

States & Soldiers

By CHRISTOPHER WILLCOX

The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History

By Philip Bobbitt Alfred A. Knopf,
919 pages, \$40

Philip Bobbitt appears to have been training all his life to write this book. Indeed, his resume practically writes it. At various times, Bobbitt has served as associate counselor to the president for intelligence and international security, legal counsel to the Senate Select Committee on the Iran-Contra Affair, counselor on international law for the State Department, as well as director of intelligence, senior director for critical infrastructure, and senior director for strategic planning at the National Security Council.

The subject of his book --the link between military innovation and the development of the modern state --is certainly timely. For Mr. Bobbitt, September 11 and the strategic imperative it created merely confirms a trend already underway in the military and the political economy. The asymmetrical threat presented by terrorists --no standing army or territory to attack --was already driving change in military strategy and governance before September 11, he argues. And it's not all that different from other pivotal changes, like the advent of large armies in the 17th century, which meant not only better training and discipline but also conscription, centralization, and larger government.

This book is immensely and deliberately provocative. In differentiating between kinds of states, Mr. Bobbitt embraces the sweeping generalization. The state-nation, for example Napoleonic France, gained legitimacy from putting people in the service of the state. The nation-state, like contemporary Belgium or Canada, derives legitimacy from putting the state in the service of the people. Under the former, the state becomes the forger of national identity, rather than the provider of services. But in both cases, according to Mr. Bobbitt, legitimacy comes from an implied contract between the state and the people.

It is an interesting argument, and Mr. Bobbitt traces it from the formation of princely states, when military capabilities and manpower needs induced walled city-states to expand their territory; through the age of kingly states, when the monarch became the personification of the nation and the dynasty conferred legitimacy. This period reached its apotheosis with Louis XIV ("*L'etat c'est moi*") and, characteristically, quickly began a slow decline that would lead to Bonaparte and the end of the old order, Napoleon and the colonizing state-nations would dominate throughout the 19th century, preparing the way for the 20th-century struggle between totalitarian nation-states and the choosing parliamentary democracies.

Another of the book's theories is that many wars, particularly the decisive ones, are not self-contained conflicts but part of a continuum. These make up epochal wars, like the Thirty Years War (1618-48) or the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1815), that often produce a new constitutional order. What Mr. Bobbitt calls the Long War ended with the defeat of Soviet Communism in 1990; interestingly, Mr. Bobbitt believes this war actually began in 1914 with what most people refer to as World War I and includes the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the so-called Cold War, Korea, and Vietnam. The Long War decided the competition between the authoritarian/totalitarian model of the nation-state and the parliamentary version. But in Mr. Bobbitt's view, America's triumph was pyrrhic because it ushered in a new era of "market-states" dominated by global forces and information technologies and threatened by shadowy terrorist networks and rogue dictators. Sound familiar? There is, indeed, an almost eerie quality to this part of Mr. Bobbitt's argument. It certainly rings true, but is it true?

This book is not the first to forecast the withering away of traditional government as global markets begin to drive the important decisions on everything from interest rates to tax policy and labor markets. And it has become fashionable to predict that technological progress will produce radical political change. But Bobbitt's prognosis is the weakest part of the book because it assumes the United States is in decline and pays little more than lip service to the American exceptionalism that has long confounded our prophets of doom. The Soviet-style command economy (thank you, John Kenneth Galbraith), the Arab oil shock, and the Japanese and German economic models were all supposed to carry the seeds of our

destruction. Needless to say, it didn't happen. In fact, America today enjoys important competitive advantages across the board.

Judging from the footnotes, Mr. Bobbitt may have read too much Paul Kennedy, a liberal favorite, whose "The Rise and Fall of Great Powers" (1987) argued that nations that spend more on military than on "infra-structure" are doomed to decline. Tell that to the Americas who have prospered over the past 60 years. In any case, there is a Spenglerian gloom here that seems overwrought.

Mr. Bobbitt's bold analogies also stretch to the breaking point on occasion. One such is an extended comparison between the notorious Kitty Genovese murder case and Bosnia. The Genovese woman's neighbors were reluctant to go to her aid because "she worked in a bar" and so was in part responsible for the attack, Mr. Bobbitt argues. Similarly, the West was reluctant to help prevent the massacres in Bosnia because there were no unstained heroes in the Balkans. Maybe, but pop psychology seems jarringly out of place in an otherwise serious work.

This book is a passionate and worthy effort to make sense of what is clearly a brand new world. And it is a useful antidote -if one is necessary after September 11- to the notion that the defeat of Communism means we all live in a safe neighborhood. It would have been "a more successful effort if it had found a few more reasons to believe in a prosperous *and* democratic future.

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