

As world evolves, idea of 'nation' lags behind

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By PHILIP SEIB / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

In *The Shield of Achilles*, University of Texas professor Philip Bobbitt presents an extraordinarily sophisticated and comprehensive survey of war, peace and nationhood. Concentrating on the history of European states, Mr. Bobbitt examines the changing nature of sovereignty, particularly in light of the effects of evolving technologies on economics, communication and warfare.

Today, as current events clearly illustrate, not only nations can wage war on other nations. That change, and dealing with it, gets to the essence of a nation's purpose. Mr. Bobbitt says that a country that cannot "protect its homeland from attack by other states would have ceased to fulfill its most basic reason for being."

Beyond that issue, borders and other traditional trappings of nationhood mean less. Mr. Bobbitt's detailed analysis of the 1990s war in the former Yugoslavia brings into focus what states do and fail to do. He identifies the mass murder at Srebrenica during this war as a crucial event in the demise of the traditional nation-state era in which the concept of sovereignty deterred intervention. He argues that "sovereignty that cloaks practices such as ethnic cleansing cannot create borders that must be respected."

The Shield of Achilles
<i>War, Peace, and the Course of History</i> . Philip Bobbitt (Alfred A. Knopf, \$40)

Another major change, says Mr. Bobbitt, is the rise of the "market-state," which will privatize many traditional governmental activities and take advantage of transnational opportunities that are a function of globalization. Mr. Bobbitt, who has worked in the White House, State Department and Senate, urges that policy makers study these changes and devise national strategies accordingly.

In addition to discussing institutions and political theory, Mr. Bobbitt tells the stories of the people who make the processes of nations work and describes how their personal strengths and weaknesses affected events. He provides well-drawn portraits of Viscount Castlereagh, Count Metternich and others, and evaluates the performance of contemporary diplomats such as James Baker.

The 1990 Charter of Paris, which formally marked the end of the Cold War, stated that "Europe is liberating itself from the legacy of the past." That certainly was true, but even during the exhilarating time of a fresh start, history should not be ignored. As Mr. Bobbitt notes, "The past, it turns out, is all we know about the future."

A college course based on this book would be fascinating, proceeding at a measured pace through this mix of history, legal theory and analysis of contemporary international affairs. Most important, it would enhance the intellectual underpinnings of policy by encouraging the next generation of national and global leaders to consider the complex issues they will have to address. Philip Bobbitt has made a valuable contribution to wider understanding of how the world really works.