

THE FATE OF THE STATE

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Contents

1. Introduction
 2. A Brief History of Modern War
 3. The State and its Weapons
 4. The Fate of the State
 5. The Economics of Peace and Security, or, what's a State Supposed to Do?
- Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

This article considers the relationship between military technology and the rise of the nation-state, especially in Europe. After a brief review of the history of modern warfare and a discussion of the differences between professional and volunteer forces, this article considers the crisis of legitimacy in the modern state and suggests ways for the state to reestablish its relevance in the eyes of its citizens.

1. Introduction

When readers of this encyclopedia think about the subject of this section, peace and security economics, they almost certainly do so within the framework of the state. Peace means peace between states; security means security for states; and the economics of security relate to state military establishments and their budgets. This framework is so automatic that it is seldom discussed; it is simply presumed. The fact that most people considering peace and security economics are employees of states, directly or indirectly, reinforces the presumption.

The purpose of this essay, however, is to challenge it. Its thesis is that the state is losing its monopolies on both security and social organization, and that the future belongs increasingly to non-state entities--including the future of war. Those who restrict their vision of peace or security economics to matters between or within states will find they overlook a growing portion of reality. More, those who seek to uphold the state against non-state entities will discover they are fighting an uphill battle--not hopeless in every case, but certainly difficult. They will not prevail simply by adhering to the fashionable elite ideology that goes by the name "democratic capitalism." History is not ending, but returning to its roots.

In order to see this new and different direction in which events are tending, it is first necessary to review some history, particularly the history of modern war.

2. A Brief History of Modern War

Modern war is war between states, and the history of the state and the type of war it generated and fought are bound intimately together. Put simply, armies, navies and, most recently, air and missile forces as we now know them can only be created and sustained by states, by governments so powerful that they can mobilize all of a nation's resources for war over prolonged periods. On the other hand, by the end of the twentieth century these enormously rich, technically advanced armed forces had become so specialized that they could only fight each other. Like European knights on horseback in the sixteenth century, they are useful only for jousts. Real war increasingly flows around them like a flooding river engulfs a castle, and the castle being engulfed was the state itself.

The state as we know it was born in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the midwife which brought it into the world was cannon. Before cannon, any baron with a castle could defy the king in reasonable safety. If the king wanted to assert his authority, he had to lay siege to the castle. Sieges were long, expensive and uncertain affairs; usually, the question was who starved first, besieged or besieger. Most of the time, it simply was not worth the effort, with the result that the king was himself little more than a baron living like other barons from his own lands.

Cannon changed that. With effective artillery, which became available in Europe in the fifteenth century, a king could knock down the walls of a recalcitrant baron's castle in a matter of hours. Soon, barons found themselves knocking down their own castles (at royal command) and going to live with the king as a member of his court. The king, in turn, discovered he needed a bureaucracy to administer his new-found power. The two phenomena combined to create the state, a fictitious "person" much like a corporation that came to overshadow king and court alike. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a king such as Frederick the Great of Prussia could describe himself as simply "the first servant of the state."

Indeed, by the time of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that ended the Thirty Years' War, the European State had established a monopoly both on war and on social organization. The only legitimate armed forces were those of the state; the freebooters, robber bands and mercenary armies that previously played such a large role in war were either incorporated in the new state armies or simply rounded up and hanged. The armies and navies of European states, in turn, became specialized in the job of fighting each other.

Over the centuries, that specialization grew, enhanced by the rapidly developing technology that was a product of the Modern Age--itself, like the state, a product of European civilization. More, the particular nature of the technology and armies and navies that employed it led to a battlefield of order, of lines and columns. Not surprisingly, the battlefield of order led to a military culture of order, of ranks, uniforms, salutes, of imposed discipline, highly structured personnel systems, and technical specialization. The culture of order drew into it people who liked and sought such order--the "authoritarian personalities"--whose psychology reinforced the culture of order. State armies and navies became highly distinctive organizations, sharply differentiated

not from each other but rather from the civilian societies that financed and employed them. They became "closed systems," so oriented on maintaining the culture of order that they imposed order on war itself, or at least attempted to do so.

But here was the rub. By its nature, war is the least orderly of human activities. Dominated by what Clausewitz called "friction," it offers vast advantages to forces that can not only tolerate and operate within disorder, but can actually generate disorder and use it as a weapon. The battlefield of order that formed the European military culture was an anomaly. But the culture, once formed, was too powerful to change. The result, today, is that modern state militaries (European or not) have cultures directly at odds with the environment in which they must operate. The state, instead of swinging a club, goes into battle armed with a broken reed.

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Bibliography

1. For background on both the history of the state and the state's relationship with war, see Martin van Crevelds two books, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1999) and *The Transformation of War* (The Free Press, New York, 1991).
2. In the twentieth century, state militaries developed two different approaches to the contradiction between the disorderly nature of war and the military culture or order, the French way of war and the German (both were developed during World War I). French *bataille conduite* maintained the culture of order by emphasizing centrally controlled firepower; German *Auftragstaktik* used the battlefield's disorder by emphasizing maneuver, high tempo and decentralization. Despite the decisive victory of the Germans over the French in 1940, most Western militaries (including the American) today adhere to the French model.
3. *The Rise and Decline of the State*, op. Cit., p. 189
4. *ibid.*, p. 414
5. Conversation with the author.
6. Recent proposals from the Swiss General Staff to "professionalize" that country's military and do away with the universal militia show an astounding lack of comprehension of the very nature of their own country.

Biographical sketch

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