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This paper suggests that the central question in IR theory today is not perhaps how "the international" should be conceived, rather what role either the state and interstate relations continue to have in a globalizing world with numerous actors of different types engaged in almost every significant issue. Postinternational theory advances this worldview in an aggressive fashion. Yet it is also true that (a) traditional theoretical perspectives continue to have their utility in limited contexts; and (b) postinternational theory intersects in interesting ways with traditional approaches as well as some of their most important challengers. The central organizing question, the paper maintains, is which actors exercise a significant influence over outcomes in particular issues—and why?

The concept of 'the international' calls to mind a time that extended until not so long ago when conventional wisdom held that the world was securely divided by territorial boundaries into sovereign, legally independent states. Those boundaries encompassed 'national' political systems, laws, societies, economies, and cultures. Relative peace and order were presumed most likely to prevail in that sort of 'domestic' context. By contrast, 'outside' was the 'anarchic,' competitive, and often violent realm of 'the international'. In that realm, where each state pursued its 'national interest' defined in terms of 'power', diplomacy involved mainly state-to-state intergovernmental negotiations, and international law and institutions were weak. At that time most IR theorists were self-styled 'realists' and they branded anyone who offered any other perspective as 'idealist' or 'utopian'.

The foregoing is a caricature of realist thought that nonetheless, we insist, captures the fundamentals of the realist vision. However, it is obviously not the full picture. It is important to put twentieth-century realism in its context. Realism drew its modern lessons from what E. H. Carr labelled the twenty years' crisis from 1919 to 1939 and continued to flourish – despite its inability fully to comprehend the ideological nature of the contest – during the post-World War II Cold War between the United States and its allies and the Soviet bloc. Perhaps not surprisingly in time of total war and under the shadow of nuclear annihilation, the preoccupation of the realists was with state security and conflict, to the neglect of almost everything else.

Moreover, some key realists themselves seemed to recognise that something was missing from their essential worldview. For example, E.

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H. Carr wrote:

> The theory of the divorce between the spheres of politics and morality is superficially attractive, if only because it evades the insoluble problem of finding a moral justification for the use of force. But it is not ultimately satisfying …. [T]he attempt to keep God and Caesar in watertight compartments runs too much athwart the deep-seated desire of the human mind to reduce its view of the world to some kind of moral order.[1]

'Exemplar' realist theorist Hans J. Morgenthau wrote:

> The power of a nation … depends not only upon the skill of its diplomacy and the strength of its armed forces but also upon the attractiveness for other nations of its political philosophy, political institutions, and political policies.[2]

Far more significant is that even early on there were a few IR theorists who looked at the world with less state-centric lenses. For instance, one of the English School founders, Hedley Bull, while largely comfortable with the realist tradition, famously insisted that states might well find it in their national interest to observe and advance international law, build international institutions, and encourage international cooperation.[3] James N. Rosenau went even further to argue that there were 'linkages' between the 'domestic' and 'international' politics that constituted a feedback loop of sorts.[4] But most IR theory remained locked in a realist state-centric worldview that today – although still admired by some theorists and policy-makers, especially in the United States – seems reactionary and naïve, the foreign policy equivalent of creationism in natural science.

Contemporary scholars are increasingly aware of the enormous variety of states, the important distinction between 'state' and 'nation', the fact that states even at the policy-making level are not unitary actors, the importance of international institutions and norms, and the probability that violence will be 'intrastate' or 'trans-state' rather than 'interstate'. It is also apparent that the present-day stage of global politics is crowded with countless actors of different types, whose complex interactions substantially determine the intermediate and longer-range course of particular dramas. Moreover, the flow of events not only reflects such relatively familiar background factors as diversity among

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1. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of Intgernational Relations*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1946), 109.
2. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th rev. edn (New York: Knopf, 1978), 154.
3. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*: *A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
4. James N. Rosenau, *Linkage Politics: Essays on Convergence of National and International Systems* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

world religions and petroleum resource scarcity, but also especially the breathtaking and accelerating pace and volume of 'globalisation' in its multiple dimensions and related 'localisation' dynamics that include resistance to globalisation.

'Post-internationalism' or 'post-international' theory reflects the worldview described in the previous paragraph, This article explains what post-internationalism is and how it relates to other IR schools, and suggests an agenda for future theory-building. Bad theory usually makes for bad policy, a fact manifest in the combination of neorealism and 'neocon' liberalism that has dominated Washington in recent years. Happily, post-international insights are likely to refocus practitioners away from the Scylla of power balances and the Charybdis of democratic regimes towards a multiplicity of actors, identity politics, and changing conceptions of political space. Thus, post-international 'theory' is not only theoretical but also a practical way of thinking about the world and analysing global political issues.

Is post-internationalism a 'theory' (in the IR professional sense) or 'merely' an analytical framework? The answer to the questions depends entirely upon the definition of 'theory' employed. If theory implies the capacity to establish cause and effect for everything of significance in global politics, post-internationalism falls short. But what established theory does not fall short if such is the standard? A case in point is realism, widely accepted to be a theory and so widely accepted for many years as to have been a veritable paradigm. To be sure, post-internationalism advances a worldview and an analytical approach, but it also makes theoretical statements about the dynamics of global politics, actors, identities, and related matters.

Central Tenets of Post-international Theory

Departure from State-Centric IR Theory

Post-international theory arose out of dissatisfaction with the inadequacies and distortions inherent in traditional realist and neorealist theories, especially their state-centric vision of the world. The post-international view is that – although sovereign states and their 'international' relations obviously remain important and are likely so to remain – the *state-centric world* accepted as a given by traditional theories never fully existed, certainly does not exist now, and will never exist.

The authors' initial break from a state-centric perspective came from recognition in the mid 1970s that leading textbooks were out of touch with the real world, especially regarding the proliferation of non-state actors ranging from terrorists to transnational corporations.[5] In the 1990s we developed a 'polities' model for analysing global politics that emerged

5. Richard W. Mansbach, Yale H. Ferguson, and Donald E. Lampert, *The Web of World Politics: Nonstate Actors in the Global System* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

from empirical research on six pre-Westphalian systems,[6] and we revisited and extended that model in *Remapping Global Politics: History's Revenge and Future Shock*.[7] Interestingly, it was becoming clear that our perspective, generated independently, was converging with Rosenau's pioneering and prolific work.[8] Rosenau coined the term 'post-internationalism' to describe 'an apparent trend in which more and more of the interactions that sustain world politics unfold without the direct involvement of nations and states'.[9] He continues to refer to post-international and post-internationalism, although he now typically describes his personal 'paradigm' or 'worldview' in dynamic terms as one of 'turbulence' or 'fragmegration'.[10] Our polities model similarly highlights 'integration' and 'fragmentation' or 'fusion' and 'fission'.[11] But 'post-international' still seems to us to be the best shorthand characterisation of contemporary global politics.

Continuity, Change, and Complexity

Post-international theory emphasises continual change, but change that is much faster in some contexts than in others. In some cases, change is little more than an addition to or extension of existing patterns and does not necessarily obliterate all that has gone before. At the other extreme, change may be transformative, producing dramatic alterations in the nature of political life.[12] However, post-international theory does not hold that change is necessarily unilinear and contains no assumptions – stated or unstated – about 'progressive' versus 'retrogressive' change.
Rosenau argues that there seem to be different 'temperaments' at work

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6. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, Polities: *Authority, Identities, and Change* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

7. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, Remapping Global Politics: *History's Revenge and Future Shock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

8. See his trilogy: *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

9. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics*, p.6. See also Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier*, p. 38n; and James N. Rosenau, 'Beyond Postinternationalism' in *Pondering Postinternationalism*, ed. Heidi H. Hobbs (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 219–37.

10. Rosenau continues to stress fragmegrative processes in *Distant Proximities*, 11–16.

11. Ferguson and Mansbach, *Polities*, 51–7, 383.

12. See K. J. Holsti, 'The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory' in *Political Space: Frontiers of Change and Governance in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yale H. Ferguson and R. J. Barry Jones (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 3–43.

among theorists.[13] Some are predisposed to look for continuities, while others are inclined to emphasise the degree to which the present is different from the past. Our own perspective stresses the critical importance of history, although we acknowledge all the subjectivity highlighted by constructivists that is inevitably involved in historical interpretation. (Is there any less subjectivity involved in interpreting the contemporary world? Probably not.) As Saskia Sassen expresses it: 'One uses history as a series of natural experiments to raise the level of complexity.'[14] The present is at once the same as and similar to the past in some respects yet very different in others. *So exactly how is the present both similar to the past and also different?* Everyone would benefit if all theorists were obliged to answer both questions and marshal evidence before writing anything further.

Historical analysis makes us keenly aware of the resemblances between our twenty-first-century world of fragmented authorities, shifting identities, and competing ideologies to pre-international epochs like the Hellenistic Age. It reminds us, too, of the persistence of many historical political forms, ideas, and loyalties that today constitute what we call a 'living museum'. Sometimes the past seems almost to 'haunt' or have its 'revenge' on the present. Different exhibits from that museum come out of the storage cabinets at various and often extremely inconvenient times.

Rosenau also acknowledges historical precedents of non-state authority such as the Medici family and the Hanseatic League; diseases such as the bubonic plague; and the information impact of the printing press, wireless, and telephone. But for him – and who could disagree? – 'there are … major dimensions of the present era that have led to differences in kind and not just in degree when compared with earlier times'.[15] It is thus perhaps fair to suggest that his emphasis is on transformative change, while ours is on *both* continuity and change that only when *regarded together* can capture and account for present-day complexity.

In sum, Rosenau tells the story of a world where history is speeding up, a world characterised by a bifurcation of global structures, the proliferation of actors, technological revolutions, the globalisation of economic exchange, the presence of interdependence/collective goods issues, the weakening of state authority, subgroupism, increasingly skilled individuals, and a widening income gap both within and across countries that reflects those who are benefiting from globalisation and those who are not benefiting (or are benefiting to a much lesser degree).[16]
That, in general, seems to us to be an accurate description. Nonetheless,

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13. James N. Rosenau, 'NGOs and Fragmented Authority in Globalizing Space' in *Political Space*, ed. Ferguson and Jones, 261–79.

14. Saskia Saseen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 404.

15. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier,* 22–3.

16. Ibid., 56–77.

despite transformative change, there remain not only significant historical precedents but also, more importantly, *direct legacies from the past*. The contemporary world is experiencing *both* 'history's revenge' and 'future shock'. This conjunction, we believe, helps explain the 'multiple contradictions' that Rosenau discerns in what he terms 'a new and wide political space' in global politics that is 'the domestic-foreign frontier'. It is a world in which states remain, some of which are powerful, but in which sovereignty matters less and less despite leaders' assertions to the contrary. Boundaries have become sieve-like, and territory, though still capable of generating passionate feelings, is often transcended. 'Landscapes are giving way to ethnoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes, and finanscapes …'[17]

Given this condition of perverse and bewildering complexity, the central analytical challenge is, as Rosenau expresses it: 'How do we assess a world in which the Frontier is continuously shifting, widening and narrowing, simultaneously undergoing erosion with respect to many issues and reinforcement with respect to others? How do we reconceptualize political space so that it connotes identities and affiliations (say, religious, ethnic, and professional) as well as territorialities? … Under what circumstances does authority along the Frontier accrue to like-minded states, to global regimes, to transnational organizations, to subnational entities, or to coalitions of diverse types of actors?'[18]

Post-international theory *does* emphasise fundamental change in global politics, albeit, strongly tempered by historical inheritance. Such theory breaks sharply and self-consciously with static models.[19] Post-international change is the product of simultaneous processes of fusion and fission of authority. The first is reflected in the growth of networks that connect and influence the behaviour of persons 'remote' from one another. Remoteness, of course, is a function of physical distance, technology, and, not least, mindset, but, unlike the past, geography has less impact upon psychological distance or proximity. Ancient empires were impossible to micro-manage from a distant centre because of the limits of transportation and communication technologies, and contemporary networks would be inconceivable in the absence of much more advanced technologies. The second tendency is the fracturing of existing political units into islands of self-identification that localise and often specialise authority and encumber efforts to deliver collective goods.

Thus, some associations are falling apart even as others come together. 'The seeming contradictions between the forces spreading people, goods, and ideas around the world and those that are impelling the contraction of people, goods, and ideas within narrowed or heightened geographic boundaries'[20] are engines of change in the post-international model or

17. Ibid., 4.
18. Ibid., 5.
19. For example, Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 7.

what Rosenau describes as 'fragmegration'. The 'central argument' of one of his most recent books is that 'the best way to grasp world affairs today requires viewing them as an endless series of distant proximities in which the forces pressing for greater globalization and those inducing greater localization interactively play themselves out'.[21]

The normative implications of these processes remain decidedly confused. Political, economic, and cultural integration offer advantages of scale, but may consign fragmented and less competitive parts of the world, for example, to relatively lower living standards. Disintegration or disaggregation of authority preserves local culture and offers the psychological satisfaction of smaller units, yet it may also result in marginalisation and ethnic strife over battlefields such as Kosovo or East Timor. The two processes of change are related. Centralisation produces a desire for recognition of and respect for social, cultural and political heterogeneity and spurs efforts to decentralise authority. Decentralisation produces demands for economies of scale, greater functional capacity, and efficiency that can only be realised through the exercise of wider authority.

Polities, Global Governance, Identities, and Loyalties

Post-international theory sees the world as inhabited by countless actors of many different types that reflect different identities, are differentially engaged in countless issues, and (as we shall explain) exercise effective authority in particular domains and contexts.

Although Rosenau takes us a considerable distance away from state-centric formulations, he does not in one respect take us quite far enough. His model of global politics retains 'two interactive worlds …: a multi-centric world of diverse, relatively equal actors, and a state-centric world in which national actors are still primary'.[22] Of course, there are interstate interactions, yet fewer and fewer interstate interactions of importance are unmediated or unaffected by other, often non-territorial, polities. This is not simply the case, as was once thought, of 'low politics'[23] where, for example, giant transnational corporations and banks have become engines of modernisation and economic inequality. It is increasingly the case of 'high politics' as well. Thus, Hizbullah has become a fulcrum among Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and the United States in a regional struggle for power, and the Horn of Africa is an arena of colliding militias, warlords, and religious militants. This is stateless realism with a vengeance.

Just as states in the past 'captured' subnational and transnational groups

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20. James N. Rosenau, 'Multilateral Governance and the Nation-State System: A Post-Cold War Assessment'. Paper for the first meeting of a Study Group of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, DC, 1995, 3.

21. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities*, 4.

22. Rosenau, *Turbulence*, 97–8.

23. See, for example, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd edn (New York: Longman, 2001).

ranging from ethnic nations to religions to enhance their legitimacy and stability, today states are being 'captured' by tribal militias and religious groups, much as Marx thought the bourgeois state had been 'captured' by capitalists. Countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia are little more than deceptive colours on archaic maps. The Iraqi state exists only in the myopic vision of the last defenders of failed G. W. Bush administration policies, and the Lebanese state will need to be (re)constructed both literally and figuratively.

Accelerating change is producing an increasingly complex universe of actors in global/local politics. We call them polities, while Rosenau prefers the term 'spheres of authority' or 'SOAs'.[24] Polities are collectivities – territorial and non-territorial – with a significant measure of identity and institutionalisation, a degree of hierarchy in their organisation, and the capacity to mobilise persons and groups for political purposes (value satisfaction). Some entities more clearly meet these criteria than others. For instance, most states, international institutions, TNCs, major NGOs, and criminal and terrorist organisations are polities. By contrast, most markets are not polities, because they lack the requisite identity, institutionalisation, and hierarchy. Like global issues, markets are not themselves actors but reflect background factors as well as the behaviour of many polities, often including corporations, banks, and financial funds, as well as the day-to-day actions of many individuals.

Polities coexist, cooperate, compete, and clash. They often overlap, layer, and 'nest'[25] and hence share some of the same 'political space' – territory, issues, identities, markets, and/or cyberspace. Polities are all 'becoming' in the sense that political evolution is constant, although they evolve at different rates and not necessarily in a unilinear fashion. Even older states in Europe such as Germany, Italy, and Belgium are still trying to establish a fully secure national identity. Consider also the complicated nesting of various states and traditional nations in the European Union. The challenge of forging a national identity and even preserving a modicum of political order is clearly far more desperate in many other countries.

In a post-international world, sovereign territorial borders are increasingly porous and routinely transcended by all the major currents of globalisation. For Stephen Krasner this erosion of 'interdependence sovereignty' does not entail a weakening of the three other dimensions of sovereignty that he posits.[26] However, the interconnectedness of

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24. As Rosenau sees it, 'an SOA can be an issue regime, a professional society, an epistemic community, a neighborhood, a network of the like-minded, a truth commission, a corporation, business subscribers to codes of conduct ..., a social movement, a local or provincial government, a diaspora, a regional association, a loose confederation of NGOs, a transnational advocacy group, a paramilitary force, a credit-rating agency, a strategic partnership, a transnational network, a terrorist organization, and so on across all the diverse collectivities that have become sources of decisional authority in the ever more complex multi-centric world', *Distant Proximities*, 295.

25. Ferguson and Mansbach, *Polities*, 48–9.

these dimensions makes this dubious; for example, it is difficult to see how 'interdependence sovereignty' can be reduced without limiting 'Westphalian sovereignty' and vice versa.

The health of national economies responds to developments in the global economy as much as or more than to the actions of central banks. For all the attempts to censure internet content, more and more individuals around the globe daily access the information highway and use email and cellphones to communicate across vast distances. Movies, television, and popular music have become both global and regional enterprises. Turbulent weather patterns exacerbated by global warming spare the citizens of no land. Diseases like SARS or bird flu threaten global pandemics and prompt transborder research cooperation. Despite recent tightening of border controls due in part to perceived terrorism threats, the movement of peoples proceeds apace and creates grave challenges of assimilation into national cultures. Groups of 'home-grown' Muslims in Britain watch Islamic television and respond to fundamentalist ideological appeals for jihad, and so on.

Post-international theory acknowledges the continuing importance of sovereign states in world affairs but refuses to privilege them in analysis, overestimate their influence, and thereby fail to appreciate the often much greater influence exercised by a wide range of other actors or polities. The sovereign state, with its peculiar legal status as independent and sovereign, now appears to have been a contingent product of a particular time and place – early modern Europe.[27] The territorial state model succeeded insofar as it did because it then provided a measure of security, encouragement for markets and long-distance trade, a reasonably dependable system of law and justice, and a national loyalty that helped to bridge the dangerous ethnic and religious cleavages of the times. Nonetheless, boundaries continued to shift, and the national construction of institutions and identities was by no means a foregone conclusion – and remains a work in progress to the present day.

Contemporary IR theory has tended to lose sight of the fact that the most prominent political units throughout human history, apart from villages and cities, have not been states but empires. 'Much of what we call history', argues Niall Ferguson, 'consists of the deeds of the 50 to 70 empires that once ruled multiple peoples across vast chunks of the globe'.[28] Even the Westphalian era was at least as much about empires as it was about states. As the European states were themselves consolidating, they set off on campaigns of conquest in far-flung corners of the globe. It was those same empires that implanted the nation-state model over many older political forms, identities, and loyalties, with varying degrees of

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26. Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

27. See, for example, Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

28. Niall Ferguson, 'Empires with Expiration Dates', *Foreign Policy* 156 (September/October 2006), 46.

success. Ironically, the triumph of 'decolonisation' in the post-World War II era took place against a background of a Cold War between two rival superpowers that resembled informal empires. Indeed, some observers contend that a 'United States empire' still persists in the current so-called 'unipolar moment' that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its clients in Eastern Europe. That idea may now be sinking fast in the quagmire of Iraq.

In the post-international framework, each type of polity is only an ideal type and assumes many different forms in practice. There are, for example, many variations in the structures and processes of cities and empires, and the same is plainly true of sovereign states. The nearly 200 such sovereign states in the world today vary enormously in their size, political influence, governmental forms and institutions, bureaucratic rivalries, value systems, and actual autonomy. Also, the presence of countless other authorities and domains limits the influence or control even of states that by realist standards would surely be classified as 'great powers'. Some states are actually 'failing', while many, if not most, are experiencing varying degrees of 'legitimacy crisis'.[29] Most states lack adequate capacity to meet rising citizen demands, especially in a context of globalising trends.

Fragmentation is continually expanding the number and variety of states and other actors with which existing states must share the global political stage. In addition, as Rosenau points up, as access to education and information continually improves around the world, more and more 'skilled' individuals are assuming active political roles. By virtue of their immense personal resources, some individuals such as Bill Gates, George Soros, and Ted Turner are actually super-empowered. Gates, for example, is worth about as much as the total national income of Bangladesh.[30] However, ordinary citizens are better informed, ever harder to fool, and are demanding more of their leaders, at the same time as national governments are less able to deliver on their promises. This is a basic reason why politicians of nearly all stripes stand so low in the public opinion polls in most countries.

To be sure, the state is not likely to disappear as a political form, because some national loyalties run deep, some states still do a reasonably effective job at their traditional tasks, and a few that started behind are catching up. Moreover, some actors other than the state (such as organised crime and terrorist groups) are abhorrent to many citizens, corporations and banks are widely distrusted, and other actors are even less well organised than the state to deliver the things people and indeed global markets need and want. So, as Sassen suggests,[31] the crux of the matter is not whether states are 'winning' or 'losing' in a general sense,

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29. See, for example, Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam (eds), *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

30. Forbes <http://forbes.com/lists/results.jhtml?passListId>.

31. See Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*.

but what specific institutions, laws, and functions of particular states are being 'denationalized' or significantly constrained by globalising processes. For most states, that is a long and growing list.

The 'domain' of a polity – its 'reach' in political space – consists of the persons and groups who identify with it and comply with its directives, as well as the resources it can therefore command. All polities are 'authorities' and 'govern' within their respective and often overlapping domains. Thus 'governance' exists within, across, and beyond the jurisdictions of sovereign states. 'Global governance', in turn, refers to patterns of polity authority domains in the world and not only to forms of governance that are truly 'global'. It is important to understand that post-international theory defines authority and governance as effective influence or control. Authority need not be 'legitimate' to be effective, although almost every polity offers some sort of ideological justification for its existence and role. Moreover, those polities that are able to gain compliance without substantial coercion obviously tend, for that reason, to be all the more secure.

The central analytical question for post-internationalists is *who or what influences or controls what in global politics—and why?* With that question in mind, familiar conceptions of power, distribution of capabilities, international structure, territory, and boundaries in IR take on decidedly non-traditional dimensions. Power is a relative concept so that a polity's 'hard' or 'soft' power resources have limited significance in the abstract. Notwithstanding the loss of parsimony, what matters is which other polities it is attempting to influence regarding what issues under what conditions. Territorial boundaries may be a help or hindrance in exercising influence, but issue systems typically transcend such boundaries, as often do the identities and loyalties of individuals. Much if not most of what happens or does not happen, routinely or otherwise, in the world by way of effective influence or control – that is, governance – has little or nothing to do with superpower, hyperpower, empire, hegemony, or indeed, with states. The current Bush Administration's adventures in the Middle East offer ample evidence that a rogue superpower may turn out to be merely a mouse that roars or, at best, a bull in a china shop as far as accomplishing many of its major objectives is concerned.

A post-international approach presumes that another related assumption of traditional IR theory – that the world is fundamentally 'anarchic' – tells us little more than that there is no overarching supranational authority. Human affairs are largely governed, that is, 'ruled' on a day-to-day basis, by a multitude of individual polities that exist within, crisscross, or transcend individual states. Some of these polities are internally dysfunctional or inclined to disruption and violence, but many if not most act individually and collectively in a peaceful, highly effective, patterned, and often predictable manner. The news media record shocking events, perpetrated by non-state or sometimes state actors, or Mother Nature in the case of hurricanes and other natural disasters, but normally fail to record (because it is not 'news') the vast tide of human events that each day occurs with its accustomed and reassuringly benign rhythms. It is the actions of individuals and polities

of many types that constitute that tide and – whatever palpable injustices persist – we must be aware and thankful that the prevailing condition is complexity and not utter chaos.

As noted earlier, each polity has its own domain, and it is increasingly the case that domains overlap and authority is shared. This is the 'real world order', one in which the transformation of the micro, macro, and micro-macro parameters specified by the post-international model has led to new patterns with a potential for stability as well as turbulence. Once again, disorder, serious instability, and violence are the exception rather than the norm, whether we are considering what we usually term 'politics', markets, professions, or the neighbourhood garden club. Individuals and families affiliate with their local religious organisations, companies decide to invest in a particular market or to resist stricter environmental standards, a university changes its curriculum, refugees and illegal immigrants migrate across borders, labour unions form picket lines, the World Health Organization starts a new vaccination campaign, the US Federal Reserve raises interest rates, currency speculators push up or depress a particular currency, the British International Studies Association elects a president and governing board, and so forth. It follows that much of the disorder that prevails in the world has limited relevance to anarchy among states as such and everything to do with the capacity of non-state polities to challenge them or operate beyond state control or under their radar.

The distribution and relations among identities and loyalties are central to post-international analysis. Every person has multiple identities. Although some identities can be imposed (for example, prisoners at Guantánamo), most are willingly accepted in exchange for psychological and/or material rewards. Loyalties are distinct from identities and flow only to those authorities and associated identities that provide tangible and/or intangible value satisfaction. Many identities and loyalties can coexist for long periods of time without serious conflict, but periodically contexts arise involving issues that force individuals to make invidious choices as to which identities/loyalties they will serve. Will gender trump religion as regards reproductive health or family planning? Will Islamism trump Arabism on the streets of Cairo?[32] Does religion dominate citizenship among British Muslims?[33]

The territorial state is only one focus of human identity and loyalty, and often not the most important one. Once we use contextual analysis, states typically gain or lose on the affinity scale to the extent that they

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32. See Michael Slackman, 'And Now, Islamism Trumps Arabism,' New York Times (20August 2006), <www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/weekinreview/20slackman.html?ei=5088&en=f3862d1c026b8101&ex=1313726400&adxnnl=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&adxnnlx=1156342010-oVj7Hj9WeYPVCd10MHC6Mw>. See also Stéphanie Giry, 'France and Its Muslims', *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2006): 87–104.

33. See Christopher Caldwell, 'After Londonistan', *New York Times Magazine* (23 June 2006), 41–7, 62, 74.

are viewed as serving the perceived interests of self or collectives such as family, ethnic group, or religion that individuals normally hold dearer than their nation-state. Nested identities/loyalties, like nested polities, are part of what we have termed the world's living museum, and they are activated by issues that affect specific identity groups. When one polity incorporates another, identities and loyalties associated with the former polity are rarely obliterated entirely and, even when it appears that they have been, may eventually be resurrected or reconstructed. The post-Cold War explosion of tribal, ethnic, religious, and racial identities offers powerful evidence of the revival or reconstruction of old memories and loyalties. More importantly, many new polities continuously form and strive to enhance their identity and build the loyalty of their adherents.

As governments reveal themselves to be less and less capable of meeting citizens' expectations and aspirations, their legitimacy declines and alienation from them increases. The unmooring of individual loyalties from traditional institutions produces what Susan Strange labelled 'Pinocchio's problem'. Once Pinocchio became a 'real boy', he no longer had his puppet strings to guide him and, therefore, no authority to command his behaviour. In a world of decentralised authority and lacking global governance, 'we too have Pinocchio's problem. Where do allegiance, loyalty, identity lie? Not always, obviously in the same direction. Sometimes with the government of a state. But other times, with a firm, or with a social movement operating across territorial frontiers'. No longer do national loyalties remain consistently dominant and, according to Strange, without such 'absolutes'; 'each of us shares Pinocchio's problem; our individual consciences are our only guide'.[34]

Notwithstanding 'Pinocchio's problem', it is also important to recognise that identities and loyalties are not entirely a matter of individual volition. There are social pressures and socialisation, political culture, habitual ties that bind, any number of polities and less-coherent 'causes' that are actively bidding for our support and allegiance, and powerful external trends and individual circumstances that pressure us and limit our personal range of choices.

Confluence and Conflict with Other Theoretical Approaches

This article is obviously not the place for a comprehensive discussion and critique of other 'schools' of theory. In this section, however, we merely attempt to identify post-internationalism's key points of convergence and contest with several other well-known theoretical approaches.

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34. Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 198–9.

Realism and Neorealism

The question post-international theory poses, 'who or what influences what in global politics – and why?' shares with realism and neorealism a preoccupation with identifying the sources and directions of the patterns of authority we observe. However, the answers post-internationalists offer to the question are very different from those provided by realists and neorealists.

Post-international theory eschews the realist assumption that the state is the primary or indeed only significant actor in global affairs. States remain important, most show no immediate signs of disappearing, and many are to some extent adapting to changing conditions. But the state and its bureaucracies are only some of a host of influential polities motivated by a shifting mix of interests and passions.[35] Familiar distinctions between 'public' and 'private' begin to dissolve when we perceive that states may be captured by private interests and that private actors such as Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank also perform public interest functions and substantially affect the public good.[36] Furthermore, states themselves rarely if ever 'act' in a unitary fashion. State decision-making is perhaps best understood when it is deconstructed. Almost all 'state' policies can and should be traced back to their wellsprings in the likes of bureaucratic infighting, particular personalities, legislative manoeuvering, interest group influence (increasingly transnational), and alliances with non-state entities.

For post-internationalists – unlike classical realists, but as neoclassical realists like Jennifer Sterling-Folker[37] acknowledge – 'national interest' is primarily a subjective construction. Power shifts, external threats, and opportunities for cooperation are substantially matters of perception. There are very few 'imperatives' emanating from the environment in which policy-makers and attentive publics operate. 'State survival' is only very rarely at stake, and the precise requirements of 'national defence' and effective foreign policies are often hotly debated. Morgenthau's famous dictum that states pursue their national interest defined in terms of power is seriously misleading. Power is rarely an end in itself, but a means to other ends, and in any event, as we have noted, is always contextual, relative to other actors, specific issues, and prevailing circumstances. Despite being a superpower or putative empire, the United States is unable to achieve even its highest priority objectives. Neoconservatives in the current Bush Administration surely

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35. Albert O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

36. See A. Claire Cutler, Virginia Haufler, and Tony Porter (eds), Private Authority and International Affairs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); and Rodney Bruce Hall and Thomas J. Biersteker (eds), *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

37. See the section on 'Realist Approaches' in Jennifer Sterling-Folker (ed.), *Making Sense of International Relations Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005).

did not enhance American power by launching the Iraq war, nor did they heed Morgenthau's advice to make 'prudence' the touchstone for policy.

Krasner[38] is correct in arguing that 'sovereignty' in practice has always been variable rather than absolute, although we do not accept his position that therefore the challenges states face in the contemporary era are not new. State 'sovereignty' is best seen as an aspiration, a legal status and claim of the right to exercise authority, but there is no guarantee that attempts to exercise it will be successful or be regarded as legitimate. Moreover, civil conflicts, terrorism, and criminal activities should dispel the Weberian myth that states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.[39] Not all state violence is regarded as legitimate, and clearly some non-state actors and their followers believe it is fine for them to kill and coerce too.

Post-internationalism rejects the classic realist tenet that the state is the main identity and allegiance for citizens. The key identities and loyalties in human existence are to self and family/clan, tribe or loved ones, to religion, to professions, to interest associations, to ethnicity (in some societies), even to sports teams, and so on – in short, to relationships and polities other than the state. The modern state came into existence partly through coercion but primarily because citizens came to identify the welfare of the things they mainly cared about with support of and loyalty to the state. When that linkage weakens, crises of state authority ensue. Today, the state system is experiencing an authority crisis as politicians find it harder and harder to deliver on their promises, much as earlier transformations witnessed authority crises for dominant polities such as the Catholic Church during the Reformation or the Roman Empire when confronted by Christianity and 'barbarian' tribal polities.

Post-international theory sees the growth of international and regional institutions, as well as the slow but steady advance of international law, as a natural result of states' efforts to achieve through some measure of collective action what their own territorial constraints make it impossible for them to achieve alone. Post-internationalists also reject the classic realist dictum that norms must yield to expediency in international relations.[40] Although norms may come into conflict with one another or may yield unanticipated outcomes, normative impulses permeate human individual and collective behaviour, including IR theory. They underpin ideology; they provoke passion; and, in fact, most actors regard them as crucial sources of legitimacy. In fact, even realists should be seen as preaching their own version of what 'ought' to

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38. Krasner, *Sovereignty*.

39. It always was something of a myth, as Janice E. Thomson argues convincingly in *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Oded Lowenheim, *Predators and Parasites: Persistent Agents of Transnational Harm and Great Power Authority* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

40. See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 175–91.

be. National governments use the claim of 'national interest' to muddy the waters, but everything leaders say or do has inescapable normative overtones and repercussions.

Not surprisingly, post-internationalists have a broader view of international system structure than neorealists do. The exemplar neorealist, Kenneth Waltz, focused almost exclusively on the distribution of capabilities among states and resulting polarity that starkly contrasts with the issue-oriented and contextual world we described above. In a post-international world, innumerable polities of different types, as well as countless individuals, interact around particular issues that routinely cross or transcend state boundaries. Taking Strange's reference to Pinocchio a step further, an analogy might be dramas acted out in a marionette theatre: whenever the strings' cards labelled for this or that drama are pulled, the marionettes whose strings are attached to those cards begin to 'act', while all the others remain motionless. Thus, one way of conceiving of the 'structure' of global politics consistent with post-international theory is as numerous issue systems. They carry names such as 'Iran's nuclear programme', 'justice for the victims of genocide in Cambodia', 'fish stocks in the Outer Banks', 'avian flu', 'human trafficking', 'economic collapse in Argentina', 'agricultural subsidies', 'intellectual pirating of movies and music', and so on and so forth. Issues can be discrete but, like the polities that are engaged in them, often overlap and nest. Iranian nuclear ambitions are part of a larger non-proliferation issue-area, Cambodia and Darfur are part of a bigger issue of genocide and war crimes, and the like.

In addition, there is a disturbing absence of attention in the neorealist universe to the structural implications of the distribution of subjective factors such as expectations and affect. Thus, from a post-international perspective, it is critical to map the distribution identities and loyalties and/or, like Rosenau, the orientations of individuals to various 'global worlds', his main theme in *Distant Proximities*. He is at pains to point out that those orientations – may we add, rather like our marionette example – may shift even as individuals find themselves engaged in different issues. In short, issues arise that generate different attitudes and behaviour, even as they increase or decrease the salience of particular identities and loyalties.

Among realists, we applaud the search of structural realists like Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little[41] for 'deep structures' in the international system, which appear to us to have the potential of revealing a world of polities.[42] We do, however, disagree with Buzan's and Little's position that each historical epoch produces a dominant polity type and that the dominant type in the modern era has been the

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41. Barry Buzan, Richard Little, and Charles Jones. *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

42. See also Robert A. Denemark, Jonathan Friedman, Barry K. Friedman, and George Modelski (eds), *World System History: The Science of Long-Term Change* (London: Routledge, 2000).

state.[43] Much of human affairs has proceeded apart from the state, and arguably the state's share has further diminished in recent decades. 'Dominance' or 'hegemony' depends on the issue.

We may also consider structure in global politics in terms of differential engagement in prevailing patterns including globalising trends. Thomas Friedman is no doubt correct that for some business elites and companies the world is decidedly 'flat'.[44] For Richard Florida – considering such things as concentrations of population, energy consumption, and patents and copyrights – the world is 'spiky'.[45] Sassen[46] and others have somewhat similarly looked at the world as a landscape of 'global cities' – 'scattered territorialities'[47] – whose connections are providing much of the dynamism for globalisation and are themselves being transformed by it.

Last but not least with regard to structure is the distribution of winners and losers from prevailing patterns. This is a normative dimension. Marxists have traditionally been preoccupied with matters of equality and justice, as are many of today's post-positivists, and these are concerns that must not be lost despite the abject failure of Marxism as a political project. Plainly, there are 'haves' and 'have nots' and lots of 'in-betweens' in the contemporary globalising world, whether one is focusing on political human rights or economic welfare. There are also, evidently, close connections among this sort of structure, identities and loyalties, and actual or potential conflicts.

Liberal Institutionalism, International Society ('The Englsh School'), Constructivism, Critical Theory, and Postmodernism

International institutions have proliferated in recent decades and have become increasingly important and familiar polities in global politics. Unfortunately, much of the scholarship over the years that has sought to wrestle with the growing impact of international institutions and law has had a strong state-centric realist bias. This was true of the early work of liberal institutional theorist Robert Keohane[48], Hedley Bull[49] of the English School, and most recently the specific version of constructivism

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43. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 374.

44. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

45. Richard Florida, 'The World Is Spiky', *Atlantic Monthly* (October 2005): 48–51.

46. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

47. Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 54.

48. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

49. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

advanced by Alexander Wendt.[50] Wendt's phrase that 'anarchy is what states make of it'[51] is a case in point. Nonetheless, all of the foregoing, in their different ways, tried to make the useful point that states engaged in 'international society' might well perceive their interests to be served by international cooperation as well as or better than by conflict.

The early approach to explanation, on the one hand, gave too little attention to increasing levels of interdependence that make it all the more likely that states will find institutions and rules well-nigh indispensable and, on the other hand, to the significant autonomy won by some institutions after their creation. Keohane's later work, for example, stresses the 'thick networks of interdependence' involving both states and other actors and also the facts that institutions themselves 'matter' and have their distinct sources of legitimacy. [52] Similarly, non-state-centric constructivists, notably Friedrich Kratochwil,[53] Nicholas Onuf,[54] and John Ruggie,[55] also have systematically explored the reasons for the importance of international law, constitutive principles, and less formal rules in world affairs.

The recent work of Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore,[56] who characterise international organisations (IOs) essentially as bureaucracies that exercise 'rational-legal' authority 'in their domain of action', has significantly advanced our understanding of IOs. Barnett and Finnemore note that IO constitutions and mandates frequently require extensive interpretation and indeed that exercising initiative to sort out problems is exactly what states often want IOs to do. To be sure, IOs still have to be wary of powerful states, but many IOs have far more room for initiative than they usually get credit for. IOs indeed have their own sources of authority that derive from their reputation for serving noble purposes and also technical expertise. In fact, suggest Barnett and Finnemore, IOs have identifiable 'pathologies' that derive from their bureaucratic nature and hamper their ultimate performance.

Such efforts give IOs their due merit approval, but should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the spotlight should also fall on a much broader range of polities on the global stage. For instance, Onuf's brand of

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50. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

51. Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,' *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring, 1992): 391–425.

52. Robert O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (London: Routledge, 2002).

53. Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

54. Vendulka Kubálková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert, *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY, M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

55. John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 1998).

56. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

constructivism 'begins with people…the simple social relations they have with one another' and works it 'way up to complex relations, practices, institutions, "structures," or social arrangements that are called states or IR.' His is 'a picture of "staggering complexity and constant change" within the interwoven patterns of overlapping social arrangements.'[57]

In this connection, it is worth recalling Bull's additional speculations about the possible eventual emergence of a 'new medievalism' in the global system. This idea remains highly provocative because all the trends that he identified three decades ago as foretokens of a 'new medievalism'[58] are even more apparent today. Bull was certainly on the right track, but there were always two difficulties with that characterisation. First, the concept has unfortunate Eurocentric overtones, since 'the Middle Ages' are too often seen merely as the prelude to the European state system. Second, 'the new medievalism' is too limited with respect to timeframe, since the sort of dispersed authority patterns Bull saw threatening actually have been a feature of most of world history. Some of the interesting work of various scholars on 'world system history' is assisting to make this clear.[59] Arguably it was not the Middle Ages but the Westphalian era in Europe that was exceptional, although the post-international lens perceives plenty of dispersed authority in the Westphalian era as well.

Post-internationalists do share with constructivists and postmodernists a concern with the 'socially constructed' dimensions of global politics, including the importance of identities as promoting interests and conditioning human behaviour. It is interesting and significant that Rosenau now speaks of himself (perhaps facetiously) as a 'pre-postmodernist',[60] partly because he is now keenly aware of the ways his own personal assumptions and motivations over the years have shaped his approach to theorising and partly because part of his enterprise in later years has effectively deconstructed some parsimonious theories and concepts. That is a mission we have also undertaken.

Post-international theory merges to some extent with critical theorists and postmodernists with respect to the elusiveness of concepts and language generally and about the inherently normative nature of all scholarship. However, post-internationalism parts company with extreme relativists among the postmodernists and some critical theorists epistemologically because it still regards the theoretical quest as being essentially an empirical enterprise. We insist – and here we are in accord with Wendt and most constructivists – that there is an objective 'reality' 'out there', however hard it is to analyse objectively because of inadequate information and 'the spectacles behind the eyes' we all wear. The subjective dimension of political life – ideas, norms, identities, even

57. 'Preface,' in Kubálkova, Onuf, and Kowert, *International Relations in a Constructed World*, xi. This reference courtesy of an anonymous reviewer of this article.

58. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 264–76.

59. See, for example, Denemark et al. (eds), *World System History*.

60. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities*, ch. 19.

language – consists of empirical referents and, though more difficult to scrutinise than the objective dimension, is also 'out there'. This does not mean that we retain any lingering faith – unlike Rosenau – in the eventual triumph of 'scientific' analysis.[61] We are more comfortable in the company of 'soft' social scientists and humanists than strict 'scientists' (which Rosenau himself today is not) and rational-choice gamers.

A Post-international Research Agenda[62]

Fathoming the emerging post-international world requires a very long historical perspective. Many of the dynamics and patterns we now observe are by no means unprecedented, although some are entirely new. But which are which? One might expect the past to be far 'simpler' in many respects – and it was in some ways – but it was also remarkably complex in others. Interdependence, overlapping polities, and competing identities have been prominent features of world politics for millennia, including the three centuries of the 'Westphalian moment'. Revisiting these features in other settings and epochs themselves and examining how they were played out in the past suggests useful lines of investigation for the present.

The authors of this article are now engaged in two major projects. One focuses on *pre-international* polities in the ancient Mediterranean and another on empires old and new. Making sense of the successive transformations that characterised a pre-international epoch, including its eventual evolution into international relations, will provide insights into the fundamentals of political change as well as the range of political forms and allegiances that still have relevance for our contemporary world. One of the reasons we have chosen to zero in on the ancient Mediterranean for one project is the abundance of information on that evolving historical system and also its direct influence on later European political institutions and ideas.

Analysing empires (not confined to the ancient Mediterranean) is an important reminder that territorial states with legally fixed boundaries are not the only polities in human history with a claim to primacy. Like states, empires have come in all shapes and sizes. Some observers suggest (in our view, erroneously in any empirical sense) that an American empire persists to the present day. Empires at once illustrate the nesting that so often characterises polities, as well as the critical lesson that any central polity finds its influence severely limited. Successful empires profited from an understanding of their limitations and dependence on the domains of other polities. The same, of course, has been true for states.

Another dimension of a broader post-international research agenda must focus on the origins, evolution, nesting, and possible demise of

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61. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *The Elusive Quest Continues: Theory and Global Politics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003).

62. See also Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, 'Remapping Political Space: Issue and Non-Issues in Analyzing Global Politics in the Twenty-First Century', in *Political Space*, ed. Ferguson and Jones, 87–111.

identities and loyalties. This is a relatively new frontier. To what extent are long-standing notions of self and others remaining constant or shifting in response to broad systemic changes? Answers to this question are crucial to understanding the viability of existing political forms and possible future patterns of political association.

A fourth promising and almost limitless direction for research revolves around political issues. For each issue of concern, what general trends in global and local environments open space for and condition the behaviour of individuals and collectivities? What polities of various types are engaged in the issue? What are their sources of influence and/or control, how legitimate are they seen to be, and to what extent are they successful in realising their potential? What are the normative implications of the patterns observed including value allocations with regard to this issue? What policy prescriptions for which polities might lead the way to more desirable outcomes?

The research agenda we have outlined for ourselves and recommend to others is clearly an ambitious one, but in our view must be pursued if we are fully to comprehend our post-international world. There is really no alternative unless we are to content ourselves with a context-limited and state-centric neverland.

Yale H. Ferguson is Professor of Political Science and Co-Director, Division of Global Affairs, Rutgers University-Newark

Richard W. Mansbach is Professor of Political Science, Iowa State University.
