

Governing in a Borderless World:
Meeting the Challenge of Instability

A National Conversation
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Jane Harman:

Good afternoon. Welcome to springtime in Washington.

[laughter]

It will only last another few hours, but it will last for the duration of this panel. And we have a very springy group here and we're delighted to welcome you to the Wilson Center. I'm Jane Harman, the president and CEO of the Wilson Center, a recovering politician, and it is my pleasure -- I don't see them, but I'm sure they're here -- to introduce Joe and Alma Gildenhorn. Are they -- where are they? They were just here. Joe is the immediate past-chairman of our board. They are enormous supporters of the Wilson Center and the co-chairs of the Wilson Cabinet.

Today marks the 21st National Conversation that we have hosted with NPR. And most importantly, it is both Bob Kagan's and David Ignatius' third appearance since we launched the series, did you know? And I don't actually know what the statistics -- oh, there they are. You just were introduced. The Gildenhorns are making a dramatic entrance. I don't know how many times Steve has been here.

Steve Inskeep:
Maybe three.

Jane Harman:

Maybe three, maybe more. Okay, so we have a lot of repeaters here and that's because they're fabulous. Over the past we've hosted NATCONs with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, China's new leadership, Admiral Bill McRaven on the U.S. Special Operations 20/20, Homeland Security -- former Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano on cyber security, Senator Bob Corker on the future of the authorization to use military force, and so on. Our NATCONs analyze big ideas. So here's a really big idea. Why do we need nation states at a time when information travels in ones and zeroes? We're not just talking about personal information or commercial information, or even government activity. We're also

talking about information between terrorists as they plot how to blow us up or take down our infrastructure. Those individuals of concern could be a kid in an Internet café in the boonies of Yemen or in a basement anywhere in America. These people fit the definition of non-state actors as much as this activity is borderless. These young, digital natives have spent the past few years while the U.S. focused on eliminating core Al-Qaeda leadership, building up their propaganda elements and their recruiting shop for foreign fighters. For instance, according to some reports, Westerners, mostly from Europe, make up 10 percent of the new recruits in Syria. Add to this that many national borders were set by international conferences -- and I think we're going to hear about this in more depth than I can put it, just one sentence guys -- centuries ago and have no relation to tribal affiliations or ethnicities. Some states formed in this matter -- manner have already split up into smaller parts -- think Yugoslavia -- but most have not.

Wilson Center Middle East expert Robin Wright, who is now headed to Iran, recently put it this way in a newspaper column: quote "The Arab Spring was the kindling. Arabs not only wanted to oust dictators, they wanted power decentralized to reflect local identity or rights to resources. Syria then set a match to itself and conventional wisdom about geography." So this is a really big issue, which we ignore at our peril. I hope our panel will test all aspects and I think under the extraordinary Steve Inskeep it will, but a warning from grandma here, if you don't, you can bet some kid somewhere will test all aspects of the problem. Here to help us understand where we are going in this brave, new world, is an all-star lineup, Washington wise man and "Post" columnist, David Ignatius. I confess that I read his columns to learn what I think. He's a dear friend whom I accused recently of being too busy to pay attention to me. So guess what? He sent me flowers after years of rudeness.

[laughter]

Absorb that, folks.

[laughter]

There's also Bob Kagan of the Brookings Institution, an expert on foreign policy and the principal -- I didn't know this, speech writer to George Shultz. Is that true?

Bob Kagan:
Not anymore.

Jane Harman:
Not anymore.

[laughter]

Well, you know -- interruption folks, George Shultz, whom I just saw in Singapore, is 92-1/2 and going strong, within the last six months shot a hole-in-one playing golf. So -- and we have Bruce Jentleson, a Wilson Center scholar, yes, professor of public policy, Duke, and long-time State Department hand. NPR's Steve Inskeep, the first male voice I hear when I wake up every morning, will moderate our panel. From the Persian Gulf to the wreckage of New Orleans, he has interviewed presidents, war lords, authors, and musicians, as well as those not in the headlines. He's extraordinary and we're honored to have Steve moderate again. And this time we will not have a short keynote speech, which we have in the past because David Ignatius wanted to save all of his pearls of wisdom for Steve's panel. Welcome to all.

Steve Inskeep:
All right. Thank you Madame President. Thank you very much. It's an honor to be here. It's delightful to be at your new table, which is new since I was here last, and it's a very impressive table, and I think the table may answer some of the questions better than we will, but we'll do our best.

[laughter]

And let's begin right here with a question that Jane Harman posed with that introduction. Are states, governments, borders, institutions, militaries, are states become irrelevant?

David Ignatius:
Well, you're looking at me and that suggests that I should lead this off and I'm happy to do that. Just to mention something that I said to Jane where we were talking about

this idea, which I heard from my teacher and mentor when I was an undergraduate, generally a wasted period of my life with the exception of the time I spent with Daniel Bell. Daniel Bell observed in 1977, after I graduated, that the problem with the nation state is that is too big for the small problems of life and too small for the big problems. And he went on in a very prescient essay to talk about how the economy would become more interdependent, how nation state borders would, in a sense, get in the way of a globalizing economy. He anticipated some of the friction that we saw first in Yugoslavia, but now have seen throughout the Middle East. When I think, Steve, of the nation state, I think about having watched its collapse.

In Iraq when we knocked the pegs out from under the brutal authoritarian dictator who held the nation state together, and then it shouldn't have surprised us, watched people flee to their most basic religious, tribal, sectarian identities because they no longer had the nation state as an identity. We've been watching the same thing, obviously, in Libya. We got rid of a hideous dictator, a kind of burlesque of an authoritarian figure. And we've seen that Libya post-Gaddafi really is ruled street-by-street almost, certainly neighborhood-by-neighborhood, tribe-by-tribe, clan-by-clan as the authority of the nation state is knocked out. And then I've seen up close in the last year what happened in Syria when the authority of the nation state -- it was a self-destruction, as Jane said, when Bashar al-Assad began firing on his own people and ultimately using chemical weapons on his own people -- the nation rebelled. But Syria is now an utterly lawless place, a place where Al-Qaeda is putting down root. I wrote this week that there are, by the count of my intelligence sources, over 5,000 foreign fighters in Syria fighting with the Al-Qaeda affiliate, the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria. Over 5,000, that's out of a larger population or this group that pushes toward 20,000. So in the absence of a state in Syria, as in these other places, and a state army that's coherent, we are seeing nightmarish problems. And those, I hope, we'll talk about through this conversation.

Steve Inskeep:

You pointed to identity, the people fleeing to different identities, sectarian identities in Iraq. I'm reminded that there was a period in which America trainers of Iraqi troops like to tell a little homily about how they kept

reminding Iraqis that their identity was not Sunni or Shia, it was Iraqi. Maybe the fact that an American had to try to tell them that was the first suggestion of a problem. And I want to ask our other panelists, is that just a symptom of a particular time and place or is that symbolic of something larger that's happening in the world and something larger that's happening to the state?

Bruce Jentleson:

So, I think we've got this nice I, J, K order we figured out here. So, as the "J," I'll go. You know, I think the state is definitely, as my colleagues have said, part of the problem, but I don't think it's got to be a part of the solution. So one of the ways to think about the way it's part of the problem is to go back to this commercial that was on American TV for a while for Las Vegas. And they'd say, "You know, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." It may or not have been true, but that was the commercial. But what happens in states doesn't stay inside states. So one of the great challenges we face globally is this version of the Vegas dilemma, you know, not mass atrocities that set off refugee flows, not population uprisings against repressive governments that scramble regional geopolitics, you know, not pandemics, not safe havens for terrorism, et cetera. And so, the inability -- the weakness of states isn't just the states' problems, it's the globe's problems. And we can't always predict where it's going to come from. You know, as you think about global pandemics, there's a whole variety of places they could start, and you don't have to go back to the movie "Contagion" to get a sense for that.

At the same time I think states have to be part of the solution because if you think about all the different ways we try to create order in the world, and what the weaknesses are, or you think of what's happened in the world since the end of the Cold War, there are many more states and there are a whole lot of states out there that are saying, "This is really exciting. We're a state for the first time, or at least for the first time in recent history." And you have others that are rediscovering, you know, history and nationalism. So you see what's going on in Asia now. China and Japan and South Korea are very much about their history over 100 years together as states, or countries like Brazil that are kind of getting seats at the table as a state for the first time. And even with all the different identities, you know, and in some places like

Iraq, they haven't worked out a state [unintelligible] partly because of the way their state was formed. But it's still the principal source of identity; even in Europe, which is so integrated, people still think of themselves, you know, as a Greek and maybe a European, or as a German and maybe a European, and Latin American, you know, and Africa, you know, as well. And so, along with the strains on the state identities -- and if states don't do their job of keeping basic order, then it takes a global agenda, whether it's for the U.S., the U.N., or anybody else, which is already overloaded and just adds to it, you know, an untenable amount. So, you know, I don't think they're going away. They're under a lot of stresses and a lot's coming out of them and affecting the rest of us with the Vegas dilemma, so they've got to it's strengthened.

Steve Inskeep:

Well, maybe that's something we need to define here. Are states broadly across the globe really in that much trouble. We can think about a lot of countries that have absorbed a lot of social change or calamity, or stress from Iran to China to North Korea, that are still there and still functioning to one degree or another as states. Are states actually in danger of becoming irrelevant?

Bob Kagan:

I mean, I'm more surprised by the durability of states, if anything. You know, we've been predicting the end of the nation state for at least 100 years, you know. At the dawn of the 20th century there was all this discussion because of economic -- what was -- what we would have called globalization then, tremendous economic interdependence, communication and transportation revolution, people genuinely started talking about the end of nation states. They were inventing a universal language at that time. And then we got kind of hit with World War I, which sort of proved how mistaken that was. You know, I think it was about almost 30 years ago one of my former bosses, Jessica Matthews, wrote an article called "Power Shift," which was written about how the nation state was drifting away and was going to be overcome by all these things. And it just hasn't happened. And, you know, in terms of even Daniel Bell's prescient and one never wants to, you know, suggest there's anything that Daniel Bell said that could be wrong, but, you know, I'm struck -- if you just take this one issue and this one that Dan Dressner has recently written about -- if you look at the way the

major nations of the world handled the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression of 1929, and the 1930s, and compare it to the way the world economic system handled our most recent economic crisis, they were much more effective this time. I mean, they really saved, I believe, the central bankers and the others -- the other key figures, really saved the world from going into a much worse economic calamity, whereas the great nation states of the 1920s and 30s really failed utterly in that sense. So, I'm not sure that the nation state is going away. After all, we're sort of in sort of century eight now of the nation state and those of you who like I am, going through the AP world course with my kids, know that forms of government come and go. And this is a pretty long run as these things go. But I'm also not convinced that the state hasn't adapted to some of the problems. Yes, there's going to be places where you have collapse like Syria, but I, as I say, I'm sort of surprised at the durability of the state in the present system.

Steve Inskip:

Well, there's a couple of points I want to make. First, you mentioned Daniel Bell. I think you said that other than that experience, your undergraduate experience was wasted, was that right?

David Ignatus:

Largely.

Bob Kagan:

He was at Harvard, that's why.

David Ignatus:

Largely.

Steve Inskip:

I just mention that --

David Ignatus:

Don't tell my dad.

Steve Inskip:

If any of his former professors are in the audience, be sure to raise your hand during the question session, other than Daniel Bell, and ask him about the waste. But getting back to the point at hand here, I was trying to think of an analogy for what's happening to states' governments, and I

supposed what you're trying to describe is that there are other forms of identity, other forces that are coming to the fore, whether it's religion, whether it's ideology, whether it's technology, whether it's economic forces, I wondered if a way to think of it is a little like the big three television networks here in the United States. ABC, NBC, CBS used to be totally dominant. Now there are more competitors for attention and time and money, and yet, the networks are still somehow there. Is that what's happening in the world right now?

David Ignatus:

Well, I, you know, one of the trends of the digital world that we see in the media business, but you could apply it to the questions of states, is this sort of disaggregation, the way in which the phrase one of the consultants used is the bundles had been blown to bits, the bundle that's a newspaper that, you know, put everything that you should know about the world into one package, that blown up. So if you want to read about sports, you go right to your sports site, general interest magazines similarly had a bundling and collecting function. They've been damaged to the point of many of them sadly disappearing. And I think it's true for states that there is this sort of -- when you have global networks, they often bypass the nation state and its institutions --

Steve Inskeep:

Global networks, we're talking about social networks, economic networks, financial networks --

David Ignatus:

Well, we're talking about when you have companies -- when you have global companies that are operating in let's say 120 different countries, and can do business, you know, at the push of a button, the idea of regulating them, of drawing nation state lines on what they can and can't do, obviously doesn't work very well. You know, early on with the Internet, one of the questions was, "Should you assert state sales tax obligations on Internet sales" as they zipped through this instantaneous, you know, national network. And wisely, people decided, no, that would be a terrible mistake. So there's a regulatory set of questions -- you know, I -- basically I'm where Bob Kagan is in the sense that I'm surprised by the durability of nations, even in the parts of the world where they're most stressed. Lebanon is place that I've been going since 1980, almost 35

years. And I've seen Lebanon through the years of civil war. I've seen Lebanon when it effectively was cantonized and the cantons were each protected by individual militias that shot anything that came across the boundary line of the canton. Yet, even in that period, Lebanon had a parliament. It had a president. It had an army. The army stayed in its barracks. It didn't move out of the barracks, but it never lost the army because the idea of the Lebanese nation state, of being Lebanese, had meaning for people. I think find that weirdly in Iraq. I mean, Iraq is splintering, but the idea that there's an Iraqi identity still is pretty strong. Same thing in Syria. So, you know, these goofy lines that were drawn by Mark Sykes and something or other Jorge Piqueaux [spelled phonetically] in 1916, this famous Sykes-Piqueaux lines, from the A in Auker [spelled phonetically] to the K in Kirkuk [spelled phonetically], said Mark Sykes, that everybody often says, it's just nonsense. They're invented, they're imaginary, it's all baloney. Oddly, these lines do have a kind of durability over time. And I think we ought to admit that even as we see the stresses.

Steve Inskeep:

Any idea why that would be?

David Ignatus:

Well, force of habit. I think armies -- the existence of a national army does have a sort of identifying, solidifying character. People were recruited into the army from all the different provinces. You know, one reason the Ottoman Empire survived was that people were drawn from all the different [unintelligible] into a central administrative structure. The Ottomans were very clever about how they balanced local and centralized. So, I think armies are important. And I think strong armies are important. One thing I've learned, just to close out my thought on this, is that where states exist strong states generally are a good thing. And it should be in the interest of the United States -- we shouldn't be embarrassed about helping states be strong, helping train their armies so they're good, efficient democratic armies if they're democracies. Egypt, Egypt after a period of terrible instability, has decided that it loves its army. It loves its army, even if its army kills a thousand people in a day --

Bob Kagan:

They don't love the army.

David Ignatus:

Those people -- but, you know, you go travel around Egypt and you'll find an astonishing -- and I think it's really a response to the chaos of people living in a very disordered non-nation and then kind of grasping what it feels like to be a nation again.

Bob Kagan:

This is a key point and I think that, you know, one of the things that endures throughout history is people's need for security. And where the security comes from usually sets the boundaries of what the allegiances are. Interestingly, where are -- where do we see some fragmentation? I lived in Belgium for six years. Belgians are fragmenting in a remarkable way. Scotland is voting -- they probably won't vote for independence, but you have Scottish. In Spain, you have --

Male Speaker:

Catalonia.

Bob Kagan:

-- the Catalonian movement for independence. I believe that all of that comes from the fact, a) that they feel entirely secure, and b) that insofar as they have anything overarching for them, the EU provides this overall umbrella that if they were in a more, you know, dangerous situation they wouldn't be necessarily moving in that direction. And so, I think if you want to look for units that are going to hang together, it's the ones that provide security for people and it is still the case by and large the nation state does that the most effectively.

Bruce Jentleson:

And what you have going on, I think, are two processes at once that we're sort of speaking about. One is integration? Are we getting all interconnected in so many ways, economically, technologically, et cetera. And the other is fragmentation, right? And both are going on, not just one or the other. And it varies in different parts of the world or even varies within parts of the world. But there's a tremendous nationalism out there. I mean, that is to me what you see that's going now in places like China, Australia, you know, trying to sort out what kind of -- you know, they're the only state in the world that's part of the Anglo-sphere and part of Asia. What does that

mean to their future? You go to Brazil and they're very proud. Then the last -- under Lula they created embassies in 40 countries. They never had them before. You know, the prime minister of India made the first visit to Saudi Arabia in decades. So there are more states that have more relations with each other. Or even some of the global problems like on a lot of the global public health problems. They've kind of got the WHO up there coordinating, but it's really like our CDC and their counterparts in other states that work out how to deal with avian flu and things. So you know, it's not like it's just a president that goes to talk to a president, but you have this interconnection of parts of the states working with each other. So it's not, as you were saying, Steve, it's not the only unit out there. There's a lot more going on in the world -- this integration. But the state still is the central unit by which people get their identity, by which people do their politics.

Steve Inskeep:

So I think I need to revise my opening question. I asked are states -- nation states becoming irrelevant? It seems the answer is no, they're still relevant. But you all seem to be saying that they're under different kinds and new kinds of stresses. So let's define some of those stresses. David, you specified one, the company that does business in 120 countries may evade the power of the state or put new stresses on the state. What are some of the other stresses on nation states around the world?

Bruce Jentleson:

I mean, to get the ball rolling in that, I'd that, you know, in the broadest terms, every state is trying to figure out how to be a capable state, you know, legitimate in the eyes of its own people, which we think of as elections, but there's other forms of legitimacy. And giving people a sense that they're not solving all their problems, but they've got the arrows pointed in the right direction, so that it will be better for their kids. And a lot of these states are in their first decade or two, right? I mean, that Ukraine is, you know, really had been, you know, you know, it's sort of post-post-Cold War. And so, part of what we're seeing in some cases is that it's crumbling like an Iraq where there wasn't really a state identity and you reveal that it was never really there when you got rid of Saddam Hussein. And others are, you know, countries like Egypt that are trying to decide what kind of

state they want to be. So it's not so much should we still be a state, but what kind of state? And what does it mean for us to be a capable state, a state that the people feel the government has a degree of legitimacy, and is kind of capable -- it's, you know, we feel like it's got the arrow pointed in the right direction. And there are a whole lot of different answers out there. It's not just the end of history or everybody's going capitalist, but it's a whole variety of efforts to answer it going on in different countries.

Steve Inskeep:
David?

David Ignatus:

I would note as one of the stresses on the nation state beyond the obvious one of sectarian strife that we've talked about a little bit. The problem of slow economic growth, you can see the stress on our state from repeated years now of low or non-existent growth in real incomes and the ways in which, coupled with increasing inequality, that stresses our political system. And our political system you'd have to say is in very bad shape. And when I try to think about why, I think one of the answer is that our economy just isn't growing fast enough to make this feel like an opportunity society. One thing that Daniel Bell, if he was alive, would note is that in the world that emerged you had instant mobility of capital across regional boundaries, national boundaries, you know, European Union as a fantastic example. But you don't have similar mobility of labor. Greeks spoke Greek and they basically wanted to stay in Greece. Even as capital moved quickly and then the adjustments on the downside when you had, you know, massive capital problems, debt problems, should have been in part with labor mobility, Greeks go to where the jobs are, they didn't. It's just -- as Caines [spelled phonetically] would say, it's sticky. It's just tough to get that transition. So, I think for states, that's -- I mean, we saw that problem in the United States. People will do anything, go anywhere for a job, the great migration of African-Americans from the south really is a transforming American moment because, you know, people just left by the millions and went north and our whole focus of our history in the mid-20th century changed because of that event. Nothing like that has happened in Europe despite an, you know, I would say, a corresponding economic crisis. And that's interesting.

Steve Inskeep:

Something like that should have happened? I mean --

David Ignatus:

Well, I don't -- I mean, other than -- so you have to -- I mean, what are the mechanisms of adjustment in these extra, you know, super-national organizations? You either have a single fiscal policy that's administered from Brussels. Well, people aren't going to accept that. Or you have -- because you already have mobility of capital, so you're going to have mobility of labor so people go where the jobs are, as one part grows faster than the other. And that's not happening, so a lot of people look at this and say, it's just, you know, in the end you're going to have to have -- the only adjustment is to leave the union. And that's, you know, that's one of the ultimate questions or tests in this issue of what is the proper boundary, nation state, you know, wider union, and it's the ability to solve precisely this problem of economic growth.

Steve Inskeep:

And when you were talking about religious divisions, I was thinking about non-geographic identities, which must have multiplied. The possibilities must have multiplied in recent years. I can be a member of a nation, a citizen of a nation, but also with a religion, which doesn't have to be geographic at all. I can also be part of a group of Twitter followers or people on Facebook. I can be part of a global elite. I can be connected to a lot of different people in a lot of different ways that aren't connected at all to the state.

Bruce Jentleson:

Yeah, you know, a lot of psychologists that study say we are capable of having multiple identities. There's usually one that's the most central one. I mean, I grew up in New York. I haven't lived there in ages, and I still think of myself as a New Yorker, die-hard Yankees fan, although both my children have married people from Boston, which led me and my wife to think what did we do wrong in raising them?

[laughter]

But, you know, it's -- you know, so I think there are multiple identities that people have, but this is where the persistence -- I mean, using Europe as an example, and, you

know, Belgium is one case, how this is the most advanced regional integration over the last half century anywhere in the world, you know, in so many ways, the education systems, the economies. Yet people still think of themselves, you know, as a Spaniard and a European. And I don't totally understand the psychology of that. That's what -- and I think it's going to take many generations, if at all, for that to change, which is why the national identity still is an anchor. I think it's less true in some of these areas of the Middle East that goes back to the way those states were constituted, but, you know, China and Japan are both dealing with in some respects, too much nationalism, right, in their own politics right now. So there's no fading -- you know, Indonesia is feeling itself, a lot of countries in Asia are feeling very much like we are the nation state and these other identities are secondary.

Steve Inskeep:

Do the elites of different countries, including this one, feel the same connection to the country as the people at large? And by the elites, I mean the people who do business around the world who can afford to travel around the world, who can be the president of Pakistan but have a home in Dubai in case things don't work out very well there, and a home in London in case things don't work out in Dubai. And maybe a few homes other places. I mean, there are a lot of people like that around the world, a lot of Americans who can leave the United States if they need to.

Bob Kagan:

I don't think they'd give up their passport, though.

[laughter]

David Ignatus:

I -- you know, this is something that's -- that I every time I go to an international conference that's celebrating globalization, I think about the way in which globalization has plugged people, yes, into this global grid. And it's exciting, you know. And we're talking about common themes and people's children are trying to get into the same universities and studying the same great professors. And then maybe they'll all, you know, try to get that job at Goldman Sachs or the big law firms, and it's one world at this elite level. What we forget is that as people plug

into this global grid, they unplug from their local grid. So the elites and the stabilizing role that elites' stabilizing, integrating role that elites can play in their countries, begins to disappear. And I think that's -- it's no often noted, but I think that's one of the really pernicious effects of globalization is that it stole the sort of talent and integrating, you know, glue, if you will, from a lot of these societies as people rushed to this incredible global grid and its rewards.

Bruce Jentleson:

I think it's a really good point. It goes back to what you said earlier, David, about the inequality. You know, in the '90s we thought globalization is going to be the classic rising tide that lifts all boats. And in a whole lot of studies, Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, you know, the gaps have been getting greater, right, and the President spoke to this yesterday, but it's been there, you know, in a lot of respects. And in some respects, people in, you know, in India will tell you Bangalore feels like they have more in common with Silicon Valley than they do with a community 30 miles away. And Silicon Valley has more in common with Bangalore than it does with, say, rural Montana. And so that is a, you know, a problem for leadership where people's own interests are. They're not necessarily in the same place as large masses of people inside their own states.

Bob Kagan:

Although -- I'm sorry, the historian in me keeps wanting to say I just don't know how new any of this stuff is. I mean, there was a time in Europe, for instance, I would say arguably for three or four centuries, when the aristocratic elite had much more in common with each other when royalty had much more in common with each other and they would talk to each other. One of them famously said, "I'm so sick of my stupid country." They -- there was a, you know, the congress of Vienna was in agreement among transnational aristocrats to hold on to the aristocracy and prevent revolution. So, I'm not sure we're -- I think that was more cosmopolitan in some respects. Then, of course, that also immediately disintegrated as soon as war returned. I think -- I must say, I'm -- I admit to be a bit of a dinosaur, but we get very excited about the technological changes that have occurred, and they have. And they have undoubtedly had an effect. But I think our desire to assume that these technological revolutions are changing

everything about the way the world works, we get a little carried away. I continue to be struck by how enduring some of the basic realities of international existence are, including -- and on this question of, you know, where allegiances lie, you can't get away from the importance of national sovereignty in terms of how citizens look to a government to provide them. They look to a government, they don't look to the world. In the case of the EU, they have begun to move into this sort of post-modern era, but the rest of the world has to look to their government for things. And I think as long as that's the case, you're going to have the centrality of nation states. And by the way, if the government isn't giving them those things, they look for other things. That's when you move to sectarianism. Why do you give up on the Iraqi state? Because the Iraqi state has stopped protecting you. So therefore, who do you turn to? You turn to your blood relatives, you turn to the people, you turn to clan. Government was always supposed to replace clan as the means of providing this overall ability to provide wellbeing. When the government breaks down, you go to clans. But I think that as long as governments can -- you know, and David raises the question of whether we can still -- governments still can, but I think by and large they still do, that's what's going to be the central unit.

Bruce Jentleson:

I mean, I totally agree with you [unintelligible], you know, appalling to me sometimes, you know, like how little history people have, like everything started with the Internet. And it is an important perspective so we don't overreact. But I think the difference in the periods you're talking about was this -- in some ways what you're saying about providing security, the structure of authority when all the elites were intermarrying, you know, was such that they had sufficient structure of authority within their societies, that people just stayed in their place, right, both economically and politically. You know, and there were rebellions here and there, but basically --

Bob Kagan:

[unintelligible] 1948 and 1917.

Bruce Jentleson:

That's right, but that's why the Conference of Vienna failed. But I'm even thinking centuries before. Whereas, today we have this -- I don't know if democratization is

the right word or popularization, but, you know, there is a sense and it's not just about technology, that people are saying no more to different authority structures at the same time that there may be a little bit less trust in their leads. So, I think the historical comparison has similarities, but also some differences.

Bob Kagan:

Well, that's true, yeah,

Steve Inskeep:

A lot of governments clearly -- you mentioned technology and overstating the importance of technology, a lot of governments clearly seem afraid of the Internet, of the power of the Internet or the power of ideas that can be expressed through the Internet. At the same time, governments like Iran and China seem to be making a lot of advances in controlling the Internet. Governments like the United States seems to be really good at monitoring the Internet.

[laughter]

So in the end, is the Internet threatening states or is states going to capture and strengthen themselves through the Internet?

David Ignatus:

Well, if you look at China, you'd see that -- sense that the Internet is probably more powerful as an instrument of control than of connectedness. But, I mean, I think that tension is going to play itself out. It's fascinating to see the authoritarian societies make use of the Snowden moment, even as they increase their own control over their populations.

Steve Inskeep:

Oh, they're not complaining about their own surveillance. They're only unhappy if the United States --

David Ignatus:

Right.

Steve Inskeep:

But anyway --

David Ignatus:

Yeah, I just would add one additional thought to our discussion about nation states and, you know, their value from the perspective of U.S. policy because that's a Wilson Center subject. David Kilcullen, who was a very interesting, provocative writer, has a new book called, "Out of the Mountain," which is about the kind of growing likelihood of urban violence. We've been dealing with rural insurgencies like the Taliban and that's our image of what we're going to have to worry about. And David's point is actually people are going to be flowing into coastal cities by the hundreds of millions and billions. And your ability to deal with those problems is going to depend on whether there is an address, whether there's a nation state that you can hold responsible for the activities of its citizens. David cites a fascinating statistic that over roughly the last 100 years, 83 percent of the incidents of conflict have been sub-national. And only 17 percent of it involved wars between nation states. In other words, most of the violence, most of the stabilization problems that militaries end up having to deal with are at the sub-national level. And as states break down, how you -- I mean, look at the tribal areas of Pakistan, which you know and I know because we visited there, as an example of the problem when there is no real national authority in an area and it becomes a safe haven for, well, you know, we saw it, for terrorist attacks against the whole world.

Steve Inskeep:

Does that statistic -- and I guess I'm trying to start an argument here -- but does that statistic indicate that states are decaying, the power of states is decaying, even if the states are still there and still very important?

David Ignatus:

David would say that it -- no, it's a constant that's, you know, over this long period, that have been the pattern. And that we tend to think of wars as being the wars between states, but the -- you have, you know, sub-national violence in 1910, in 1923, and you know, he could cite you a whole series of examples to show that this is a continuing problem, not just a recent one.

Steve Inskeep:

Okay.

Bob Kagan:

I think what we're having -- you know, one of the things that we're seeing is not so much -- well, I would say not so much nation states' incapacity, but we are certainly seeing the inability of the international group of nation states to solve common problems. I mean, this has been the talk of globalization and the promise of globalization for a long time, including the elites that meet at [unintelligible] who spend all their time talking about common problems. When they go home their states are not actually contributing to the solution. Global warming is a perfect example where nation states are looking out for nation state interests, not for global interests, and I think that the problem of transnational terrorism in a way falls into this, too. If the nation states got together -- the big states -- and said, "We're not going to allow these blank spaces to exist where terrorists are going to operate," I don't think they'd be around very long. But you can't get those nations to agree on that because they're engaged in their own competition. And so, I think, you know, the problem that we have, which again, is a problem that has always existed. It's only when you have a Roman Empire around to take care of everything that you get problems like that solved in a Roman way, but in terms of international system, we are not able to address, I think, a lot of these global problems.

Bruce Jentleson:

Let me go back to your Internet question and then come back to this.

Steve Inskeep:

Sure.

Bruce Jentleson:

So just to make two points on that. One, I think, is you talk about China, you know, I think in some respects the use of the Internet by the right wing is actually scary to us and scary to the Chinese government. And so, when we talk about liberalizing the Internet, there's a lot of reasons we think it's a good thing. But some of these heavily nationalist groups in China are the ones that are precisely using the Internet to, you know, push their nationalist perspective, whether it's [unintelligible] with Japan or Taiwan. But the other, I think, and this does relate to the overemphasis on technology, is that we see the, you know, the Twitter and the Facebook and all that, you know, [unintelligible] going on to the Ukraine now. I

mean, it's pretty clear that these forms of technology they're like the modern [unintelligible] that, you know, the Soviet dissidents. And, you know, they're quicker, they reach more people. And they have a lot of impact on protests against governments, but they have yet to really show comparable capacity for governing, right. And so, it's two different things when we think about, you know, think about the Internet. And, you know, the other point that we were just talking about -- I mean, I, you know, I think the central question that affects so many issues is this question of sovereignty, right? And it's come up on intervention issues. It's come up on some, you know, pandemics, who has rights to information if SARS is breaking out. Is that China's or is it somebody else's or avian flu in another country. And I think that it's this tension between what are the rights that states have and what are their responsibilities, both to their own people and to the international community. To me, it's like the master key issue that just cascades through one issue after another because of this sort of Vegas dilemma notion that we're all affected by what happens, you know, inside states. I mean, some people were saying in Syria, right, well, I'll just, you know, very cynically saying, "You know, let them kill each other," right. And separate from a values judgment there, you know, the notion that it would stay inside Syria and it wouldn't affect Lebanon and Jordan and others. And things just don't stay inside. So how we wrestle with this balance for states and what's their rights and what's their responsibilities, is a very hard issue internationally because like Bob said, different countries bring different perspectives and interests to bear. But it's at the core of so many things that we really struggle with.

Steve Inskeep:

I wonder if Syria is a good example of the countervailing forces, the complex forces we have going on here because we have a state that seems to be near collapse, but not actually collapsing, and you also have an awful lot of states that are awfully active and awfully eager to play a role and sponsor proxies in Syria at the same time.

David Ignatus:

Well, I think the way in which Syria is becoming as Lebanon was, the arena in which regional powers fight their proxy wars, is one of the worst aspects. To see Gutter and Turkey fighting a war with Saudi Arabia, let's say, by

arming different crazy Jihadists inside Syria has re been a dangerous aspect of this.

Bob Kagan:

And part of this has Gutter asserting itself as a state, saying, "We want a foreign policy. We want to have an impact on the world.

David Ignatus:

Yes. Yes. I mean, if you wanted to cite a hopeful example of interested powers coming together around the idea that the survival of the unitary state of Syria and its ability to regain control and protect its citizens, is in the general interest. Look at what's happening in Geneva under the auspices of a U.N. assistant secretary general named Valerie Amos -- Baroness Valerie Amos, I think a British subject, who has convened a working group to provide humanitarian assistance to people who were literally beginning to starve to death. I mean, they were eating leaves in some of these remote places in Syria -- to get humanitarian assistance quarters into these places. And guess who's on the working group? Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United States. In other words, that group, which would necessarily be part of a broader solution in Syria, has begun to come together, I would note, with great impetus from our Secretary of State John Kerry, in the last several weeks to begin to move this. So, I mean, I -- and necessarily their efforts will have to be run through the Syrian state. And they recognize that, as does the opposition. So, there's also the beginnings of a dialogue between the Syrian opposition and the Syrian state about how to get the supplies into these besieged areas. So, that's just an interesting -- it's happening right now. Go to the Internet, type in Valerie Amos and you, like me, can follow her interesting adventures.

Bob Kagan:

Know, we will spend billions taking care of and feeding the refugees of a problem that we didn't want to spend hundreds of millions trying to prevent. But that's -- I guess that's a good humanitarian story in any case.

I mean, I'm struck, again, I, you know, a lot of this, we like to talk about broad trends. We like to talk about how things are changing. But, you know, at the end of the day,

a lot of it is about decisions made by governments and leaders. And Syria's a perfect example of that. You know, it's not as if we've never faced a problem like Syria before. The Balkans in the 1990s were Syria. You had people who'd been killing each other for hundreds of years even more in a way than the Syrians who were killing each other. Everybody said it was an impossible problem. It was another problem from hell. But the Europeans, I would say, galvanized and ultimately militarily led by the United States decided it was intolerable to let that happen in Europe. It was intolerable, so they went and clamped down. Is it a perfect solution? Are things still dicey and unstable? Absolutely. But it's a much better outcome.

That is precisely what has not happened in Syria. It could have happened, but the United States was in a phase where the, you know, the, you know, a post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan, what have you, with a president who didn't want to take the action. And we did that. It's not a result of new problems of the state. It's not a result of new technologies. It's a problem of making a decision.

Steve Inskeep:

I wonder if Mr. Jentleson hit on something interesting about the way the technology may actually be affecting this, which is forcing governments to be more in touch with their own populations even on matters of global issues or foreign policy. I've been thinking recently about the fact that the United States and Iran are negotiating. And there are domestic politics in both countries, not just the United States, that may limit how far each government can go.

The United States is confronting China over the East China Sea, and it appears that domestic politics in China, as you alluded to, is part of a conflict like that. You had nationalists at a ground level in China who want to see certain actions taken, and they want to see the pride of their country upheld. Are the changes in the world making it harder for governments to interact, to avoid problems, to act in decisive ways?

Bruce Jentleson:

I mean, you can't control information, you know, and speed and timing, right? You know, do we have four hours to think about this? No, we may have 20 minutes because the information's out there. There's no question that those

are factors. But I still sort of subscribe, and this actually relates to the Bosnia issue. It's a piece that was written by Warren Strobel, you know, by journalists. And when he's looking back at Somalia and Bosnia and there was a question of, you know -- and I did serve in the Clinton administration.

Like I said, you know, did, you know, what was happening here, what was the problem? And he actually made an argument that I think bears up in a lot of issues in which when leaders -- for us, presidents -- you know, articulate kind of what their policy is, they still have a better chance of doing a bit of bully pulpitting than when they don't and there's a void in the media, and others leap into it. It's not a pure rally around the flag effect and Ronald Reagan, the great communicator, never convinced people, you know, to support the contras and [unintelligible]. But there is -- I don't think we should throw up our hands about the technology. We just need to continue to develop a lot more sophisticated political strategies to try to communicate in this world.

The thing I do worry about the most, though, is being pressured to make a decision in a timeframe that often leads to a really bad decision because you're worried about the --

Steve Inskeep:

[unintelligible] has been a bit of democratization of foreign policy even in countries that aren't democracies. Maybe, Robert Kagan, you would suggest that this, too, has always been the same. I don't know.

Bob Kagan:

Well, it depends on which countries you're talking about. I mean, in the United States, I would say we've been living with the democratization of foreign policy for a long time. I just happen to be spending a lot of time looking at the 1930s. That's a situation where the vast majority of the American people, regardless of what was happening in Europe, Hitler, Mussolini, no matter what, didn't want to do anything. And it's interesting what Bruce says. So what did Franklin Roosevelt do? He was very careful. He never took the country where he knew it didn't want to go. But with speeches and fireside chats, he started sort of laying things out. And then as events unfolded, he was

ultimately able to lead the country where it -- where he thought it had to go.

And so I think, you know, we're still -- and you can go back, you know, to any period of American history, including, you know, the debate over the Jay [spelled phonetically] Treaty, you know, and look at the role of public opinion. And so, and the end -- the solution has always been the same. It's political leadership. It's making a decision that you want to go in a direction and actually providing that political leadership. [unintelligible] win, but it's remarkable to me. I do think a president even of this, you know, sprawling, impossible democracy, has a great deal of -- a capacity to influence the public and lead them in a direction.

Steve Inskeep:

There seems to be a sense, though, that there used to be a time when Americans could go abroad and find the one strong man in a country to deal with and make a deal, and that guy could make it stick. That seems to be more complicated today.

Bob Kagan:

Well, we seem to nevertheless search for them desperately -
-

[laughter]

-- and in Egypt, we found one after another. It was Mubarak, and when Mubarak was overthrown, it was Morsi. And when Morsi was overthrown, it's the new military government. I mean, it's a -- I actually wish we didn't look for the one guy. I don't want to look for the one guy. I think American policy would be much more stable and successful if we actually attempted to understand what the people of Egypt, in their great diversity, may want from us instead of finding the guy who you can pick up the telephone for.

Bruce Jentleson:

And some of our problems today are consequence of having done that for a whole lot of decades during the Cold War in a whole lot of parts of the world.

Steve Inskeep:

Sure. So maybe it's a good thing that that's more and more difficult to do even temporarily, you're saying.

I'd like to know this. I mean, it's commonly noted, and maybe it is a truism no matter what era we've been -- we would talk about, that when we considered foreign policy problems that the United States faces, that the Obama administration faces, someone will say at one point or another, there are no good options. Syria, maybe, is the best example of that. But we could go through a list of situations where none of the options seem particularly good.

Is this actually a more complex, more difficult moment in history to get things done if you're an American president and you want to get things done? You're saying no, you're saying yes. This is going to be exciting.

[laughter]

Bob Kagan:

Well, you wanted to spark a debate.

David Ignatus:

So I -- you know, I think that the obstacles to governance are real and growing. I hoped looking at this badly polarized, increasingly politically dysfunctional country, in 2008, that Barak Obama might have the qualities of leadership that would allow him to do what he talked about in a campaign govern across red state and blue state lines, govern across party lines, govern across racial lines. You know, it was a moment in which that was really the -- what he would seem to be offering the country. And five years later, you'd have to say that hasn't worked out very well. So I think the obstacles to his successful governance are greater than I had thought. Maybe his weaknesses as a politician are greater than I thought, too.

But you know, looking around the world, governance is a problem everywhere, in part because it's legalistic, because it has these, you know, 19th century or older, somewhat archaic mechanisms that are so easy to jam up. And one of the freshest ideas that I've heard -- this goes back a decade, but I'll just mention it because it's on target for our discussion, I think -- is -- has to do with question of ratifying agreements on climate change and how difficult it's been to get everybody on board. And the

argument is you'll never get everybody on board. That is a 19th century mechanism. It requires, you know, ratification and enforcement. Just forget it.

The way the world works now is in formal networks of certain key actors and stakeholders who agree, these are going to be the norms. They don't sign a treaty. They don't have legal enforcement. They just do it. And if you're outside that circle of agreement, of leading actors, you're in trouble. You're not going to be effective in doing business. You're not going to get the Good Housekeeping seal of approval.

And I increasingly, actually, think that's going to be the way to solve problems, that you just have to be honest, Bob, and say nation-states are not working very well. They're not working here. They're not working in Europe. They're not working very well anywhere. And that there are going to have to be other ways to solve problems, which are in fact the ones that are happening right now every day in real life. I mean, real problems are getting solved every day. How is that happening? And then look at what is that process, and then say that's actually -- that's how the world's working now.

Bob Kagan:

Well, I mean, I, you know, yes, I agree. Governments are not governing effectively now. My only problem is I think they always never governed effectively. I'm not sure that

--

[laughter]

-- you know, I don't know. Compared to when? You know, yeah, you can think of periods in American history when you had a good president. You led the way, civil rights legislation, what have you. But I can think of 20 more instances where we had weak leadership, you know, this kind of gridlock. The system was built, by the way, to create gridlock. So we shouldn't be that surprised to find it, so I'm not sure what, you know, what comparison we're making here. And, you know, in answer to your question, every hard foreign policy problem that we've ever faced is one where there were no good options. No good options is what is a -- is what makes a foreign policy problem. And so, you know, you always have to fight through. Take Vietnam. It was not a good option to do nothing. You know, a

succession of presidents from different parties with different ideological perspectives decided they couldn't do nothing -- even Eisenhower. There's a great new book on Eisenhower and how committed he got us into Vietnam even though it didn't happen on his watch. But obviously using force was a no good option either.

And so that is the problem. That's what statesmen face all the time. By the way, stopping Hitler: what was the good option, you know? Go to war in 1936, before anybody even knew whether that was necessary or not? That would have been an ugly scene, invading Germany, you know, to keep them out of their own territory. So that's the nature of the beast.

Now, you know, let me just -- I'll end by saying this. I think it's perfectly true that democracy has a problem making these kinds of decisions. You know, the United States government was founded at a time when United States was not the leading power in the world. And so the government we have was not necessarily the government you would design to play the role the United States is playing. And that has always been a tension.

Now I would also say, in a way, thank God, because we also know governments that have been extremely efficient at making foreign policy decisions. And I'm not sure we've always been delighted with the outcome of that. So you have to take this messy, messy thing. And I -- I'm going to -- I know I'd end. I'm going to end on this.

[laughter]

Messiness is what it's all about. And I feel like we are just looking at the messiness today and we want to throw up our hands and say, "Oh, my God, it's just so messy." It's always messy.

[laughter]

It's always hard. It's always a challenge. And we get it wrong 50 percent of the time, at least. That's the nature of the beast.

Bruce Jentleson:

I just have a couple quick points on that: one, whenever I hear somebody say, "I know my option's lousy, but the

others are worse." All my antenna go up, you know. You got to have enough confidence in your option to say it's not perfect, but I really believe this is what we should do. And so I really think that's incumbent on policymakers. But it's not ideal, but you got to be able to do that.

Second one I think is that, you know, the myth of politics stopping at the water's edge. I mean, this is one of the very distorting myths of our history. So arguably, from the late 40's to the early to mid-60's, it was like that for very particular reasons. And there were a whole lot of politics going on then. But you mentioned the Jay Treaty, you know. When George Washington signed that, the editorials of the day sounded like MSNBC or Fox News. And names that called George Washington --

Bob Kagan:
That's an insult to MSNBC.

Male Speaker:
Yeah.

[laughter]

Bruce Jentleson:
Yeah, well, I'm trying to be bipartisan here. That's right.

[laughter]

You know, World War I, we stayed out for all those years. And so I think we've always had messy politics in our foreign policy. You know, in the late 70's, there was that book by Tony Lake McDessler [spelled phonetically] and [unintelligible] our own worst enemy, right? That was about the unmaking of it.

So, but I think the last part I think is that I don't think we can do this without states and governments. You know, NGOs are playing a very important role in a whole lot of ways around the world. And companies are doing things. But at the end of the day, you know, I think governments are less sufficient than they may have been in a different era. But this is where that, you know, the state is dead along with the state. You know, governments really need to do what only governments can do. Otherwise, all the other

stuff will help, but it won't really get at the core of some of our problems. So we can't, you know, we want to encourage that. There's many different actors that come into play and making good policy. But we need states to be capable states.

Steve Inskeep:

Okay, I want to open this up now to your questions. I believe there are people with microphones on either side. So I'll call on you and I'll just ask when you're called on, if you'll stand so we can see you. Say your name so we get to know each other ever so slightly. And put a direct question to these brilliant gentlemen so that they have time to answer it.

And I see someone way in the back with a hand upraised. Go right ahead, sir.

Male Speaker:

Hi, my name is Steve. I'm pretty tall, so now I'll sit down.

[laughter]

I study IR here in the city. Thanks a lot, Mr. Inskeep. But first, to you, Mr. Ignatius, could you -- it'll be a pretty consequential weekend. President and Secretary of State will be speaking. The Israeli Foreign Minister and his boss will be speaking. So could you preview some of the remarks that you expect to put to the Israeli foreign minister tomorrow night? And to Dr. Kagan, about a month ago -- 3.5 weeks ago, I saw you had a piece in the Post that lamented the value of international organizations. And one among the questions you put was if not the United States, who? Today we're sort of, I guess, astride conflicts, and the horn of Africa, and there's the Syria question. So if not the EU and if not the UN, who? And as a bonus question -- I know this is particularly sensitive to you --

[laughter]

-- so I'll put it to you. How is the Secretary of State doing? Thanks.

[laughter]

Bob Kagan:

It's easy. I'm not going to answer that question.

[laughter]

Bruce Jentleson:

Somebody might get fired.

David Ignatius:

Well, that's a very good opportunity to preview another foreign policy event this weekend, called the Saban Forum, which is hosted by the Brookings Institution. And as the questioner said, we're going to have speeches from a range of prominent officials, including Secretary Kerry, I think probably our national security advisor, Susan Rice, Bibi Netanyahu, by close circuit television, almost as lively as being in the room. And I'm going to be interviewing tomorrow night the Israeli foreign minister, who's just returned after resolving his legal problems, Avigdor Lieberman.

And what am I going to ask him? I'm going to ask him some of the obvious questions that I'm sure you all would have at the top of your list. Tell me about your concerns about the deal the U.S. and its partners have struck with Iran. What's the measure of satisfactory final deal from your standpoint? And then, are you ready to accept the interim deal is real and won't be reversed? I'm going to ask him, since he is Russian, and sort of the de facto leader of the Russian Jewish community in Israel now, what does he think about the role Russia's playing in Syria, in the Middle East generally? You know, what's his sense of Putin? Putin is somebody he's fascinated by. He is widely known in Israel as a particular skeptic about Turkey under Prime Minister Erdoğan. And I'm going to ask him about Turkish-Israeli relations and whether there are any chances that they'll improve. And if you have any other suggestions, send them to me at ignatiusd@washingtontpost dot --

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:

Other questions? Let's see. Back here toward the back, ma'am. Yeah, right there. Or, yes, sir, actually. Okay, right there.

Hugh MacElreth:

Hugh MacElreth [spelled phonetically]. I'm a retired intelligence officer. I was intrigued with Robert Kagan's picture that he painted of this crisp and decisive action in Yugoslavia. And my memory was that there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the messy, sloppy, muddling through away that we got to wherever we got to in Yugoslavia.

So, you know, and the excuse that was given back then was, well, you had to wait until it burned itself out. Isn't that kind of where we are on Syria now?

Bob Kagan:

Well, first of all, I never said it was crisp and sweet. I mean, I lived through it, and it was very painful. And in a way, I've looked at Syria and said maybe we're just in year three of the Balkan crisis and we'll eventually get to -- and part of me thinks we will, by the way. You know, as everybody probably remembers, Bill Clinton backed into the Balkans because he'd forgotten that he made a -- well, if it's Richard Holbrook, he forgot. If it's Bill Clinton, he didn't forget. But in any case --

[laughter]

-- that he'd made a commitment that at the very least, if things went bad in the Balkans, he'd pull the -- he'd use American forces to get out the European forces. And that obviously didn't seem like a bad idea. So if you're going to use forces, you might as well try to get something done.

So, no, and we resisted. I mean, the Bush administration -- the first Bush administration didn't want to do anything. It went on for years and years, and it got very bad. It didn't need to be.

So part of me has been expecting exactly that sequence of events to play out in Syria, but the moment I thought we'd reached the 1995 moment or the 1999 moment, was this past summer on the chemical weapons issue. And so when I felt like maybe we're not in Kansas anymore and that the old patterns that I'd come to expect in the post-Cold War world, which, by the way, has been a heavily interventionist period in American foreign policy. We've intervened. If you look at the period from -- you know, '89, to 2003, we intervened with major force on average

once every two years throughout the entire period. And that -- Bosnia and the Balkans fit into that pattern.

The fact that Obama stepped back from military action in August makes me wonder whether we've now moved into a different phase where we're not going to be engaging in that kind of activity anymore because of American public attitudes, because President Obama ran on not doing this kind of thing in the Middle East, or who knows what the reason is.

Male Speaker:
[inaudible]

Steve Inskeep:
Sorry?

[unintelligible commentary]

Bob Kagan:
And because it's wrong, sure. If you think it's wrong, it's wrong. But, you know, a lot of -- a majority of Americans thought it was wrong to go into the Balkans also. Both the Bosnian intervention in 1995 and the Kosovo intervention in 1999, significant majorities of the American public were against both those interventions. Congress, in the case of Kosovo, the House voted, did not vote to approve that intervention. And the president went through with it anyway. And guess what? A month later, his personal approval ratings went up after both of those interventions. I mean, go figure. This is a problem -- the fickle American, you know, attitudes towards these things.

Steve Inskeep:
Okay, ma'am. Go right ahead.

Brenda Shaker:
Hi, I'm Brenda Shaker from Georgetown University. The panel frequently used a phrase "identity," as if that's a very important force in most of the conflicts and security challenges that we're facing in the current era. But if you unpeel the rhetoric from many of these conflicts, do you really -- if you actually look at them, you see often what's really stands behind these conflicts is actually the state. For instance, if you take the former Soviet Union, about 200 ethno-national border disjunctions, but the only

so-called ethnic conflicts that broke out, successions conflicts where there was state backer, in the case of Caraba, [spelled phonetically] Armenia, the case of Setia, [spelled phonetically] Aposia [spelled phonetically], Transnistria, Russia. I mean, if you look at even the important security threats and terror, it's when the terror -- a terrorist group links to a state, when there's some sort of territorial backing.

So it's actually, is this era really about the weakness of the state when it comes to these security threats and these conflicts where it's actually shown that the state is just there? Just the rhetoric has change.

Bruce Jentleson:

I think it's a good point in terms of a lot of factors at work here. But there is, you know -- so the [unintelligible] book of problem from hell was taken from the quote of Secretary of State Christopher at the time. You know, [unintelligible] this sense, what could we do? This been going on for 600 years in this region.

But I think what happens is not necessarily that it's been a straight line. In fact, you know, these conflicts had been subsumed and they weren't raging. And they were exploited by state leaders. But what state leaders then do is exploit the sense of identity. You know, it's the politics of identity: who I am, who you are, and why that - - I'm going to kill you before you kill me.

And so I think identity still is a very powerful factor. I don't think it automatically leads to conflicts. It has to be, you know, in some ways, fueled by demagogues. But Sunni-Shia conflicts, you know, Arab-Israeli conflicts, Hutu-Tutsi, all of whom had roles. Part of the reasons they got so vicious was that the identity thing resonates. And when taken in the wrong direction, it really -- it leads to some of the things we've seen.

Steve Inskeep:

Walid Nassar, the scholar of the Islamic world, has noted that the divide between Sunnis and Shias -- if you go back to 1000 years of history, sometimes there's very little divide. Sometimes it's a very wide divide, and it suggests just what you're saying, I would think. That history would suggest that the divide is there to be taken advantage of if a state actor or someone else wants to take advantage of

it, and they can also be mitigated if the right people do it. Is that what you're saying?

Bruce Jentleson:
[unintelligible]

Steve Inskeep:
Other questions. Right here, sir. Go right ahead.

Ken Egan:
My name is Ken Egan, and --

Steve Inskeep:
Stand up, if you would.

Ken Egan:
Sure. My name is Ken Egan. And I first came to Washington in 1983 from New York. And I started a 501c3 in Rosslyn, and one of the people I hired was Christopher Hitchens. And Christopher Hitchens wrote a book called "Cyprus," because he was dedicated to that issue, and only 10,000 copies of that book. And we used to talk often about how Cyprus was the Middle East without oil. And today Cyprus is the longest unresolved issue before the United Nations Security Council.

My question is when the world divvied up the sand to make countries, they ignored tribes. To what extent the Sunnis and Shia and so forth manifest itself in the dilemmas that we have today?

Steve Inskeep:
When you're talking about tribes, I suppose you're talking about that in a broad term, since you said Sunni and Shia. You're talking about religious differences. You may be talking about ethnic differences, national differences.

Ken Egan:
Yes.

Steve Inskeep:
The Sikes [spelled phonetically] Pocoe [spelled phonetically] map that you referred to certainly does divide Kurds into multiple countries. So are a lot of other people.

David Ignatus:

It took a Kurdish people and chopped them into a part that was called Iran, a part that was called Iraq, part that was called Syria. There are a few in Lebanon as well.

I made the point earlier, which I -- to me is just the -- an abiding, maybe the abiding lesson of the last decade, which is that when you knock the pegs out from under a state, thinking that you're going to, you know, make positive change -- in the case the United States, one hopes -- the consequence of that often is to create a vacuum into which come, inevitably, the most basic loyalties, hatreds, connections that people have -- loyalties of sect, of tribe, of geographic, of family. And, you know, we grew sort of horrified all those people are so primitive, they're so -- they have no choice. I mean, if you -- it's a question, literally, of how do you know that you're going to wake up alive the next morning and that your wife and your children are. And the people with guns that will protect you -- the only ones you can count on are the ones identified with your sheif [spelled phonetically], of your tribe, or your religious leader. And I watched that over and over again in Iraq. I had people plead with me, "Don't you Americans understand what you're doing? What -- don't you see it?"

That was one of the most frustrating in that whole terrible story, because I think we didn't see it. I think we really were blind to that. But we created that pre-modern thing, and then we're now having to live with it. And I hope we, you know, we sort of did it again in Libya. You know, we knocked the pegs out and then we left. And, you know, we have a mess there. We're going to have to go back in.

Bob Kagan:

Well, that's the key thing, though, it's the desire to -- I don't think it's ignorance as much as it is the desire to leave almost before we've entered.

David Ignatus:

Yes, we're just -- we're so impatient and --

Bob Kagan:

Right.

David Ignatus:

-- you know, let's be honest. We're selfish. We are a selfish, selfish people. We just aren't suited for some of

the leadership roles we want to play in the world. We're impatient, selfish, and, you know, we seduce and then we abandon, to use the --

[laughter]

-- language of the 19th century novel.

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:

Maybe those examples underlie the importance of the state. In the absence of a strong state, you have a constant risk of catastrophe.

Bob Kagan:

Exactly. It goes back to security. The United States' obligation after it invaded Iraq was to provide security for everybody. And when they failed to do that, we got the torrent of sectarian forms of protection.

Bruce Jentleson:

I think there's also a little bit of whether it's naiveté or parochialism that we just think we can remake these places sometimes in our own image, you know. So you send over reserve officers from Newport, Rhode Island, with the police manual for Newport or something. And I think we, you know, it's a combination of things. Sometimes we don't have patience and sometimes there's this real, you know, naiveté or, well, look what happened in Japan and Germany. Well, that's, you know, extraordinarily unusual set of circumstances, you know, after World War II.

Bob Kagan:

Which we remained for decades, by the way.

Bruce Jentleson:

That's right. But I think it was very unusual circumstances with this society. So I think in some of our own parochialism in some respects that I think is the negative side of our American exceptionalism. You know, everybody wants to be like us, and we're just going to help you do that. You know, it might be good motivations, but it's not the way the world works.

Bob Kagan:

We could have been the British, and just gone and stayed and oppressed the entire population --

[laughter]

-- for decades and decades and decades. And I think they probably provided more stability that way.

[laughter]

I'm not endorsing that but --

[talking simultaneously]

-- I'm just saying that was --

[talking simultaneously]

David Ignatus:

You did a better job with messy. You made me like messy.

[laughter]

Bob Kagan:

I'm not endorsing. I'm just saying that's what the British did, right?

Steve Inskeep:

The next Wilson Center discussion will be an argument for colonialism.

[laughter]

Bob Kagan:

Not from me.

Steve Inskeep:

No, it's not true, not true.

[laughter]

Let me just fish around here a little bit. Ma'am right there in the middle. Gary, go right ahead, yeah. The microphone's going to come to you. Take a moment.

Female Speaker:
[inaudible]

[laughter]

Claudia Farris:
My name is Claudia. See, the microphone is too much. My name is Claudia Farris [spelled phonetically] and I have a question about innovation and the innovations in government, especially at the global level that you gentlemen are aware of. I'm particularly interested in the work of Elinor Ostrom, who -- are you familiar with her work? Okay.

So she maintains that the legitimacy at any level of government derives from the level beneath. The problem that we have at the global level is that there's nowhere to go. So I'm wondering if there are innovations that address, for example, crosscutting functional or non -- other non-geographic dimensions that can add some, you know, -- I don't know what the word is I'm looking for, but you got it. You're shaking your head. You understand the question.

[laughter]

Okay.

David Ignatus:
Well, I'll just mention one thing that came to mind as you were describing that. And I'll look for Elinor Ostrom. But this is an example --

Claudia Farris:
[inaudible]

David Ignatus:
This is an example that I know just a little bit about from the world of business from -- Steve may know this. The Karachi Electric Power Company?

Steve Inskeep:
Sure.

David Ignatus:
There's a very innovative international businessman named Arif Naqvi who has a company called Abraaj, which is sort

of a venture fund private equity fund based in the Middle East, and a lot of the most innovative business things in the middle east come through his company. So he wanted to buy Karachi Electric Power because he thought it was undervalued and potentially a great asset. The problem was getting paid, because Pakistan -- he's like people in a lot of places, are not great about paying their bills if they don't have to. So he began to innovate with the people who were helping him do this in social mechanisms that could provide incentives on a neighborhood/clan basis for paying your bill. Like you know, in the areas of Karachi where the company was operating, electric power was typically limited to X numbers of hours a day. Let's say eight hours a day. But if you had an 80 percent plus payment rate in your neighborhood, your number of hours a day went up to 10. You got two extra hours. If you know, everybody in your wider family group, you know above some level, 85 percent paid, you had a reduction of X percent in the rate that -- all these -- and suddenly the money was flooding into the company. It became extremely profitable where it had been a mess before. And I just, I haven't been able to get that idea out of my mind. It's a Harvard Business School case study, if anybody wants to explore it, but you know, somewhere in that idea of some simple integrative mechanisms in a big poor city in Pakistan, I think is the answer to some of the riddles we've been talking about.

Steve Inskeep:

And that's an example of the kind of opt-in/opt-out networks you were describing before.

David Ignatus:

Exactly. That's an example of non -- their not government networks. They're out there. They're private opt-in/opt-out, but they're very powerful.

Bruce Jentleson:

Just one policy example, I mean [unintelligible] this is only a degree of success, by no means a great success, but if you look at the millennium development goals that were set by the U.N., the international community in 2000 to be reached by 2015, and then you go through them. You know, some significant progress has been made on a whole bunch of those, cutting the rate of poverty by 50 percent, you know, cutting hunger, doing things for maternal health, and so you know, the glass is by no means full, but we tend to think sometimes that none of this stuff is working. I

don't know whether it qualifies as innovation, or just some successes, and what can we learn from them, but even in an area where we tend to think like everything is failing, development and stuff. You know, you ask your community, it hasn't done so badly. Of course it doesn't get much attention, because other things get the attention about where the U.N. makes a mess of things or whatever, but you know, there's some interesting lessons there about degrees of success.

Steve Inskip:

There's a gentleman who has been patiently waiting in the front. Please go -- second row there, yeah, and we'll get to you as well. Go ahead.

Chris Hennick:

Steve, my name is Chris Hennick [spelled phonetically] and my question is not directed to you.

Steve Inskip:

There's a microphone over by you, sir --

Chris Hennick:

Thank you, my question is not directed toward any particular panelist, but a bordelaise sense of cryptocurrency such as bitcoin that is being transacted peer-to-peer payment network. I'm just curious to your sense or anyone's sense of where you see this appreciation compared to other currencies. It's clearly bordelaise and just would be factor in seeing where you see this is headed.

Steve Inskip:

Okay, does a stateless currency undermine states?

Bruce Jentleson:

I don't know much about it. I always look for where my son or daughter is when I get asked technological questions, and neither one is here. My sense is that most of side dish, you know? It's not going to be as we think about the dollars as the principle currency of reserve and exchange, and whether or not others will emerge at the Chinese, you know, international [unintelligible]. I don't think -- so I think these are kind of interesting, and I don't know much about it, but I don't think they'll ever get central. But they'll, you know, we're still going to be relying on currencies issued by states.

Steve Inskip:

Other thoughts on that before we go on? Okay, sir, why don't you go right ahead next? I think a microphone is also very close to you. No, no, here in the front row.

Garrett Mitchell:

Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report and I want to come back to a point that Steve Inskip made after having sort of agreed that the panel didn't believe that the nation state was on its way out, but rather to talk about the pressures on nation states. And I'm thinking about two kinds of conversations that are taking place, some with more success than others, one with more success than others.

Above the nation state, we've had lots of conversations in the last few years about building and growing global governance to deal with issues like global warming, et cetera, and here we can say particularly in this country, but and in other countries, at the level below the nation state, Bob Kagan's colleague at Brookings, who just happens to have the same initials, Bruce Katz [spelled phonetically] has just written a book about -- on metropolitan, and local, and regional government kinds of innovations and inventions.

And I guess the question that I have is whether what we're seeing is not a question of whether the nation state is imperiled or not, but whether there are supra and sub solutions to the -- it sort of comes back to the Daniel Bell question in a way, or excuse me, to the Daniel Bell observation about too large to do this and too small to do that. And I wonder a) what this group thinks about the quality of those conversations that are taking place, which is to say are they doing any good, and b) whether there is a chance that we will see in this country as an example, we're really going to see something along the lines of a new definition of federalism which will ideally free up the nation state to do the things best that it ought to be doing.

David Ignatus:

Steve, I'll just briefly answer the -- Daniel Bell's own answer to his conundrum was precisely the one that you offered federalism, state and local governments. It is

true that the nation state is too large, but thank goodness we have these other units of governance, and an interesting fact about the United States is that at a time when it's hard to be too pessimistic about the federal government and its operations, state and local government is doing pretty well. I mean, look at California. California was a, you know, kind of inside the beltway-like nightmare of gridlock, and you know sort of doomsday machine.

I can remember writing all the reasons why it could never get solved, but you had good, strong political leadership, and Jerry Brown who had done it before. And he's made some progress, and there are a lot of examples you could cite from state to state and local government. You know, in Europe the big dialogue is about cities. You know, I mean Barcelona is a phenomenon in Europe, quite apart from cattle [spelled phonetically] and nationalism. The phenomenon of Barcelona as a trading hub with its own culture and connections, so there's very creative work being done about that. The real intricacies of the new Europe are in fact city to city. Nation states are not -- and certainly not Brussels. That's not what it's about. So I think that, you know, those other units are in fact where a lot of the action is.

Steve Inskip:

I'm going to take one more question. I'm hoping that someone has a quick one, and just to advise our panelist after this one more question, there's a kind of lightening round that we're supposed to do. So I'm going to ask you to sum up all these incredibly complicated thoughts and give me one sentence of some amazing insight that will cause the room to explode. So be ready for that.

[laughter]

You've got a few seconds. Now, somebody with a very quick question. Way in the back, if it's a quick question. Yeah, please go ahead.

Male Speaker:

Have you heard about the United States of Africa 2017 Project? You don't?

Steve Inskip:

United States of Africa.

Male Speaker:
Check it out.

Bob Kagan:
That'll be a really quick question.

Male Speaker:
Yeah, right.

Male Speaker:
And a really quick answer too.

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:
[unintelligible] is a bigger nation, I suppose, a bigger nation state for effort. Okay. All right, the answer is no, but --

[laughter]

-- the Internet is available and we'll look it up. It sounds intriguing. Okay, lightening round. We've been talking about this for almost an hour and a half now, and let's just fly right through. You can even go to two sentences if you need to. Final thoughts.

David Ignatus:
A) Daniel Bell was right.

[laughter]

God bless him. B), only Bob Kagan could make me love the word "messy."

[laughter]

Steve Inskeep:
Okay.

Bruce Jentleson:
I'd just say what I started to state is part of the problem and has to be part of the solution, and that states and globally we've got to figure out this balance of rights and responsibilities of sovereignty.

Steve Inskeep:

Okay, Robert Kagan.

Bob Kagan:

Well, I have to say because we live in this Internet age, everything you say will be used against you, that I want to make it clear that the reason I brought up the British Empire, not because --

[laughter]

-- not because I want to emulate the British Empire, but to take me to my one sentence that I want to leave you with, which is every time --

Steve Inskip:

[unintelligible], no, go ahead.

Bob Kagan:

-- every time -- yeah, I want to wear, you know, the pith hat, but every time you ask yourself about what's going on now and talk about it, you have to also ask yourself compared to what? And when we talk about the disasters of American farm policy, and believe me we are littered with disasters, the question is compared to whom. Who do you want in that position in the world if you look throughout history, and I continue to believe that we've done better than most.

Steve Inskip:

Okay. All right, please join me in thanking our panelist.

[applause]

Thank you very much, gentlemen. Appreciate it, and thank to your [unintelligible]. Thanks for coming.

[end of transcript]