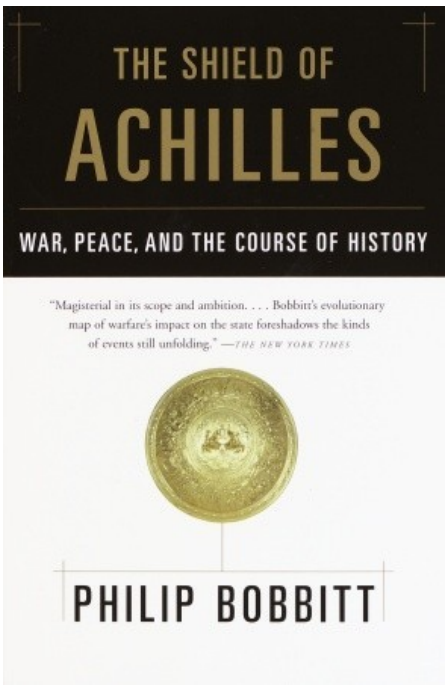

The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History

Philip Bobbitt

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The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History Philip Bobbitt
For five centuries, the State has evolved according to epoch-making cycles of war and peace. But now our world has changed irrevocably. What faces us in this era of fear and uncertainty? How do we protect ourselves against war machines that can penetrate the defenses of any state? Visionary and prophetic, **The Shield of Achilles** looks back at history, at the “Long War” of 1914-1990, and at the future: the death of the nation-state and the birth of a new kind of conflict without precedent.

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

Date	:	Published September 9th 2003 by Anchor (first published January 1st 2002)
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Author	:	Philip Bobbitt
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Genre	:	History, Nonfiction, Politics, War, Military Fiction

From Reader Review The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History for online ebook

Jesse says

A wealth of knowledge to be sure, but being pre-9/11 material this is essentially a historical document giving insight into bobbit's thinking and research methods. While I wouldn't say Shield is obsolete, I expect most readers will be more interested in bobbit's more recent books "terror and consent" and/or "garments of court and state".

Mike says

Sweeping . . . that's the best one-word review I can offer . . . just sweeping, as Dr. Bobbitt traces the basic history of the whole concept of the nation-state from inception to circa 2001. And he does so in prose that is as compelling as a novel in places, believe it or not. I started reading this book in 2004 in the midst of a horrible Floridian hurricane and found myself not wanting to put it down or leave my apartment. The chapter on Colonel House and his legacy in statecraft is worth the price of the book alone, to say nothing of the rest of it. If you want a great introduction to modern statecraft and how contemporary Western nations think and work, this is the best place I can think of in one book to start out on that education. It's long and dense, but again, the author is a very skilled writer and keeps your interest all the way through.

Steve says

Pulled out 'The Shield' recently and re-read some sections - Bobbitt is an interesting character, a constitutional lawyer and historian. I heard him speak at the Stanford Law and Ethics Forum a few weeks ago on 'Terror and Consent' which is also the title of his new book. The 'Shield' is of door-stop dimensions, but it had (for me) great value. He traces the dynamic, evolutionary relationship between the internal, constitutional order of states and the external challenges of strategy and war, beginning in the 15th century He argues that the effectiveness of internal mechanisms of order is proven (or not) in the Darwinian arena of foreign affairs. For example the so called 'long war'- all the conflicts between 1914 and the Peace of Paris in 1990 were (in his terms) an epochal war between the constitutional orders of fascism,communism and democracy. We are now, according to Bobbitt, in the beginning phases of a new epochal war, the war on terror, the first in which it will not require a state to destroy a state and which will force constitutional changes to survive the challenge. Gotta love a big picture guy. But he could use a brevity focused editor. Recommended- but be prepared to skim!

Sherwood Smith says

The perfect book to take on a long train ride. Bobbitt's strength is in his ability to paint the Big Picture, specifically the evolution of the state, and how we're now passing into the era of the market state.

He supports his thesis with a staggering mass of detail which I found somewhat problematical the farther

back he went (Castlereagh the great visionary? Really? What about Kosciusko? Or for that matter, Talleyrand and Metternich, and how a great deal of the face of modern Europe was envisioned by the first before Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, and the latter ten years later at Vienna?)

The problem with Big Picture thinking is that the conclusions can seem too neat, and history has a way of demonstrating how very messy it is. Given that, the last half of the book is terrific, as he examines the alteration of paradigm over the twentieth century conflicts--the first half of which he calls the Long War. It ends with a coda supplied after the events of 9/11, striking a warning note.

Tom Emm says

Can’t rate this highly enough. A fine historical interpretation of why power structures have changed over time, leading to the rise of the Nation State; how they might evolve in the future and what might be the catalyst.

Terry Quirke says

A tome of a read but well worth the effort, Bobbitt poses an intriguing link between the development of military strategy/technology and the development of legal states. The net is cast wide and covers an enormous amount of information, and generally Bobbitt manages to hold it all together and has a good writing style to keep the reader on the journey. Thought provoking and written before the events of 9/11 and recent Middle Eastern history, some of his possible future developments do seem to be happening.

A comprehensive read and you'll need to wear your thinking head but well worth it.

Patrick McCoy says

The Shield of Achilles by Philip Bobbit was an interesting look at the history and culture of war in western society. I basically focused on Book I: State of War. I didn’t have time to finish it since I was in SE Asia, and I haven’t decided whether or not to tackle Book II: States of Peace. Bobbit has an impressive knowledge of military innovation through strategy and technology. He is equally knowledgeable about constitutional law and its history. He presents an interesting analysis of what he calls “the long war” (1919-1990). I particularly found Part III The Historic Consequences of the Long War interesting for his analysis of The Strategic Choices (of the Market State). He comes across as hawkish and it wouldn’t surprise me if he was a supporter of the Bush administration’s foreign policy with his attitudes toward war and foreign policy.

Dave says

If Schama's 'Citizens' is the best history book I've read with a narrow focus, this is the best one with a broader focus.

The weaknesses almost all lie in the 2nd half of the book, which is not as strong as the first. The chapter on House I felt could have been eliminated all together.

But the first half is so enriching and eye opening. So many things came together for me about the last 500 years of western history as I read this.

Alan says

A bit of a slog, but worth it. An eye-opener for me. It's distressing to read so persuasive a prediction of nuclear weapons proliferation and that states are evolving away from their objective of improving citizens' welfare. On the other hand, do-good initiatives informed by his analysis will be more like to actually do good. Right after finishing this, I read about Kroll Inc., a very profitable international fraud busting company that seems the kind of organization necessary for Bobbitt's more rosy scenarios. Mr. Kroll says that corruption, while pervasive enough for him to make lots of money, is declining.

Jack Schweitzer says

It has the potential to open and change your persepective if you can handle the scope and the depth of the work. One of the best books Ive ever picked up. If your interested in war and history give this book a try

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Hadrian says

Reconstruction of the Shield of Achilles, by Dr. Raffaele D'Amato, and Giuseppe Rava, *The Early Aegean Warrior, 5000-1450 BC.*

Now,
when the famous crippled Smith had finished off
that grand array of armor, lifting it in his arms
he laid it all at the feet of Achilles' mother Thetis—
and down she flashed like a hawk from snowy Mount Olympus
bearing the brilliant gear, the god of fire's gift.
-Homer, The Iliad, lines 714-720, Robert Fagles translation.

This is a vast and sprawling book of IR theory, international law, and grand strategy. The material within could easily two, or perhaps three, separate books.

The first premise is that the world has recently (1990) emerged from a long epochal war on the future of the nation-state, of a parliamentary nation-state versus the competing systems of fascism and communism. The war had started in 1914 and had only been concluded with the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany of 1990, the reunification of Germany, and formal dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The second is an investigation of the modern state, starting with the Renaissance. Long epochal wars are the catalysts of profound constitutional change through a series of innovations, either from a political or strategic impetus for reform. Innovations in grand strategy led to changes in the constitutional order of states, ranging form mass conscription to mass education.

First, there is the Princely State, dating from perhaps 1494 with the invasion of Charles VIII into Italy, and ending with the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572. Here, the epochal wars were the Habsburg-Valois dynastic wars, where the presence of a State confers legitimacy upon a dynasty. Innovations in this time included a more stable financial system, permanent government, the use of *condotierre* mercenaries, mobile artillery, and star forts.

Second, there is the Kingly State, from the Dutch Revolt to the Fronde, which arose during the Thirty Years War. Now, the legitimacy is reversed, and the power of the dynasty confers legitimacy to the state. We see the rise of Absolutism, standing armies, and the first Gunpowder Revolution.

Third, we have the territorial state, from the execution of Charles I of England to the French Revolution, midst the Wars of Louis XIV, where the State is the best managerial power for the country with aristocratic leadership, professional armies, and cabinet wars.

Fourth, there is the State-Nation, which began with the American Revolution, and concluding with the German Unification in 1870, where the State shall form the identity of the Nation. We see here Nationalism, Imperialism, Mass Conscription, and Defensive Battles.

Fifth, the Nation-State, starting with the Civil War, and ending with the Yugoslav Collapse (?). This during the Long War mentioned earlier, with the rise of the Welfare State, the Military-Industrial Complex, Nuclear Weapons, and Telecommunications.

This long cyclical view at history arrives at the present day, with the decline of the Nation-State, and the present Market-State, starting perhaps with the 1989 'Second Russian Revolution', or maybe earlier. War is, in his view, the defining experience of the modern state, where constitutions as diverse as the American and the French were all imposed by the exigencies of war. Thus the modern Market-State is the result of the Long War from 1914-1990. It is this present era which was the new characterization of global statecraft.

By now, the state has amassed a wide range of responsibilities, leading to a sort of crisis of identity. The State, first and foremost, has to guarantee the security of its citizens and maintain a monopoly on the use and regulation of violence; it has to manage the economic welfare of its people, but modern commerce has now expanded on an international, perhaps even worldwide scale; and an alternate promise is protecting its 'culture', the ideologies of democracy, egalitarianism, and personal freedom. It may not be possible for the state to encompass the last two. The press and other forms of media have taken on the responsibilities of mass propaganda.

In order to deal with these varying threats and responsibilities, the Market-State has emerged, which depends on international capital markets and the modern multinational business network to create stability in the world economy, instead of an international political body. The nation-state was responsible for the welfare of the people, but the market-state considers welfare to be one commodity of many, with full employment and 'opportunity' being the paramount goals.

As for the state's responsibilities? Security will devolve to the private sector or on the federal model, or local protection. Money will become increasingly important in representation. The welfare state will diminish sharply and permanently, and privatization will take over.

On the foreign policy level, the market-state has five strategic options available to it. New Nationalism, or US interests above all, isolation in all other instances (George W. Bush), New Internationalism through world peace and collective security through multilateralism (Zbigniew Brzezinski), New Realism and the balance of power (Talleyrand/Kissinger), New Evangelism and the spread of Democracy by all means necessary (Bill Clinton), and New Leadership, with US hegemony remaining supreme (Charles Krauthammer).

The US market-state has its own set of strategic dilemmas, ranging from their economic strategy to the priority of NATO, weapons proliferation, a North-Asian Security Council (Japan, Russia, the PRC, ROK), trade regionalization, guarantees for regional security, lease-hire security arrangements or mercenaries, and finally strategic planning group similar to those used in private industry.

New methods for the market-state include economic sanctions of multiple sorts, covert action (even though it is fundamentally inconsistent with American constitutional law), sustained precision targeting, information warfare in electronic communications, missile defense systems, simulations, mercenary forces, and so forth.

All this is in Part I.

The second part of the book, States of Peace, discusses the new roles of International Law. The Society of Nation-States is not always benevolent, of course, and not always amenable to intervention, even in humanitarian cases. Here he draws a horrifying yet only too apt comparison between the Kitty Genovese murder in New York, where a young woman died screaming in agony and one person called the caops several hours later, and the cases of intervention in Yugoslavia. There is an international 'bystander effect' and a diffusion of responsibility. Bobbitt holds that we must rid ourselves of the illusion of an eternal binding international laws as a legitimating force.

Next follows a discussion of international treaties, saying that they produce the 'constitutions' for an international society of states for each respective era. What follows are discussions of Augsburg, Westphalia, Utrecht, Vienna, Versailles, and the 1990 Peace of Paris. These historical analogues also include analyses of contemporary legal scholars, from Grotius to Talleyrand and more.

Bobbitt concludes with three possible iterations of a market-state. The first is 'entrepreneurial', which relies on free trade, migrant labor, high income disparity, and emphasizes personal achievement. Although this resembles a right-libertarian fantasy, he pins the People's Republic of China as a modern example to this.

The second form of market-state is 'mercantile', with a strong protective government, with the objective being social stability. Examples here include Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Singapore.

The third market-state is 'managerial', which involves openness in a regional market, stakeholder companies, and high levels of regulation. This example might be the European Union, or the United States between 1940-1970. Each model has its own strengths and vulnerabilities. He concludes by offering a Tom Clancy style list of future possibilities and counterfactuals, meant to demonstrate the possible interactions between states.

However, simply because Bobbitt notices the trends leading up to the market-state, does not necessarily mean his advocacy for it. He notes, as earlier, the dismantling of the concept of the state providing welfare for its citizens, (because in this state it can no longer do so), but other factors including personal corruption and the increasing probability of trans-national threads, and the possibility of a global epochal war.

The book ends with a postscript, the only part of the book written after the events of September 11th, where he prophecies the possibility of small groups of disaffected individuals to cause massive harm to a nation-state, with dispersion of new technology. In a closing chapter, 'Possible Worlds', he describes future crises for the new market-state, from international stock market crashes, nuclear proliferation, Russian authoritarianism, European and Japanese demographic crises, criminal conspiracies, Muslim anti-Western opinion, advances in biotechnology, and so forth. They are all only too plausible, and many have indeed already come to pass, give or take one or two years from his prediction.

This book is vast. It contains multitudes. It is perhaps a law book, but it has astonishing implications for international relations and global theory. It even cites poetry: Auden, Larkin, Milton, Milosz, Symborska,

and of course, long stretches of Homer. It has the broad booming rhythms of a Spenglerian prophecy of history. It is one of the very few books I have seen which encompasses or defines this modern age.

And all of this was written before September 2001.

I will revise this review later and make it more coherent. All of this was almost in one go. This book deserves better.

EMPHATICALLY RECOMMENDED.

Michael says

This is an excellent book. The author's thesis is that there is a dynamic relationship between strategic and legal development, such that changes in the strategic environment drive constitutional changes in states and the evolution of state's constitutions change the strategic environment. As a consequence history has moved through various stages which correspond to the development of modern states, with each stage centered on an "epochal war" (often a series of conflicts) which separates the successful constitutional form from the unsuccessful.

It is long, dense and academic, but well worth the slog.

Perry Whitford says

Certain world leaders over the last dozen years have been in thrall to the theories and arguments that historian and political adviser Phillip Bobbitt formed in this mammoth book, published in 2002.

Why?

There is only one way to find out - to read the thing, which is quite a challenge as, not only could you find an alternative use for it as a prop for the shortened leg on a large-sized table, you could actually use it for a small-sized table on its own.

In the Introduction, Bobbitt establishes his aims clearly to identify the emergence of the the 'market-state' as the newest form of state, superseding the nation-state of the 20th century, much as that form had superseded the imperial-state of the 19th, and so on through six epochs all the way back to the very emergence of the very idea of State in 15th century.

He asserts that Law, Strategy and History are interconnected prerequisites for the constitutional legitimacy needed for a State, a vague but obvious fact on the face of it.
But Bobbitt has what he considers to be a new thesis to argue, so of course he has to make this claim as though he is the first person to think this, chiding other thinkers with the usual academic childishness such writers can't resist.

In Book 1, 'States of War', he presents a plausible explanation of how an epoch of war (termed the Long War) that started in 1914 only actually ended in 1990 with the Paris Treaty, for only then did the battle for constitutional legitimacy between communism, fascism and parliamentarianism conclude with the end of the Soviet state.

Military histories are provided for the previous five epochs he recognizes, all of which will be familiar to anyone who has studied history - almost specifically european history that is - at any depth.

Then he moves onto his definition of the current epoch and its 'market-states', which have come into being as a direct result of 3 causes: globalization, mass computation and WMDs.

At its simplest, his market-state definition is this: 'The State will maximize the opportunity of its citizens'. The belief is that the state will achieve this by doing less, relying more increasingly on corporations and NGOS (Non-governmental organisations| to get the job done for us (you know, such as banks, because they can be trusted to provide opportunity for the citizenry at large, right?)

He sees three such types of state: mercantile (national, interventionist), managerial (less centralized, partly interventionist) and entrepreneurial (internationalist, rarely interventionist).
I think you can guess which of these he favors.

He ends his book on war by stating that the US approach to war is outdated, that 'our current strategy owes more to General Ulysses Grant than to General Colin Powell'.

A new epoch calls for a new strategy. Terrorism is now the enemy, and the proliferation of WMDs to 'rogue' states must be stopped, something the UN will not do but NATO may, or similar, ad-hoc coalitions (such as the soon to be Coalition of the ~~Witless~~ Willing).

Book 2 addresses the international law of the society of states that has changed across the six epochs as a result of the peace conferences that has set the agenda after crucial conflicts have ended. (e.g. Westphalia established the Kingly State, Vienna the State-nation etc)

As with the historical sections of Book 1, he could have done without this clutter, though it does flesh out his thesis. This includes a lengthy history of the evolution of the proceeding form of government that he feels the market-state has replaced, the nation-state.

Also included is focus afforded to non-elected political adviser to Woodrow Wilson, Edward M. House; an analogy between the famous 'Kitty Genovese' incident familiar to all student psychologists; and the wars in the former Yugoslavian countries.

I know that jurisprudence and international law are subjects difficult to make engaging, but he could have made a better stab at it. This is the biggest problem with the bulk of the book and the inclusion of so much background - he simply doesn't write interestingly enough to keep you reading (which is why I read the first 350 pages in Oct 2012, then left it for two years until Oct 2014 to read the rest).

His take of Gorbachev's policies and intentions that proved the catalyst for the collapse of the USSR are somewhat dubious, suggesting that he had no real desire to move towards the eventual outcomes but rather blundered into them.
I still say that he and the USSR could have resorted to arms at any stage of the fragmentation of its state, but decided not to. That fact is more important than the negative effects of some misguided short-term economic reforms.

However, he is excellent on the subject of nuclear proliferation, making a clear and compelling case for the obligations that continue to define US policy, explaining why constitutionally unstable states or states with openly aggressive geopolitical aims should not be permitted to have them, and the benefits of ensuring that Germany and Japan continue to resist the need to develop their own nuclear programs instead of relying on American deterrence.

By far the most interesting part is the end, where he moves substantially onto the present and to scenarios from 'Possible Worlds', dependent on the choice of market-states chosen.
His extrapolations have already been proved largely incorrect in the years since publication, but they are all still highly possible, while he is very even-handed in the good and bad that could result from either of the three market-state models.

That is to say, the future under either of the three models looks like a hideous shit-storm whichever way.

At one stage he insists that leading politicians need to talk plainly about their strategy, discarding 'emotive' and essentially meaningless rhetoric, which we can all agree with.
Yet at another stage he merely shrugs his shoulders at the examples of hypocrisy in states, as though its their right to talk and behave in ways that pour scorn on their own constitutions (i.e. Guantanamo, American assistance for a military coup in Egypt?).

I know that this is the reality, but Bobbitt is doing more here than just pointing out the facts, he is offering an argument for how the state should act. So if double-standards are fine, why should politicians be other than the glib Public Relations advisers they have become?

I would argue that it is the very nature of the market-state itself that has made them that way. If those politicians want a state where the market actually controls everything, how can they possibly be anything but emasculated frontmen for the market?

A final word on war leaves the reader in no doubt that it is here to stay:
'We must choose which sort of war we will fight, regardless of what are its causes, to set the terms of the peace we want.'

The market-states he obviously favors, those of the US and the UK, have already chosen that war - the erroneously retaliatory and unlawful one in Irag, which Bobbitt supported.

We can already see the knock-on effect this has had in the middle-east, where several states have seen themselves come under attack from within. Tellingly, the rebels are not fighting to establish market-states on the models of the US or the UK.
Far from it.

In conclusion then, as is frequent with such theory based political works, Bobbitt's thesis could actually have been written on the back of a stamp, but it pays to pad it out to the point of obesity with potted histories of various peace treaties and biographies of political advisors and theorists on international law - where a plodding style encumbers him - as it does to crown it with a grand classical allusion, regardless of how appropriate.

All in all though, it still reads like an all-purpose apology for America to act how it wants in the world, regardless of the supposed advice being offered to a society of states in general.

Though the history is largely euro-centric, he does confirm that the US will be substantially used as a model for the market-state, appropriately enough I suppose.
But he also aims to give an 'objective' account of the countries history and influence, only to continually confuse just who he is referring to when he says "our", or "we", from the Introduction onwards.

If his intention is to persuade other market-states to follow the American lead into the new epoch, then, rather like the foreign policies of George W. Bush, he doesn't do a very good job.
If instead, as I see it, his intention is to say "It's my way or the highway", he makes a compelling case.

David says

Well, I've finally finished this tome. I read this on the Amazon Kindle 3 (iPad and Touch as well) and this thing has 23,074 locations (get used to the new system it's the future...probably...because it is more accurate).

Achilles was a good book but not a great book. Problems for me were that it was over written, fractious, largely speculative, and somewhat dated (having mostly been written before 9/11).

Essentially it is two books rolled into one. Another of its problems. The first book is concerned with the history of the Long or Epochal War...transformative wars which change the nature of states as they are fought. 1914-90 is a good example of this. The second book is about the evolution of the state and the argument that a new type of state is emerging.

Presently we are living at the fag end of the Nation State (which offers its people a better life) and are growing into the Market State (which attempts to offer its people better opportunities).

These two books are inadequately merged into a central thesis so the reader is left with a jarring experience.

In parts the book is brilliant and at other parts cliche...this unevenness was another issue for me...but the brilliant parts managed to give this book three stars instead of two. In truth I wished to give it two but it deserves the three.

Is it worth read? Tough question. I believe the book on the Epochal War is very worthwhile but the book on the evolution of the State less so.

Am glad to be free of this book...but it was worth the time...though, ultimately, unconvincing.

Baden says

Cool book. I'm currently reading about how the great treaties of the world have contributed our current international state: Augsburg, Westfallia, Peace of Paris, etc.

Valentin Chirosca says

Bobbitt the historian tells us the story of the modern state, while Bobbitt the expert in strategic planning links this story to changes in military technology which in turn were bound to change military strategy. So we learn how military requirements produced new kinds of state: the “princely state” (1494 – 1648), the “kingly state” that merged into the “territorial state” (1648 – 1776), the “state-nation” (1776 – 1914), and the “nation-state” in what Bobbitt calls the “Long War” (1914 – 1990). How far this analysis is valid and persuasive is a matter for historians to debate. What is interesting in the present context is Bobbitt’s conclusion: just as the state-nation had to be replaced by the nation-state, so the nation-state, in the 21st century, will be superseded by what Bobbitt calls the “market-state”. It does not matter whether Bobbitt likes or recommends this market-state (he does). Whether we like it or not, this new type of state is what history will bring about.

If you want a really fast introduction to the book’s entire argument, ponder those plates for five minutes, then leap to Bobbitt’s summary of three scenarios on pp. 721-2, and then vault to the climax of the argument on pp. 773-5.
xxi Opening lines: “We are at a moment in world affairs when the essential ideas that govern statecraft must change . . . owing to advances in international telecommunications, rapid computation, and weapons of mass destruction.”
This book “is principally concerned with the relationship between strategy and legal order.”
xxvi “A great epochal war has just ended. The various competing systems of the contemporary nation-state (fascism, communism, parliamentarianism) that fought that war all took their legitimacy from the promise to better the material welfare of their citizens. The market-state offers a different covenant: It will maximize the opportunity of its people.”

Matt Stearns says

The Shield of Achilles is a tome. In that sense it reflects the source for it's title, Homer's elaborate and lengthy description of Achilles' shield in the Iliad. I read this book as part of my research on a paper in which I argued that transnational legal orders are facilitating a reorientation of individual identities and therefore political change. Because of this, I was reading for very specific information and my opinion may be skewed for that reason. Philip Bobbitt's analysis is incredible. He argues persuasively the relationship between war and changes in the orientation of the state (re: government or its corollary) and citizens. Bobbitt utilizes a cross-disciplinary approach, engaging history, law, politics, economics, and psychology, to explain humanity in a way that each discipline has attempted and fallen short. Not since Toynbee's A Study of History have I been so impressed with a comprehensive approach to explaining us.

While the book is phenomenal, Bobbitt's conclusions are not necessarily good. His argues that we are transition from the "nation-state" orientation to the "market-state". A market-state is concerned chiefly with protecting wealth and open markets. It is engaged in what I would describe as a perversion of capitalism ala Disaster Capitalism. Given the record wealth inequality around the world and the financial, political, and environmental devastation wrought by regulatory capture there is a lot of recent events that lends credence to his conclusion.

As I said, I read this book for a specific purpose. However, I found it so good that I plan to reread the hulking 800 page text to approach it without predispositions or agendas. A willingness to reread is truthfully the highest recommendation that one can give for any book.

Colin says

The breadth and depth of this book is astonishing. Bobbitt explains why the 20th Century was one "Long War" fought between Fascism, Communism and Parliamentarism. The latter won.

But the more important point is the void created by the lack of the cold war, and how that confuses countries in terms of how to react to new problems of terror, dictators, food crises or even climate change.

Offers views on NATO, UN, EU etc.

Tough read with enormous detail in history from 1400's to now.

Sean says

I thought that this book might be my white whale, but I finally caught up to it. Purchased, 2002. Began reading, 2002, 2005, and 2012. Finished, 2012. Phew.

A dense examination of the interplay between law, war, and the constitutional ordering of the state. The first book focuses on the history of the modern state, and the periods of war and peace that led to paradigm shifts in way states were conceived of and behaved. Much attention is given to the Long War, Bobbit's name for the 75ish years of struggle that lasted from 1914 to 1990.

The second book turns to the international society of states, and to the epoch-making peaces that periodically mark the end of one constitutional form and the advent of another.

Bobbit contends that the nation-state, born of the late 19th century and maturing in the conflicts of the 20th -- which saw parlimentarianism triumph over fascism and communism -- is withering away, unable to face the various technological challenges of the 21st century. In its place, a market-state will arise, and is already arising. What shape it will take is still in play, and depends on the choices we make today.

I found much, and perhaps most, of Bobbit's argument persuasive, and think that the book aged well. Indeed, I imagine that I got more out of the segment on possible futures in 2012 than I might have in 2002.

Highly recommended for those with an interest in military matters, the law, or geopolitics. It's not an easy read, but I think it's a worthwhile investment of your time.

Timothy says

This is a remarkable work -- if only for its sheer ambition and the grace with which it is pursued. Setting into meaningful dialogue military/strategic history and political/constitutional history, Bobbitt traces the changing dominant forms of the "state" from its Renaissance founding (princely states) through to what he argues is the recent (or perhaps still occurring) demise of the 20th-century manifestation (nation states). So the historical narrative is not intended only to enrich our understanding of the past and to provide much-needed perspective for today's challenges, both of which it does in spades. It also sets up his more provocative and unabashedly speculative proposal: that we are living not just in the waning of the nation state but in the early formative stages of its successor, what he calls the "market state." One is tempted to review this book on the plausibility of this proposal regarding the market state, and this in turn tempts one to judge such ideas according to what one believes (desires, wishes, hopes...) the state to be or to become. But this is not the real value of the book, in my opinion. Whether Bobbitt "gets it right" or not is somewhat besides the point, for he has done an enormous service by setting the most trenchant and bewildering challenges of 21st century sociopolitical life in the midst of an integrated historical narrative that leaves this reader, at least, feeling better equipped to THINK further and more responsibly about our present and our possible futures. And specific political debates take on a new salience in this context, even as they show themselves to be ever less reducible to simple solutions (especially ones rooted in old ideologies, left or right or other). I look forward to reading his sequel, Terror and Consent: The Wars of the 21st Century, which promises to address the speculative futures of the market state in more detail (yet I will also be eager to ask how the economic events

from 2008 onward may affect his work, Terror and Consent being published in 2008). In the end, it is a book to read carefully, to ponder broadly, and then to set aside in order to participate more intelligently and fully in the political work of life together. That Bobbitt writes elegantly and synthesizes everything from poetry to policy to warfare to theory so beautifully makes the experience all the more rewarding and compelling.
