

**Wars and the Un-Making of States:
Taking Tilly Seriously in the Contemporary World**

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That war makes states has become part of international relations (and political science) folklore. There are good reasons for this. The idea can be evoked with reference to venerable classical masters of our trade, including Weber, Hintze and Elias, or more recent ones such as Finer or Tilly. Moreover, the argument dovetails beautifully with the anti-liberalism underlying much realist thinking in international relations. It stresses the violent foundations of power and states as opposed to liberal stress on the role of power growing out of legitimacy and common action. And finally, the argument is useful from two perspectives. Analytically, it enables observers to make positive sense of the messy reality of war in large parts of the world: it is just an inevitable step on the way to state formation (Cohen, Brown et al. 1981). And politically it provides a welcome excuse for not getting too closely involved with that messy reality. If wars make states, well then the best thing is to allow them to be fought out (Herbst 1996-7).

The only trouble with all this is that in spite of its respectable origins, its realism and its usefulness, the 'war makes states' argument no longer holds. And the main reason for this is that contemporary state building takes place in a globalised context which alters the effects of the central processes which Tilly (and others) argued placed war making and state making in a positive relationship. The thrust of the argument is that these mechanisms and processes continue to be useful and essential for understanding the relationship between wars and states. However, if we look at how they work, it soon becomes clear that they fail to create a positive link between wars and states. The point is therefore not to contest Tilly's analysis of European situation. Rather, the chapter shows that if we take Tilly seriously, i.e. follow the arguments he actually develops and grant his argument more than folklore status, it helps us understand why wars at present do not make states, but rather unravel them.

In order to make this argument, I will begin by identifying the three key processes by which 'war made states' in Europe according to Tilly. I will then proceed to look at how each of these processes work in the contemporary developing world in order to clarify the reason for which they not only fail to make states, but often lead to the unmaking of fragile state structures.

Three Tillyan Processes Linking War-Making and State-Making in Europe

The general thrust of Tilly's argument is that states were produced as unintended consequences (rather than by grand design) by the competition among 'wielders of coercion' for control over capital and over territory. Below I want to extrapolate the three central processes by which Tilly argues that wars made modern states so that I can then proceed to look at these processes in the contemporary context.

The first process involved is one whereby war making pushed political leaders to establish a growing degree of centralised control over the means of coercion and of finance. To consolidate their power and defeat or pacify armed rivals, rulers had to disarm rival groups, as well as society at large, and establish the 'bifurcation of violence' typical of the modern state with violence increasingly contained to the state sphere (Tilly 1990: 68). And this in itself entailed a concentration of the means of violence at the central level. Moreover, protection against external threats required growing concentrations of means of coercion, as competition and technology increased the scales and costs of warfare. This process of concentrating the control over the means of coercion entailed a concentration of financial resources. And this is so because controlling, producing or seizing the means of coercion, as well as waging war, is an expensive business which has to be financed. This is all the more the case as the scale and size of wars grows.

This drive to concentration led to a second process: it pushed power holders to develop state apparatuses to administer the increasingly centralised means of coercion and capital. Taxes had to be levied and debts contracted and repaid (Tilly 1990: 85). Arms, soldiers and police forces had to be managed and paid. All of this took a body of administrators. Moreover, the war-making effort in itself played an important part in the expansion and development of administrative state apparatuses. It justified the increasing intrusiveness of the state both into the economy (to extract resources) and into social life (to provide security). The expansion of the state administration during war times was rarely given up when peace came. On the contrary, the administrative apparatus either clung to its newly won prerogatives and functions or converted them to other (state) uses.

Administrative development and concentration led to a third process. It created (civilian) groups with claims on the state and hence produced 'the

central paradox of European state formation' whereby 'the pursuit of war and military capacity [...] as a sort of by-product, led to a civilianisation of government and domestic politics' (Tilly 1990: 206). Extracting financial resources required bargaining with those controlling these resources. And at the same time, the expansion of the administrative state apparatus created a body of civil servants who also made claims on the state. How important the resulting civilian grip on the state became varies greatly depending on the relative importance of coercion and capital in the state-building process. And Tilly distinguishes three ideal-typical paths of state formation: coercion intensive; capital intensive and capitalised coercion (1990: 30). However, *pace* variations, the grip of civilians on the state has grown in all contexts.

The importance and weight of these three processes (the competition to centralise control, the construction of administrative structures and the bargaining with civilians) varies in time. Thus, Tilly summarises his argument in terms of a 'cartoon history of Europe' (1990: 206), where the key figure, the ruler, takes on four different shapes which reflect this variation: 1) A *patrimonial* wielder of means of coercion (fighting with his own forces and extracting resources from a population and lands under his immediate control) eventually establishes himself as 2) a *broker* hiring mercenaries and using loans from independent capitalists (around 1400) between different groups. However, he eventually manages to 3) *nationalise* the use of armies and integrate a fiscal apparatus directly into the state (around 1800) and slowly gets to a point where controlling violence is only one of many 4) *specialised* functions (around 1900).

It is clear from Tilly's account of war making/state making in Europe that he sees the importance and outcome of the central processes as depending on time and context. It should therefore come as no surprise that, Tilly nowhere claims that his argument is universally applicable. Instead his book concludes with a chapter on 'soldiers and states in 1992', where the thrust is that 'contrary to the apparent teaching of European history, the growth of big government, arbitrary rule, and militarization now seem to be going hand in hand' (1990: 204). Tilly's explanation for this absence of (the third) 'civilianising process' is that the 'drift from 'internal' to 'external' state formation which prevailed in Europe has continued into our own time' (1990: 195). The implications of this drift have been that states and military organisations receive their resources and legitimacy largely from without and that they do not therefore need to forge the kind of mutual ties that constrained

the relationships between European rulers and ruled. Instead it gives the managers of military organisations an ‘extraordinary power’ and strong incentives to seize power (Tilly 1985: 186).

Below I want to pursue this path initiated by Tilly, and argue that ‘the drift from internal to external state building’ has now gone even further than it had when Tilly wrote in the late 1980s. The consequence is that not only is war not leading to civilianisation, but it also fails to prompt the centralisation of the means of coercion and capital and the construction of centralised administrative structures.

Decentralisation and Privatisation of Coercion and Capital

If we start with the first building block in Tilly’s argumentation, i.e. the competition which pushes rulers to concentrate means of coercion and capital, we quickly realise (and even if we don’t, reading Tilly elucidates us) that the nature of this competition has been profoundly altered with the ‘drift’ towards external state building. The formal boundaries of states are sanctioned internationally, so the competition for controlling coercion is essentially internal. Inversely, the competition to control capital is largely about controlling international (or better put, transnational) capital flows and much less focused on the development of national taxation. The combination of these shifts has meant that the stakes and strategies involved in controlling coercion and capital have more to do with bargaining with local strong men, privatisation and decentralisation than with a monopolisation of control at the level of the central state.

First, for most developing countries, controlling capital has for a long time meant controlling access to international financial sources. Recent developments have compounded this with a trend to decentralise the control over capital. As a consequence of the increased importance of financial relations (debt and portfolio investments) and of the debt crisis, most governments have become far more sensitive to the preferred policies of international financial actors. Even if this sensitivity is epitomised by IMF and World Bank conditionality, it is important to recall that it runs far deeper and is a reflection of the direct and structural power of international financial actors (Patomäki 2001). Arguably IMF and World Bank conditionality is vaguely transparent and subject to negotiation, which is more than one can say

about private conditionality (Williams 2000).

Privatisation, de-regulation and reduced budget deficits are central to these policy preferences. In theory (and in the minds of blueprint stand-by-agreements), it is possible to imagine that these policies were pursued without effects on the capacity of the state to centralise the control over financial resources. But practically, that tends to be an illusion. Rather, the policy translates as a reduced capacity of the central state to buy support, for example by offering positions in the state bureaucracy, by offering under-priced goods from state industries and by channelling money to local administrators. The reverse side of the coin is growth in the capacity of local power holders to control privatised assets, impoverished bureaucracies and subject populations.

In a context where access to international capital is fundamental, it comes as no surprise that local power holders use the relative weakness of state structures (and possibly their own growing strength) to establish relations of their own with wielders of international capital. Depending on the situation, they might cajole foreign investors, trading companies and aid organisations into paying them some form of tax and/or protection money. This is made easier by the fact that these foreign organisations will often find it more important to deal with the local (real) authorities than the central (state) ones. Local power holders use 'innovative strategies' to link up with transnational business networks to buttress their power (Reno 1998: 8-10). For the central state, this means, at a minimum, a need to bargain with the local authorities. And concretely, it often means accepting high degrees of decentralisation of the control over financial means. Some writers see this as a *sui generis* state-building process (Duffield 1998: 76). And this might be. However, it certainly is not one where centralised control over financial resources figures prominently.

Second, the drift towards external state building is also visible in the evolving strategies for controlling the means of coercion, which have also followed a trend towards decentralisation and privatisation. One reason is the pressure on budgets and on centralised control over finance, which is making itself felt also for the armed forces. This pressure has been particularly intense in the wake of the Cold War. The diminished interest of external powers in propping up armed forces for larger geo-political reasons has meant diminished external support in many places. Since this has coincided with pressure on budgets more generally, governments have had to look for alternative ways of not only financing their armies, but also reducing the costs

of maintaining armed forces generally.

Three criss-crossing, paths have been walked to deal with these difficulties. (i) Local strongmen who have gained political and financial clout over the past twenty years have taken over a share of the cost of – and hence control over – the means of coercion. They run their own militias or armies and provide ‘security’ in a territory they control (Rufin 1993). (ii) Armed forces are allowed to finance themselves by taxing economic activities, demanding protection money, looting civilians, or by engaging in various forms of independent, legal or illegal, income-generating activities (Howe 2001: chap. 2). (iii) The costs are reduced by outsourcing to private security and military companies (Leander 2002). This outsourcing makes it possible to have non-state agents (e.g. private firms, International Organisations and Humanitarian NGOs) pay for their own security. Moreover, it makes security cheaper for governments. They only have to pay for the intervention they ask for, whereas a standing army and/or police force has to be paid independently of what it does. Additionally, firms accept payment in concession rights. This saves scarce foreign currency and has the advantage of making sure that the extractive activities can continue, hence securing continued revenues.²

These strategies are less disadvantageous to governments than conventional views on state authority might assume. Giving up a share of central control and monopolisation of the means of coercion in favour of a decentralised and bargained strategy has the political advantage of limiting the impact of one of the main threats to central political authority in many countries of the world. As pointed out by Tilly (1985: 286), the military is one of the strongest political institutions in many countries, and the temptation of military leaders to take over political power directly has been strong, as the prevalence of military coups testifies. From the perspective of rulers it is therefore not necessarily an evil that the military as a centralised institution is weakened. It takes away one of the main threats to the central authority of rulers. It paves the way for a divide and rule strategy that might prove more viable than attempts at centralising and monopolising the means of violence typical of the European state-building strategies.

In short, the importance of controlling the means of coercion and capital remains unaltered. But the best way of doing this has been profoundly altered. Rulers increasingly seem to broker between and bargain with armed forces and local strong men with various degrees of independence. Under these conditions, wars do not lead to leaps forward in centralisation. They deepen

the dilemma of finding financial sources and the difficulties of controlling the means of violence.

Dismantling and Crimiminalising Administrations

The second process on which Tilly's state-building logic relies is the expansion of administrations to manage the centralised means of coercion and finance. However, also this process has been profoundly affected by the 'drift' towards external state building over the past decades. The decentralised and privatised control over the means of violence and finance wreaks havoc with the basic logic by which wars call for an expanded administration. Moreover, there is considerable pressure on rulers to reduce the weight and influence of a civil administration and on administrators to react to the changing situation. The result is that war in the contemporary developing world tends to trigger further dismantling and even a criminalisation of administrative structures rather than creating the centralised and hierarchical structures familiar from European history.

The strategies of controlling capital through privatisation and decentralisation have profound effects on the development of administrations. For one thing, it renders unnecessary the administrative expansion to manage the concentration and/or monopolisation of financial resources and means of coercion. For another, the prevailing decentralised and largely private form of control over financial resources and means of coercion entail that any such expansion would depend on the support of a variety of local power-wielders. Yet these groups have no reason to support increased administrative intrusiveness by central authorities, even if it is justified in terms of an external threat. Finally, extending the administration under these conditions might well mean lessening control, since it will come at the price of making concessions to local power holders.

In addition to this, the 'neo-utilitarian' view on the role of the state in the economy which has underpinned IMF and World Bank conditionality, as well as the worldview of many policy-makers, has been ominous for the fate of civil administrations. In this account, state involvement in the economy is the source of more harm than good, and bureaucrats do more rent seeking than provide services for society. Departing from these premises, it is not surprising that blue-print writers and policy-makers do their best to reduce the resources

granted to the development of the public administration and certainly do not wish to see any expansion. The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy: an under- or un-paid administration produces incompetence and rent-seeking as those who have a choice leave, while those who don't have to develop survival strategies.

One consequence has been the privatisation of (or shared authority over) large chunks of policy making. Even conventional strongholds of state power such as foreign policy making is increasingly taken over by a variety of actors with a more or less independent status (Wright 1999). And the situation is even more marked in other areas, where private actors are effectively 'privatising' the state to various degrees. The consequence is that private and public blur and overlap with central and local authorities and an 'occult structure' of power surrounds or controls the official structures of power (Bayart, Ellis et al. 1997: 42).

A second consequence is that administrations have themselves become increasingly imbricated in the criminalisation of economic activities. As the resources available to pay administrators are reduced, and their work delegitimised, there is a strong incentive for them to draw income from sources available to them. Any document, permit or certificate (or its falsification) will cost a bribe. Moreover, the push to privatise state assets has opened new opportunities. 'Spontaneous privatisations' and other forms of administrative take-overs of state property much studied and decried in former socialist countries have their equivalents in other parts of the world (Stark 1996; Hibou 1997). Finally, there are signs that, at least in some parts of the world, administrations are increasingly being dragged into the networks and activities of organised crime. They are no longer merely paid to close their eyes on various illegal activities and trades (in e.g. dirty money, arms, diamonds, oil, drugs, organs or people), but take active part in them.

The trends towards shrinking, privatising and criminalising state administrations have taken place just as much (if not more) in countries at war. Wars have not made it easier for states to finance and control their largely decentralised administrations. They are often fought, at least in part, to consolidate the control of local power holders over economic activity, including through their grip on administrations. Moreover, war economies fuel informal and criminal economies and the imbrication of state administrations in them. In some cases war has become part of a 'complex emergency', where the war itself (e.g. via the aid generated by the humanitarian disaster) becomes

a fundamental source of revenue for some power holders (administrators or war lords), who therefore have an interest in its continuation (Duffield 1994).

War and the unravelling of administrative structures seem to have gone hand in hand in many places. 'Internal wars' or 'wars of the third kind' are often explained by the weakness of central state structures. Holsti points out that war since 1945 is more often explained by anarchy within than anarchy between states. And he insists that this is likely to continue to be the case because of what he calls the 'state-strength dilemma': weak states are caught in a catch-22 situation. They have to consolidate their power and are pushed to resort to violent means, causing resistance and often war, which further weakens them (1996: 115-118). The bottom line is that it is hard to claim administrations of notoriously war-torn societies (viz. Georgia, Angola, Columbia, or Afghanistan) have been strengthened. Rather, 'wars in and of themselves do not make anything [...] Without institutional cohesion, wars will make for chaos and defeat. Wars provide an opportunity for those political organizations that are able to capitalize on it; they cannot create them' (Centeno 1997: 1570).

The Changing Civilian Constituency of Politics

So where does this land us with regard to the last key process on which Tilly's war-makes-state argument relies, namely the paradoxical need created by wars to bargain with civilians? In Tilly's argument, the civilianisation of politics is a *consequence* of the expansion of the extractive and coercive activities of the state and the expansion of its administration. In view of what has been argued above, there is no reason to expect that war should still have this paradoxical effect. On the contrary, the changes in the way that war is financed, fought and administrated entail that the civilian constituency which gains claims over the state as a consequence of war is increasingly composed of external and/or local power wielders and that profoundly alters the nature of the stakes in bargaining between states and societies resulting from war.

First, the actors who finance wars and can make claims on states are increasingly external, and this affects the kind of claims they make. The reliance on external sources of finance (foreign aid, debt, the sale of (legal and illegal) services and commodities, and customs) is mirrored by an 'externalisation of economic management and political accountability'

(Clapham 1996). The state is accountable for its economic activity to actors who are actually outside the boundaries of the state. These actors are not under the legislation of the states accountable to them for most of their activities. Consequently, their prime concern is not likely to be general shifts in state authority, such as the 'civilianisation' of administration (although they might not oppose it). It is far more likely that the prime concern is the smooth operation of the part of the economy which is of direct concern to them.

The unravelling of central state authority might inhibit this. It is a minimal requirement for the functioning markets that property rights are established and protected. This presupposes a functional judicial system, which states have conventionally been responsible for providing. However, this does not entail that private business would be willing to invest in improving the functioning of states. Businesses will have an individual and immediate interest in deregulation, but a long-term collective interest in a well functioning state. *Pace* talk of corporate citizenship, the latter is unlikely to prevail at the expense of the former (Evans 1997). In fact, most studies of the political economy of regions plagued by violence and shrinking state authority indicate that foreign business tend to compensate for the lack of central authority by dealing with local strong men and/or buying their own private protection. They rely on para-statal systems of property-rights protection in the absence of state structures. That is, rather than contribute to the 'civilianisation' the grip of external actors on the state tends to work towards further fragmentation of state structures.

The second important shift is that the strategies of decentralising the control of capital and coercion has left states 'brokering' between different groups, rather than ruling them from a nationalised or specialised centre. And in this, the side favouring an expansion of the central state is weakening. On the one hand, there is no cohesive group (like Tilly's growing body of civil servants and members of national armies) that have an obvious interest in the expansion of the state or can advance claims for the civilianisation of the state. On the other hand, the groups with which the state is bargaining are concerned above all with defending special privileges against the expansion of central authority.

Limiting central state expansion is not necessarily bad. Where the state is the key source of violence, oppression and injustice, it might seem very attractive. Weakening central authority is hence welcomed as opening new spaces for political and social action, in particular through the development of

issue-oriented movements and groups with ties to international NGOs. The underlying contention is that it might strengthen 'civil societies' and increase pressures for democratisation and civilianisation.³ Unfortunately, this is a sadly inadequate description of actual developments, particularly in places where both coercion and administration have escaped state control. The flourishing of civil society and social movements requires a relatively strong state capable of protecting civil society and enforcing rights. The groups that do get into a position to bargain with the state often bargain for things less noble than democratisation and civilianisation.

The real drama is that there are groups which are not linked to any power wielder (local strong man or central state) and who have no one to defend their interests. Increasing chunks of population are not useful to anyone. They can offer nothing in exchange and hence are not worth extending protection to or organising administration for. There is a roll-back of the state from certain areas or groups. The issue is not people 'exiting' from state structure. It is that 'rulers abandon people who could contribute little to a political alliance and would make demands on scarce political resources' (Reno 1998: 10). State building is increasingly Swiss-cheese-like.

War in this kind of context is not likely to work in a unifying way. At best, it might reflect and reproduce societal divisions, as the following joke aptly illustrates:

During the Israeli-Arab war of 1948 a Greek Catholic platoon of the Lebanese army is found in a state of complete inactivity despite the unabating and still vigorous exchange of fire on the Lebanese-Israeli front. When a Maronite lieutenant appears and rebukes the men, they reply that they lost one of their men and are therefore waiting for each of the other ethnic groups to pay their proportional toll before they engage in any additional fighting. War in Lebanon is merely a continuation of confessional politics, not by different means but by the same means (Barak 2001).

At worst, war might be used to make societal divisions unbridgeable. The point of war is often to produce the enemy to cement the networks of (ethnic, religious, tribal) extremism. Wars of this kind are not caused by extremism, 'rather, the spread and strengthening of these ideologies are the consequences of war' (Kaldor 2001: 5). In some cases new 'quasi states' emerge (King 2001). But these tend to come at the cost of deeper and more violent social divisions and a reinforced role for local strongmen. These wars carry the threat

of spirals of violence which can only be stopped by outside intervention.

In short, the prospects that wars could civilianise states are bleak. The main constituencies who gain control over states through wars are foreign and/or local power wielders who are not particularly interested in such a process. Worse, bargaining with these constituencies might work against civilianisation or even prompt further violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the processes described by Tilly's war-makes-states argument continue to be absolutely central for the analysis of the relationship between violence and state building. This said, globalisation has accentuated the 'drift towards external state building' and this has fundamentally altered the way that these processes link war and state building: war no longer makes states. Controlling finance and capital is a decreasingly decentralised business, which does not go hand in hand with an expansion of central administrations and the two things produce a state which is brokering between competing groups rather than ruling them from a centre. The consequence is that war – in the context of most developing countries – at best leaves states where they are and at worst speeds up their unravelling. It therefore seems particularly unwise to follow the recommendations of those who advocate giving war a chance in building states.

More generally, the argument underscores the importance of a basic insight we all share but ignore when we turn arguments into folklore. There is no predetermined path of development (of states, democracies, economies or anything else). Many roads can be taken and they do not necessarily end up in the same place. Some might even lead backwards. Hence, classical arguments are useful. They tell us what processes to look at. But they cannot tell us what outcome the processes have. On the contrary, the processes which made war central to European state building are making war a major obstacle for state building in the developing world today.

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Endnotes:

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2. It is difficult to know exactly how important this 'EO model' (after the now closed Executive Outcome, which was the most well-known firm practising this) is, since most of the military/security firms deny having received this form of payment and the links between the companies and other firms in the business groups they belong to are far from transparent.
3. Migdal (1988; 2001) is often used as a foil by those arguing along these lines.