

# Introduction

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Civil wars run deep through our historical narratives, shaping the political and social consciousness of people in developed countries around the world: Japan, Russia, Spain, China, Mexico, and the United States, to mention only a few. But intrastate conflicts are not merely features of the past. Today, there are some thirty active civil wars, ranging from Afghanistan and Syria to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the average duration of conflict increasing over the past twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Most civil wars have broken out in states with limited material capabilities. Major powers have sometimes, but not always, become involved in these conflicts, something that happened less often in the past. Many of these contemporary civil wars are the sources of immense human suffering and regional insecurity, some giving rise to mass exodus and uncontrollable refugee spillover.

Nevertheless, foreign-policy practitioners and scholars alike disagree on the actual risks that high levels of intrastate violence pose to major powers and global stability. They also disagree about the extent to which external powers can influence the trajectories of these conflicts, or improve governance in areas that have been afflicted by civil war. Worldviews matter. Realists generally focus on threats associated with interstate rivalries, while liberal internationalists place more emphasis on the risks created by downstream effects and the erosion of norms that underpin the order they seek to maintain.<sup>2</sup> Of course, for all, contingency and the particulars also matter.

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Some analysts believe that states suffering from civil strife can at least be put on a path to greater inclusivity and security; others believe that the best external actors can do is to prevent the spread of violence and chaos across state borders.

The essays that make up this issue of *Dædalus* and the upcoming Winter 2018 issue are the culmination of an eighteen-month American Academy of Arts and Sciences project on Civil Wars, Violence, and International Responses. The project participants have examined in depth the intellectual and policy disagreements over both the risks posed by intrastate violence and how best to treat it.

As the project's codirectors, we should note that our own perspectives on the potential impact of civil wars and appropriate international policy responses were deeply influenced by Al Qaeda's attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, and its aftermath.

As Karl Eikenberry relates:

That morning, American Airlines Flight 77, hijacked and piloted by terrorists, crashed into the Pentagon below my office located on the building's outer ring. The flight's passengers and crew perished in a jet-fuel inferno that simultaneously killed 125 civilian and military personnel on the ground and consumed part of the building. To that point, my knowledge of Afghanistan was limited. What I knew was, for the most part, based upon study during the Cold War of mujahideen tactics against the occupying Red Army and the fact the Taliban regime was hosting Osama Bin Laden and his murderous terrorist organization. But subsequent to that morning, my career path, like those of many of my colleagues, changed dramatically.

After almost three decades of operational and political-military assignments in China and East Asia, I would spend most of the next ten years in senior civilian and military positions related to the Afghanistan conflict (twice as a commander of coalition military

forces, as the U.S. ambassador, and as the deputy chairman of the NATO Military Committee in Brussels).

As conditions in the country slowly deteriorated and various policy approaches were validated or discredited, my understanding of the Afghan civil war and my recommended strategic responses changed.

As both a military commander and ambassador, I became directly acquainted with a variety of threats to Afghan stability, and to the extended region and beyond: international terrorism, massive narcocriminality, refugees (much later contributing to a populist backlash in parts of Europe), contagious disease (the reemergence of polio along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border), and potentially dangerous regional and major-power competition involving Pakistan, India, Iran, Russia, China, and the United States.

The difficulty of policy solutions became more painfully evident with each passing year. Building political and government institutions that incorrectly assumed shared national identities and rule-of-law norms proved problematic. Security assistance programs floundered due to the divergent interests of the principal (the leaders of the international military forces) and the agent (the commanders of the Afghan army and police forces and the civilian Afghan leadership).<sup>3</sup> Enthusiastic advocates of development projects designed to rapidly expand the reach of the central government across the country were often defeated by geography, lack of knowledge, and local preferences for autonomy. Sincere and tireless efforts to achieve unity of effort among the major external actors – the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and the United States – and to agree to a common plan of action with the Afghan government produced disappointing results due to the prohibitive transaction costs involved. In this, Afghanistan, I came to recognize, was not a unique case. The problems that afflicted that nation were shared by many other pol-

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ities, including where external military intervention has been minimal.

Stephen Krasner recounts:

I arrived at the State Department a little more than a week before the 9/11 attacks. I had spent almost all of my professional life in academia and I was looking forward to exposure to the policy world. Like others, I expected that the administration of George W. Bush would be focused on domestic issues. The attacks on 9/11 changed all of that. Like my colleagues in the Policy Planning Bureau of the State Department, I looked on in disbelief as commercial airliners struck the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. I was commuting by bicycle and, by the time I left the State Department, smoke was already pouring out of the Pentagon. I biked over to the Potomac near the Memorial Bridge, which was as close as I could get. I did not know that the plane had struck the Pentagon near the office of my former student, then Brigadier General Eikenberry. I subsequently worked at the National Security Council, primarily on the Millennium Challenge Account, a new foreign assistance program, returned to Stanford, and then, when Condoleezza Rice became Secretary of State, arrived back at the Department as the Director of Policy Planning in 2005. It was then already clear to me that the Bush administration was committed to an ambitious state-building program that sought to address the root causes of terrorism by putting the countries of Afghanistan, the broader Middle East, and above all, Iraq, on the path to consolidated democracy.

It has become painfully evident over the last decade that this admirable objective was unreachable; that the path to Denmark, to consolidated democracy and high per capita income, is out of reach for many countries. Countries afflicted by civil conflict, such as Afghanistan and especially Iraq, sometimes precipitated or exacerbated by the engagement of major external powers, may need generations to establish stable inclusive po-

litical systems. Major powers and the international order could be upended by developments in war-torn countries in remote parts of the world. But different civil wars had different consequences. As the essays in these two volumes demonstrate, some consequences are more important than others and the opportunities for external state builders are limited.

With time for reflection, distance from Central and South Asia (both of us are now at Stanford University), and the opportunity to engage with leading scholars who have thought and written much about civil wars and policy responses, we attempted to place the Afghanistan conflict in a global context. We drew three conclusions.

First, before 9/11, the impact of civil strife in remote regions of Central Asia or the Middle East and North Africa on wealthy industrialized nations was unclear, despite several attempts by Al Qaeda to attack the United States. After 9/11, there was no longer any question about the potential scale and horror of the consequences.

Under certain circumstances, civil wars can threaten regional stability and prove dangerous to the major powers. Contagion, proxy warfare, and even black swan events are real possibilities, but estimating probabilities and assigning risks is art, not science. The complexity of the problem, however, should not lead policy-makers to ignore and dismiss the potential threats. During the height of the Cold War, mock travel posters in the United States depicted the annual May Day military parade in Moscow's Red Square with the wry words: *The Soviet Union... Visit Us Before We Visit You*. In the case of Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, enjoying sanctuary provided by a Taliban regime that held the upper hand in a bloody, protracted civil war, visited the United States first – with shocking results.

Moreover, while the short-term costs of intervention and treatment measures are

easy to calculate, the potential long-term costs of inaction are not, as the Rwandan genocide and still unfolding Syrian tragedy demonstrate.

Second, intervening powers usually fail when they ignore local political realities and set unrealistically ambitious goals. This is true not only for the most extreme cases in which the intervening actor uses extensive military force, but also for other efforts at state-building pursued with less-intrusive instruments, such as foreign aid or technical assistance. The promulgation of a well-written constitution and democratic elections do not spontaneously create the institutions and norms needed to change self-interested political behavior. Commanders of an army trained and equipped by foreign forces will often not share their patron's view of who constitutes the immediate and most dangerous threat. The notion that political and economic modernization can be sped up through surges of military forces and increased levels of foreign aid is akin to a farmer believing that ever larger applications of fertilizer and doses of water will invariably increase crop yields and bring harvest day nearer.

Third, ironically, the extreme difficulty of finding a solution in Afghanistan and several other conflicts in the Middle East has obscured an important fact: over the past thirty years, many externally brokered negotiated political settlements to civil wars, monitored and enforced through UN or regional-force peacekeeping operations, have achieved stability and security at relatively low cost. Security does not necessarily lead to the path of better governance and consolidated democracy. But the policy choice for those in capitals to make is not binary – invasion and occupation or nothing at all – it is determining what is feasible and realistic. Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has, in some cases, devel-

oped and applied treatment regimes that have lowered levels of intrastate violence and set the conditions for gradual political and economic development.<sup>4</sup> Such development might or might not take place, but in some instances, external actors have at least been able to provide greater security. Disillusionment with failed U.S.-led state-building efforts in the first decade of this century has risked undermining less-expensive, more-limited and -tailored approaches that can produce modest results if the local circumstances are right. Security, especially if local actors recognize that they are in a hurting stalemate and accept the help of trusted third parties, is easier to provide than better governance and democracy.

Thus, with the support of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, we designed a study of civil wars that was, in part, motivated by our own experiences and research. The study encompasses self-contained civil strife, as well as conflicts involving the commitment of foreign military forces.

This enterprise has drawn upon the collaborative and iterative efforts of some thirty-five U.S. and international participants whose diverse academic and professional backgrounds include political science, global health, diplomacy, development, the military, and the media. Although the essays they have contributed to these two issues of *Daedalus* have to varying degrees been informed by our group's conversations during workshops at the House of the Academy in Cambridge and at Stanford University, the authors' works reflect their own analyses and ideas. Their essays contain a significant number of cross-references, but these do not imply intellectual consensus.

We organized our inquiry by addressing three overarching questions:

- 1) What is the scope of intrastate conflicts and civil wars, and to what extent is this attributable to domestic or international factors?



2) What types of threats emanate from state civil wars that might jeopardize U.S. and global security?

3) What policy options are available to the United States, major and regional powers, and the international community to deal with such threats?

This first volume, “Civil Wars & Global Disorder: Threats & Opportunities,” comprises two sections: “Civil Conflicts: Contexts & Risks” and “The Difficulty of Solutions.” The essays describe the nature and causative factors of civil wars in the modern era, examine the security risks posed by high levels of intrastate violence, and explore the challenges confronting external actors intervening to end the fighting and seek a political settlement.

The second volume, appearing as the Winter 2018 issue of *Dædalus*, is titled “Ending Civil Wars: Constraints & Possibilities” and also consists of two parts: “Norms & Domestic Factors” and “Policy Prescriptions.” The essays in this collection consider the impediments to ending wars of internal disorder when norms such as national identity or commitment to rule of law are not shared by contending elites, or when rebels are fighting for a transnational, divine cause and not simply the seizure of state power. The remaining essays focus on the “what to do” and offer a variety of recommendations to policy-makers. The volume concludes with our own reflections on the risks and possible treatments of civil wars.

The boundaries between the two volumes and sections, of course, are not exact. Almost all authors write about risks, the difficulty of solutions, and policy prescriptions. Given the complexity and interconnectivity of the topics discussed, and the need to give authors sufficient latitude to develop fully their arguments, we avoided fixation on typology. Still, for the most part, the main themes of each essay align with the sections in which they appear.

Our project will continue beyond the publication of the Fall 2017 and Winter 2018 issues of *Dædalus*. Beginning in October 2017, contributing authors will participate in a series of public discussions at U.S. institutions of higher learning and think tanks, dialogues with U.S. government and international organizations, and workshops in countries that have experienced (and are still experiencing) civil wars. In fact, the project’s case studies – Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and its use of buffer zones, the Western Balkans, and Colombia – and the rich analyses our authors draw from conflicts in the Middle East and Africa are shaping our international engagement agenda. The feedback acquired during these various activities will later serve as the basis for a policy-prescriptive occasional paper published under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Before briefly introducing the essays in this volume, a comment on the major insights gained from the deliberations of the project participants over two gatherings and from the essays they prepared. As indicated above, we did not seek to reach a consensus, but instead to categorize the issues (risks, policy prescriptions, and implementation) and encourage diverse analysis from different academic and professional perspectives. Nevertheless, our major debates – ending in both agreements and disagreements – often related to four questions, some previously alluded to.

First, is intrastate warfare increasing in scope and does it threaten international security? The proliferation of civil wars spearheaded by militant jihadists in the greater Middle East cautions against making sweeping generalizations about global trends. At the same time, there is something new here: not since the Cold War have we experienced rebels in many countries avowedly inspired by a coherent transnational ideology. Operating with unprec-

edented access to social media and digital recruitment, their reach is truly global in nature. Moreover, as Tanisha Fazal explains in her contribution to the second volume, insurgents fighting for a divine cause are quite different from those who fight to seize control of a state so that they can enjoy the perquisites that come with sovereignty.

At the same time, while the consequences of today's and future civil wars do not rise to the level of existential threat associated with contemporary warfare between major powers with nuclear arsenals, there are many plausible scenarios that could pose grave risks to denizens in far-flung parts of the world. Transnational terrorists can effectively terrorize. We have seen that unanticipated large migrant flows contribute to a declining commitment to open and inclusive political orders in liberal democracies. Religionist rebels demonstrating alternatives to the current world political system inspire adherents in their self-proclaimed caliphates and beyond. Lethal pandemics can spread across borders from a war zone in which there is no capable government with which to partner, with the only alternatives being border quarantine or direct intervention, both of which require a massive and intrusive military intervention. However, the vexing problem for policy-makers is that these possibilities all emerge from contingencies that cannot be predicted with any degree of confidence. Effectively planning for low-probability or black-swan events is problematic and politically difficult to justify to taxpayers.

Second, how will the continuing diffusion of economic wealth and the changing tides of globalization impact the willingness of and ways in which major world and regional powers respond to civil wars? If geopolitical spheres of influence reminiscent of the nineteenth-century European-dominated international order or the Cold War era reemerge, then we can anticipate more regionally tailored respons-

es. Such a development might come with both opportunities and risks. The greater interest and enhanced ability of regionally powerful state actors to respond to political crises in their own neighborhood might generate more indigenous solutions with credible enforcement mechanisms.

However, regional powers can only be effective if more distant major powers are supportive. If major powers defend different sides in a civil war, they can preclude the emergence of battlefield deadlocks that can facilitate negotiated settlements. The will for collective action necessary to mount even modest United Nations peacekeeping missions might decrease. Barry Posen points out in his essay in this issue that, as the distribution of power becomes more multilateral, norms of political mediation and peacekeeping to deal with civil wars developed since the late 1980s may be abandoned. This possibility is suggested by the fragmented and generally anemic international response to the Syrian tragedy.

Third, to what degree is the success of foreign interventions in countries that are torn by civil strife dependent on the alignment of interests of external actors with those of national elites? As cited earlier, our own experiences have led us to conclude that this is the central but most underappreciated problem faced by external actors desperate to find local power brokers able and willing to adopt their policy agenda.

Political elites in poorer countries torn by civil war are almost always members of exclusive orders; their primary objective is to stay in power. This requires the care for and feeding of those who provide them with essential support. Most important, they must have enough command over those who control the instruments of violence so that they cannot be overthrown. Political leaders in exclusive or rent-seeking orders are focused on avoiding the loss of status, prestige, money, and even life anticipated after their removal from office.

*Introduction* These leaders will regard efforts to hold free and fair elections, for instance, or to eliminate corruption as existential threats. Even more-modest policies, like reforming customs services, which are often revenue sources for elites in exclusive orders, might be resisted.<sup>5</sup>

This generates a difficult conundrum for external powers that only have leverage if domestic elites share the same objectives or are highly dependent on foreign assistance that external actors can credibly threaten to withdraw. In practice, key objectives are infrequently shared; and while foreign aid dependency is often the case, threats to terminate such aid are rarely credible. Realistic third-party policy options usually consist of a menu of bad choices fraught with risks. Successful policy must begin with recognition that there are limited opportunities for external state-building.

Fourth and last, when and how is it possible to end high levels of intrastate violence on terms that deliver sustainable physical and economic security, and a modicum of political freedom to the majority of the population? External actors might often be faced with painful trade-offs. This question is addressed in almost all essays found in our two volumes of *Dædalus*, and especially in the next issue.

As noted earlier, recent U.S. and collective failures to treat adequately the most severe cases should not lead to an abandonment of remedies proven to deal effectively with less-acute maladies. There are proven policy options short of neglect. There may be opportunities to create islands of excellence, especially in areas of limited statehood.<sup>6</sup> Prioritized and sequenced building of institutions leading to more accountable political systems is possible under some conditions.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in many cases, it might be impossible to establish political systems that are accountable to a large part of the population. Reaching the destination of “good enough gover-

nance” may disappoint those unrealistically hoping to quickly arrive in Denmark, but is much preferable to the permanent state of vulnerability and lawlessness that characterizes swaths of countries afflicted by large-scale intrastate violence. The extent to which relatively low-cost strategies have reduced the worst excesses of civil war over the past three decades is not generally well understood.

This issue of *Dædalus* opens by examining how civil conflicts are situated in the current international system and identifying major associated risks. James Fearon’s essay provides a comprehensive overview of the problem of civil war in the post-1945 international system. With meticulous use of empirical evidence, he describes global patterns and trends over the whole period, and then sketches an explanation for the spread of civil war up to the early 1990s and the partial recession since then. He argues that the United Nations and major-power policy responses since the end of the Cold War have contributed to the subsequent decline in the outbreak of civil wars.

However, as Fearon writes, “the spread of civil war and state collapse within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region over the last fifteen years has posed one set of problems that the current international policy repertoire cannot address well, and highlights a second, deeper problem whose effects are gradually worsening and for which there does not appear to be any good solution within the constraints of the present UN system.” The first problem is that compared with conflicts in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, civil war and state collapse in MENA more directly affect the major powers, and possibly international peace and security more broadly. Moreover, MENA conflicts resist the standard treatment model of mediation, third-party peacekeeping operations, and aid programs. The second problem,

manifestly evident in the U.S. experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, is that third-party efforts to build functional and self-sustaining states following state collapse due to civil war, misrule, or invasion have mainly been failures. Fearon provides an excellent foundation for the subsequent essays in both volumes.

In their contribution, Bruce Jones and Stephen Stedman contend that there is no global crisis of failed states and civil wars. Instead, they argue that the particular crisis in the greater Middle East has disrupted stability in that region and has had three repercussions for today's international order: hundreds of thousands of refugees seeking asylum in Europe, where immigration politics have fed the failure of international humanitarian cooperation; the success of ISIS in conquering parts of Syria and Iraq, its ability to metastasize in countries far away from the fighting, and its capacity to inspire terrorist attacks in Europe; and the failure of the major powers and international institutions to manage the conflicts, with external military intervention supporting indiscriminate wars of attrition.

They maintain that the civil wars of the Middle East and the failure of the international order have contributed to a narrative of failing global cooperation. Jones and Stedman believe that this narrative has fueled but is not the cause of the greater threat to international order: populist backlash in the United States and Europe.

Stewart Patrick's essay is the first in a series of contributions that investigate specific threats that emanate from states that have collapsed or are experiencing or recovering from large-scale violence. Patrick persuasively writes that sweeping characterizations of states mired in civil wars as existential threats to the United States and broader global security are not warranted. He notes that under certain circumstances, countries experiencing or recovering from internal conflict can generate negative "spillovers"

of significant concern – including terrorism, crime, humanitarian crises, and infectious disease – and, as Syria shows, can undermine regional stability.

Patrick suggests that the connection between internal disorder and transnational threat is highly contingent on an array of factors and conditions. Patrick's non-exhaustive list of these includes "the nature and capabilities of the governing regime, the presence of 'alternatively governed' spaces, the nature of the underlying conflict and its duration and intensity, the existence of illicit commodities in high international demand, the country's geographic location and integration into the world economy, and the influence of powerful external state actors." He concludes that it is the moral considerations – the "suffering of strangers" more than any spillover – that should motivate U.S. and global concern with war-torn states.

Writing on the interrelationships between civil wars and terrorism, Martha Crenshaw posits that when rebels employ terrorism, civil wars can become more consequential and harder to resolve. Since the 1980s, jihadism has mobilized rebels and secessionists, outside entrepreneurs, foreign fighters (and their funders and trainers), and organizers of transnational and domestic terrorism. Crenshaw argues that "these activities are integral to the jihadist trend, representing overlapping and conjoined strands of the same ideological current, which in turn reflects internal division and dissatisfaction within the Arab world and within Islam."

She notes, however, that jihadism is neither unitary nor monolithic. Her essay carefully traces the competing power centers and divergent ideological orthodoxies encompassed by jihadism, beginning with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And because different jihadist actors emphasize different priorities and strategies – they disagree, for example, on whether the



*Introduction* “near” or the “far” enemy should take precedence – the relationship between jihadist terrorism and civil war is far from constant. Crenshaw also highlights the major policy implications of this reasoning. She writes that as jihadists suffer military defeats in civil wars, they may revert increasingly to transnational terrorism, with potential negative feedback loops: “Terrorism against outside powers can provoke military intervention, which not only intensifies civil war, but also sparks more terrorism against occupying forces, their local allies, and their home countries.” She poses the critical question: can powerful states resist terrorist provocation?

Paul Wise and Michele Barry, both medical doctors with extensive field experience in violence-prone developing countries, analyze the relationship between epidemics and intrastate warfare. Their discussion is premised on the recognition that infectious pandemics can threaten the international order, and that state collapse and civil wars may elevate the risk that pandemics will break out.

They identify three related mechanisms of central concern: “1) the possibility that civil wars can elevate the risk that an infectious outbreak with pandemic potential will emerge; 2) the chance that civil wars can reduce outbreak surveillance and control capacities, resulting in silent global dissemination; and 3) the potential for infectious outbreaks emerging in areas plagued by civil conflict to generate complex political and security challenges that can threaten traditional notions of national sovereignty and create pressure for international intervention.” Wise and Barry elucidate one of the most important conclusions of this project: that civil wars increase the probability for global pandemics, and that global pandemics are a challenge that even the most developed countries, with the most advanced health care systems, ignore at their own peril.

In her essay, Sarah Kenyon Lischer examines how one tragic output of civil war – large-scale displacement crises – can become deeply enmeshed in the politics, security, and economics of the conflict. She details how refugee and internally displaced populations can exacerbate concerns about regional destabilization. With the Syrian civil war, for example, the neighboring host states of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon bear the brunt of the refugee crisis, while European states seek to prevent further encroachment by Middle Eastern asylum seekers.

Lischer asserts that policy-makers should not view host state security and refugee security as unrelated or opposing factors. Rather, refugee protection and state stability are linked: “Risks of conflict are higher when refugees live in oppressive settings, lack legal income-generation options, and are denied education for their youth. The dangers related to the global refugee crisis interact with many other threats that emanate from civil wars and weak states, such as fragile governments, rebel and terrorist group activity, and religious or ethnic fragmentation.”

Vanda Felbab-Brown explores the often oversimplified relationship between organized crime, illicit economies, violence, and international order. In analyzing the range of possible responses by states and the international community to the nexus of criminal economies and civil wars, insurgencies, and terrorism, her essay highlights how “premature and ill-conceived government efforts to combat illicit economies can have counterproductive effects and hamper efforts to suppress militancy.” She adds that flawed policy approaches can themselves generate international spillovers of criminality. Felbab-Brown emphasizes the complexity of the relationship between transnational criminality and civil wars, noting that the conflict-crime nexus can involve “defeating militants without

suppressing illicit economies, suppressing crime and illicit economies without ending conflict, and state co-optation of illicit economies.”

The second half of this volume highlights the difficulties of devising and effectively implementing responses to the threats identified in the preceding essays. Hendrik Spruyt contends that adherence to Westphalian principles, in which authority is defined territorially, has contributed to the decline of interstate war. That war makes the state and the state makes war is a logic of state-building that does not apply in many contemporary situations. Conversely, applying Westphalian principles and norms to states that gained their independence since 1945 has contributed to the frequency and intensity of civil conflicts. A fundamental problem is that the norms of Westphalian sovereignty, which protect the geographic integrity of the state, are in tension with the inability of many states to effectively govern their own territories. Spruyt examines how the norms of self-determination, non-interference, and *uti possidetis* (that newly recognized states should maintain inherited, colonial borders), in particular, provide poor guidelines for responding to civil wars. Rather, Spruyt argues that the character of the combatants’ challenge to fundamental Westphalian principles should guide policy responses. For example, civil wars seeking concessions by the extant government warrant a different treatment from secessionist civil wars. This perspective illustrates how, in some contexts, the international legal regime may choose to break with the principle of *uti possidetis*, with partition being the most effective solution to a conflict; if partition, which usually requires the acceptance of all affected parties, is impossible, federalism may be the best available alternative.

Stephen Biddle analyzes the use of “small-footprint” security force assistance (SFA) to attempt to stabilize weak states,

which has emerged as an alternative to U.S. ground-force commitments. He finds that effective SFA is much harder to implement in practice than often assumed, and less viable as a substitute for large unilateral troop deployments. He makes a strong case that for the United States, in particular, the achievable upper bound is usually modest, and even this is possible only if policy is intrusive and conditional, which it rarely is.

Biddle builds his argument on the understanding of SFA as a principal-agent relationship: “The conditions under which the United States provides SFA commonly involve large interest misalignments between the provider (the principal) and the recipient (the agent), difficult monitoring challenges, and difficult conditions for enforcement: a combination that typically leaves principals with limited real leverage and that promotes inefficiency in aid provision.” Overcoming these challenges is not impossible, but the combination of necessary conditions has not been a common feature of U.S. security force assistance in the modern era, nor is it likely to become so in the future: “U.S. policy-makers can design SFA programs to be intrusive and conditional, but it is much harder to create political interest alignment and this is often absent.”

Will Reno’s essay looks into the persistent conflict and prolonged state institutional collapse that lead to what he terms “fictional states” and “atomized societies.” He focuses on the domestic factors that cause some states to break down. This phenomenon, he explains, is rooted in decades of personalist rule and the failure of mid-twentieth-century state-building projects, problems long considered particular to sub-Saharan Africa. Reno notes, however, that developments in parts of the Middle East and Central Asia show that this connection between a particular type of authoritarian rule and state failure, which produces a distinctive type of multisided warfare,

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*Introduction* is not exclusive to Africa. Like Spruyt, he points to the tensions between the accepted norms of the Westphalian system and the logic of poor governance, contributing to civil wars in many polities.

Aila Matanock and Miguel García-Sánchez provide a different regional perspective, examining the 2016 Colombian popular plebiscite and the unique challenges posed by ending war with a negotiated settlement. Conflicts increasingly occur in democratic states, and voters have sometimes been directly involved in the process in an effort to overcome elite divisions. Yet, as Matanock and García-Sánchez point out, according to evidence from the 2016 popular plebiscite in Colombia, which sought direct voter approval of a peace process between the government, leftist guerrilla groups, and right-wing paramilitary bands, referenda and other tools of direct democracy seem to amplify elite divisions, and therefore may not be useful mechanisms to strengthen peace processes. They postulate that focusing instead on traditional elite-led negotiations that seek to satisfy each faction may have a higher chance of producing signed settlements that both sides will adhere to. However, the Colombian case also suggests some alternative forms of inclusivity, which could increase the legitimacy of the process and thereby improve the odds of successful implementation.

Concluding this volume, Barry Posen asks how a multipolar system might complicate future international management of civil wars. He describes how the “policy science” of civil wars, which emerged in the early 1990s, included deeply embedded assumptions about the nature of the international political system: “It was taken for granted that the United States would remain the strongest power by a wide margin, and that it would lead a liberal coalition that included virtually all the other strong states in the world.” Posen observes that now, though the United States is likely to

remain much more powerful than its global competitors, several consequential powers have emerged to challenge U.S. leadership and produce a multipolar system.

Further, as the top of the international system begins to even out, the influence of middle powers may also grow. He suggests that “this new constellation of power seems likely to magnify disagreements about how states suffering civil wars should be stabilized, limit preventive diplomacy, produce external intervention that will make for longer and more destructive wars, and render settlements more difficult to police.”

As mentioned above, the next issue of *Dædalus*, forthcoming in winter 2018, is titled “Ending Civil Wars: Constraints & Possibilities” and will include our project’s remaining essays.

ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See James D. Fearon, "Civil War & the Current International System," *Daedalus* 146 (4) (Fall 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The authors thank Barry Posen for this insight.

<sup>3</sup> The authors draw from Stephen Biddle in using the principal-agent construct to describe the problem.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Gowan and Stephen John Stedman, "The International Regime for Treating Civil War, 1988 – 2017," *Daedalus* 147 (1) (Winter 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Why We Need Foreign Aid," *The American Interest*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/06/19/need-foreign-aid/>.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Risse and Eric Stollenwerk, "Limited Statehood Does Not Equal Civil War," *Daedalus* 147 (1) (Winter 2018).

<sup>7</sup> See Clare Lockhart, "Sovereignty Strategies: Enhancing Core Governance Functions as a Postconflict & Conflict-Prevention Measure," *Daedalus* 147 (1) (Winter 2018).