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# What Happened to the Idea of World Government

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## Abstract

What happened to the idea of world government, so central in the United States to public debate of the 1930s and 1940s, and why has it been replaced by “global governance”? This article reviews the reasons behind that evolution—the need to incorporate interdependence and nonstate actors

into analytical frameworks along with a lack of imagination from analysts—as well as the pluses and minuses of both concepts. When states still could solve or attenuate most problems, world government remained a possible objective and not far from the mainstream. Paradoxically, now that states visibly cannot address a growing number of transboundary threats, world government is unimaginable; and even more robust international organizations are often looked upon askance. Could the same far-sighted American political commitment that created a new generation of international organizations after World War II re-emerge under the Obama administration, if not in 2009, then at least by the end of a second term?

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