York: Knopf, 2005); Daniel Headrick, *Power Over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[114] On the decline of territory as an objective, see also Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 307–11.

[115] See Richard Schultz and Andrea Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5–6.

[116] On resource-driven conflict, see Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michael Klare, *Resource Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001); *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, National Intelligence Council, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Global%20Trends_2025%20Report.pdf, esp. 63–67.

[117] See Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 3; "The New Wars of Religion," *Economist*, 1 November 2007; Thomas F. Farr, "Diplomacy in an Age of Faith," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2008, 110–24; Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jonathan Fox, "Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 53–73. For a critical perspective, see Alan Wolfe, "And the Winner Is . . . " *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 2008.

[118] Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). A

domestic conflicts are similarly characterized by religious divides, rather than ethnic or ideological differences.[119] The challenge for such groups is that managing a state requires some political compromise, which undermines the purity of the religious ideas. Controlling a state, then, often leads to disillusionment, weakening the appeal and thus the power of the group. This is one of the reasons why, for instance, Islamist groups by and large remain stateless. As Olivier Roy points out, Islamic fundamentalists "distrust the state. Their quest for a strict implementation of *sharia* with no concession to man-made law pushes them to reject the modern state in favor of a kind of 'libertarian' view of the state: the state is a lesser evil but is not the tool for implementing Islam."[120] Instead of the state, a globalized *ummah*, a stateless community of believers, is preferred. Moreover, this process of rejecting the state starts a cycle of radicalization: because a radical idea can never be fully implemented through the state, the group that believes in it will globalize its efforts (and become deterritorialized and stateless), and in turn it can become even more radical because it does not need to compromise its goals.

Until recently, religion as a key source of social cohesion, transcending state borders, has been understudied in security studies.[121] The revival of studies of the role of religion in international relations is therefore welcome because it brings to the fore the fact that, as I indicate in the next section, political actors motivated by it will likely behave differently than secular, modern nation-states.[122]

Consequences: Three Hypotheses

What does this all mean? In a nutshell, the future strategic environment may be characterized by ineffectiveness of diplomacy, weakening of deterrence, and consequently more violent international relations. In this, it will resemble premodern history. These three features are hypotheses based on a reading of premodern history and a sense that there are growing parallels between

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critic of this view is Pape, *Dying to Win*. For a debate on Pape's argument, see James D. Kiras, "Dying to Prove a Point: The Methodology of *Dying to Win*," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 227–41; David Cook, "A critique of Robert Pape's *Dying to Win*," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 243–54.

[119] Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religion and the Fall of the Civilization Paradigm as Explanations for Intra-state Conflict," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (September 2007): 361–82.

[120] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 281 (emphasis in original).

[121] Daniel Philpott, "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations," *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (October 2002): 66–95; Eliot Cohen, "Religion and War," *SAISphere* (2009), 12–15.

[122] It has to be noted that modern secular states are not inherently more peaceful than premodern ones with religious connotations. In fact, secular ideologies, such as communism, proved far more destructive and violent, internally and externally, than any premodern set of ideas. For an argument that religion does not promote more violence that secular modern states, see William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).

it and our times. They are certainly contested by many academics and policymakers, who for instance argue in favor of the continued effectiveness of diplomacy and deterrence. But they are also very plausible. If there is some agreement that the current and future strategic environment will carry premodern characteristics, such as the presence of multiple non-state actors and the resurgence of nonnegotiable objectives (e.g., religion), then it is plausible to expect that there will be analogous consequences. In what follows I delineate three related hypotheses concerning diplomacy, deterrence, and the nature of conflicts.

Hypothesis A. Diplomacy will be less successful.

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Diplomacy as a process and as an outcome is less likely to occur and succeed. First, diplomacy as a process refers simply to the act of negotiating among various actors. It is relatively easy to engage a state in a diplomatic interaction because there are more or less established venues and institutions facilitating it. States tend to have a diplomatic corps, representatives in foreign capitals, and a decision-making hierarchy. On top of domestic institutions, the past two or three centuries (and in particular since the end of World War II) have seen a gradual increase and strengthening in the number of international organizations (such as the United Nations) and norms (such as the inviolability of diplomatic envoys) that helped states establish channels of communication. This impressive armature of diplomacy is, however, fraying and becoming less capable of sustaining diplomatic engagements. The clearest example is in the relations between states and non-state groups (tribes, al Qaeda). There is little, if any, shared institutional and normative framework that would initiate the process of negotiations. It is simply difficult to conceive how to start the process of diplomacy when the strategic actors to be engaged lack the diplomatic infrastructure of institutions and norms. For instance, there is no established norm as to which government institution should try to engage such groups (in the case of the United States, should it be the Defense Department, the Department of State, USAID, or the CIA?), assuming of course that either side is willing to enter into a dialogue. There are also no obvious international institutions that would facilitate such relations. Furthermore, the norms of diplomatic interactions, especially those regulating diplomatic immunity, arose in ancient times from recurrent interactions and quarrels among similar polities (city-states, empires, or nation-states) that decided that the best way to mitigate their conflicts was to allow channels of communications (envoys).[123] These norms were always difficult to enforce in state versus non-state relations because non-state actors (e.g.,

[123] Richard Langhorne, "The Regulation of Diplomatic Practice: The Beginnings to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961," *Review of International Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 1992): 3–17.

nomadic tribes) did not participate in these agreements and rarely shared these norms.

Additionally, the process of diplomacy requires the expectation, or at least the promise, of implementation of an agreement. Diplomats sign an agreement as representatives of a state that has the capability to implement and respect it. In the case of many non-state groups, their nonhierarchical structure makes implementation of an agreement dubious because the various subgroups may challenge the validity of the representative or simply reject the agreement.

Second, diplomacy as an outcome, namely, a negotiated settlement of conflicts, is also likely to become rarer. Diplomacy is more likely to succeed among actors that share something in common, whether it was a sense of legitimacy as in the Congress of Vienna or the desire of self-preservation as during the Cold War. It works best within a community of polities, sharing some underlying unifying feature.[124] But when there are actors that are fundamentally different and do not share any values (legitimacy, culture, or religion) or structural features (that is, they are not states or entities whose main objective is the preservation of their territorial control), diplomatic settlements are less likely to occur. Given their organizational structure and values, it is difficult to imagine what political agreement could be reached with a group such as al Qaeda or Hamas. Moreover, it is more arduous to achieve negotiated settlements among states that do not share a similar cultural heritage. Many have observed that diplomacy in Europe has been more effective in restraining its states because they were bound by traditions of unity.[125] The fact that religious differences are becoming more salient in political conflicts may contribute to the difficulty of successful negotiations.[126] The more global international relations become, the less they will be moderated by such traditions and thus the less successful diplomacy will become.[127]

Hypothesis B. Deterrence will weaken.

The second hypothesis is that deterrence is less likely to be successful. There are four reasons why this may be the case. First, the effectiveness of modern, industrial military force seems to be diminishing. As Klaus Knorr

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[124] See Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, original edition in 1939).

[125] Adam Watson, *Diplomacy* (London, UK: Eyre Methuen, 1982), 17.

[126] Isak Svensson, "Fighting with Faith," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 6 (December 2007): 930–49; Monica D. Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil Wars," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 97–131.

[127] See also Ian Hall, "Diplomacy, Anti-diplomacy and International Society," in *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, eds., Richard Little and John Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 141–61.

observed, changes in the utility of war and of military power "will occur if there are shifts, uncompensated by shifts in the opposite direction, in the values derived from, or the costs incurred by, the maintenance and use of national military power."[128] Recent conflicts are pointing to such a shift, increasing the costs of using military force without corresponding military or political gains.[129] A direct confrontation between two armies, or the threat of destruction of the enemy's industrial centers, or even the actual devastation of the enemy's territory, no longer delivers the strategic outcomes we came to expect in modern times. For instance, the 2006 Israeli attack on Southern Lebanon did not inflict a decisive defeat on Hezbollah and did not compel them to change its long-term strategic objective of annihilating Israel.[130] Similarly, the enormous technological advantage of the United States is proving to be of limited value, perhaps even counterproductive, when fighting amorphous groups and tribes in Iraq and Afghanistan.[131] The diminishing utility of force means that the ability of states to threaten, and thus coerce, some actors (such as non-state or substate ones) may be limited.

Second, the rise of actors that are not based on territorial control, but prosper in the ungoverned spaces of failed states or virtual communities, affects the ability of states to influence them through threats. The structure of non-state actors does not offer clear targets that can be threatened, and if necessary destroyed, thereby weakening the ability of states to threaten to impose clear costs on them.[132] This so-called return address problem harks back to the ancient nomadic tribes, which did not lead a settled lifestyle and thus had few fixed objects of value that could be targeted in retaliation. In some current cases, the group in question may simply not put a high value on the cities or population under its control and may be willing to risk their devastation. The tactical behavior of Hezbollah, for instance, in the 2006 war with Israel is an example of the group's willingness to sacrifice vast swaths of land and impose enormous suffering to its own population in order to pursue its objectives.

Third, it is difficult to deter groups for whom violence is a source of social cohesion. In fact, such groups may seek violent confrontation with a manifestly stronger enemy because such struggle generates solidarity among

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[128] Klaus Knorr, *On the Uses of Military Power in the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966) 12.

[129] See Smith, *The Utility of Force*.

[130] Arguably, one reason for the Israeli push to Southern Lebanon was to restore the effectiveness of Israel's deterrent capability. It is still unclear whether the 2006 war achieved this objective. See Anthony H. Cordesman, "Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli-Hezbollah War," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) paper, August 2006, 6–7, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060817_isr_hez_lessons.pdf.

[131] Noah Shachtman, "How Technology Almost Lost the War: In Iraq, the Critical Networks Are Social—Not Electronic," *Wired* 15, no. 12, http://www.wired.com/politics/security/magazine/15-12/ff_futurewar.

[132] Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 273.

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their members.[133] Threats of an attack, therefore, will not deter such groups and may have the opposite effect of encouraging the continuation of their behavior, resulting in a violent clash.[134] In fact, as in premodern history, individuals join groups (in our times, terrorist groups) that are on the frontline of wars; violence, and the promise of further violence, breeds social cohesion. Attempts by others to deter such groups by threats of retaliation and violence are welcomed, rather than feared, and may even encourage the very behavior they aim to prevent.[135]

Fourth, both state and non-state actors that are motivated by religion may be more difficult to deter than secular ones. Some religions, in fact, may increase the propensity to assume greater risks in light of the expected payoffs. Moreover, similarly to the previous point, being deterred decreases one's legitimacy, which is based on the pursuit of a nonnegotiable objective such as the establishment of a theocracy.[136] In brief, the Soviet Union may have been easier to deter than the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Hypothesis C. Violence will be more lengthy and pervasive.

If diplomacy and deterrence lose some of their effectiveness, violence is likely to be, first, lengthy and, second, pervasive more than it has been in the past two or three centuries. Third, it also may be increasingly more devastating, perhaps reversing a modern trend of lower destructiveness.

First, conflicts will be lengthy and resolvable only through force. Instead of periods of relative stability punctuated by large, increasingly more industrialized wars (think of the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the American Civil War, and World War I and II), the next decades may be more similar to the constant struggle and violence that characterized Roman-Germanic or Chinese-Mongol relations, the Middle Ages, or the protracted conflict between Byzantium and Arab tribes.[137] As in the past, conflicts infused by religion, wars *sub specie aeternitatis* so to speak, will likely to be lengthy, perhaps even "timeless."[138] Finally, even for traditional modern states war is becoming increasingly less about territorial conquest. For instance, military interventions by the United States of the past two decades have not been to

[133] For this dynamic in Hezbollah, see Cordesman, "Preliminary 'Lessons,"' 6–8.

[134] Furthermore, it is difficult to deter against an enemy whose main tactic is to shock and surprise. See Thérèse Delpech, "The Imbalance of Terror," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 38.

[135] Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 100–1.

[136] Shmuel Bar, "God, Nations, and Deterrence: The Impact of Religion on Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy* 30, no. 5 (November-December 2011): 428–52.

[137] Another term to describe this situation is a "forever war," following the title of a book on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Dexter Filkins, *The Forever War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

[138] Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 291–94. Also, on how religious motivations affect the length of conflict, see Michael Horowitz, "Long Time Going: Religion and the Duration of Crusading," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 162–93.

hold territory, but rather to alter the political conditions in the target region and withdraw.[139] Territorial conquest can be finite, clearly delimited in time and space, whereas the alteration of political conditions is often endless.

Second, violence will be more pervasive, geographically diffused, and not limited to a well-defined front line or battlefield. The monopoly of violence of the modern state is being challenged, as mentioned above, by several trends, including the widespread availability of weapons and the concurrent resurgence of non-state and substate actors. The proliferation of violent actors, often detached from territorial concerns and capable of delivering violence to places far beyond the region of their origin, is lengthening, or rather muddling, the security frontier. Al Qaeda gave us a sense of this, but other groups, such as Hezbollah and Iran's Qods Force, may be capable of fighting on what has been termed as the "global battlefield."[140]

The absence of clearly demarcated and secure frontlines also means that, like in much of premodern history, areas interior to states and empires will be increasingly vulnerable to disruptive attacks. The fortification of borders will be insufficient because, as in the past, many security threats arise from the ability of groups to overwhelm frontier defenses through rapidity, mass, and, what a historian of ancient Rome called "seepage."[141] In the past, the walling of cities was a symptom of the geographic spread of instability and violence; in the future, it is likely that we will have to harden potential targets (cities, infrastructure, etc.) inside, rather than on the border of, the territory of states.[142]

Third, there is an ongoing debate on whether wars in the future will be more or less destructive than in the past. Some argue that wars are causing increasingly smaller levels of casualties for three reasons. First, medical advances allow greater chances of surviving battlefield wounds; second, wars are small-scale, fought by smaller armies over a geographically limited battlefield; and third, many of today's wars are accompanied or quickly followed by humanitarian activities that reduce wartime casualties even further.[143] These arguments are by no means widely accepted and have been

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[139] Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 272; Jones, "War in the Twenty-first Century."

[140] Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, "The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy," Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, September 2008, xv, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=882.

[141] Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600* (London: Routledge, 1993), 56.

[142] Christopher Dickey, *Securing the City* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

[143] Bethany A. Lacina, Nils P. Gleditsch, and Bruce M. Russett, "The Declining Risk of Death in Battle," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 2006): 673–80; Michael Spagat, Andrew Mack, Tara Cooper, and Joakim Kreutz, "Estimating War Deaths: An Arena of Contestation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 6 (December 2009): 934–50; *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War*, Human Security Report Project 2009/2010, Simon Fraser University, http://www.humansecurityreport.info/2009Report/2009Report_Complete.pdf.

contested in large measure because of the difficulty of measuring war casualties.[144] In fact, some argue that the numbers of post-1945 war casualties are vastly underestimated, and it is at best unclear whether there is a downward trend in the destructiveness of wars.[145]

In any case, it is possible to formulate a hypothesis that the future security environment will be analogous to premodern history also in the destructiveness of wars. This hypothesis is based on four observations, derived from a reading of premodern history and from observing the premodern traits reappearing in current international relations.

First, the enemy is becoming increasingly more personal rather than abstract. We are fighting less against states and more against individuals and groups; the causes of these conflicts are less power differentials and more identity differences.[146] Wars of territorial adjustment or of balance of power tend to end when the desired adjustment has been achieved, whereas conflicts of identity end only with the assimilation or annihilation.[147] In fact, according to a study, territorial wars result in the lowest percent of civilians being killed (47 percent of total casualties), while ethnic or religious conflicts kill the most civilians (76 percent).[148]

Second, weapons are widely available, and their lethality is increasing. The parallel with premodern history is that technological differences among states and groups are increasingly irrelevant.[149] The difference is that the lethality of the available weapons has increased exponentially. A "super-empowered" individual or group can cause destruction that until a few decades ago was feasible only at the hands of a state.

Third, a decision by a central authority can end a war between states. But violence brought about by multiple, small, and often decentralized actors will not end by fiat. As in some premodern history, conflicts are less likely to end in treaties and peace agreements and will wreak destruction until the complete exhaustion or destruction of the parties involved. The length of conflicts, even if low-intensity, means greater devastation.

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[144] See, for instance, the debate about World War II casualties in the Soviet Union. Michael Haynes, "Counting Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: a Note," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 2 (March 2003): 303–9; Mark Harrison, "Counting Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: Comment," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 6 (September 2003): 939–44; Michael Haynes, "Clarifying Excess Deaths and Actual War Deaths in the Soviet Union During World War II: A Reply," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 6 (September 2003): 945–47.

[145] Ziad Obermeyer, Christopher Murray, and Emmanuela Gakidou, "Fifty Years of Violent War Deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: Analysis of Data from the World Health Survey Programme," *British Medical Journal* 336, no. 7659 (June 2008): 1,482–86.

[146] See Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006).

[147] See also Louis Halle, "Does War Have a Future?" *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 1 (October 1973): 20–34; John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Modern War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Michael Mandelbaum, "Is Major War Obsolete?" *Survival* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1998–99): 20–38.

[148] William Eckhardt, "Civilian Deaths in Wartime," *Security Dialogue* 20, no. 1 (January 1989): 91.

[149] Headrick, *Power Over Peoples*.

Fourth, the attempt to limit both military and civilian casualties in war is a peculiarly Western and a relatively new preoccupation, made more salient by the imperatives of population-centric counterinsurgency warfare.[150] It is unlikely to be widely accepted outside of the West, as some recent wars have indicated.[151] Moreover, the sensitivity to civilian casualties may be diminishing the West's ability to coerce antagonistic states, and the realization of this can lead to a gradual reversal of this Western norm.[152] Again, the result will be that warring parties will be less discerning between civilian and military targets, and ultimately conflicts will be more destructive.

In the end, and again this is only a hypothesis, the future security landscape may be very similar to the premodern state of things, when international relations were characterized by "religio-political hostility, erupting in acts of extreme violence."[153] Unmitigated by deterrence and diplomacy, exacerbated by nonnegotiable objectives, and pursued by multiple types of actors, international relations in the future may be more like those of premodern history.

To conclude, this paper suggests that certain features of premodern international relations may be reappearing in the form of a multiplicity of strategic actors pursuing a variety of often nonnegotiable objectives. Because of this, it is plausible to hypothesize that international relations may be characterized by a weakening of deterrence and a decline in the effectiveness of diplomacy, resulting in an exacerbation of violence. Such hypotheses are drawn from premodern history, which was characterized by some of the traits that are making a comeback in our days and consequently offers case studies that may illuminate current strategic challenges. This is not to argue that we should focus exclusively on premodern history in security studies. But a renewed focus on premodern history may help us develop an appreciation for, and knowledge of, the difficulties of diplomacy, the weakness of deterrence, and perhaps a more violent security environment.

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[150] Harvey M. Sapolsky and Jeremy Shapiro, "Casualties, Technology, and America's Future Wars," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 119–27; Colin H. Kahl, "In the Crossfire or the Crosshairs? Norms, Civilian Casualties, and U.S. Conduct in Iraq," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 7–46; Thomas W. Smith, "Protecting Civilians . . . or Soldiers? Humanitarian Law and the Economy of Risk in Iraq," *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (May 2008): 144–64.

[151] See for instance Russia's counterinsurgency approach in Chechnya or Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil. Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/05): 5–63; Robert Kaplan, "To Catch a Tiger," *Atlantic Monthly*, 1 July 2009, http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200907u/tamil-tigers-counterinsurgency.

[152] Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "Defeating US Coercion," *Survival* 41, no. 2 (January 1999): 107–20.

[153] Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 79.