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The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century by Robert Cooper

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Recent Books on International Relations

Political and Legal

G. JOHN IKENBERRY

The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century. BY ROBERT COOPER. London: Atlantic Books, 2003, 156 pp. £10.49.

The United States has Fukuyama, Huntington, and Kagan as its prophets of the coming world order. Who does Europe have? The answer is Robert Cooper, a former adviser to Tony Blair and an EU diplomat. This small book of essays offers a sweeping interpretation of today's global predicament. Cooper argues that two revolutionary forces are transforming international relations: the breakdown of state control over violence, reflected in the growing ability of tiny private groups to wield weapons of mass destruction, and the rise of a stable, peaceful order in Europe that is not based on either the balance of power or the sovereignty of independent states. In this scheme, the Westphalian system of nation-states and power politics is being undermined on both sides—by a post-modern Europe and a premodern world of failed states and post-imperial chaos.

Cooper makes a good case that the growing threat of terrorism necessitates

new forms of cooperation and a reconstructed international order that goes beyond the balance of power or hegemony. Stable order in the new age must be built on legitimate authority and more inclusive political identities. But apart from these postmodern urgings, Cooper's vision remains sketchy.

Cooper is most interesting in his explorations of how the West should cope with the encroachment of pre-modern violence. The American approach to such threats is hegemonic—to control, through military force if necessary, the foreign policies of threatening states. The European community, meanwhile, aims to expand outward to absorb threatening societies on its periphery. In Cooper's view, neither approach is sustainable, and he seeks a synthesis that would allow the United States and Europe to confront threats together over the long haul. The defensive interventionism displayed in the West's response to Afghanistan is one model, and the U.N. protectorate in Bosnia and Kosovo is another. Cooper's provocative call for a new Western imperialism that is compatible with human rights and cosmopolitan values is fraught with unexamined peril but worthy of serious debate.