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War and State Formation: A Mennonite Critique

By Sandra Fullerton Joireman

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Political scientists have long held opinions on state formation based on the historical experiences of European states. Key among the precepts learned from the European experience is that war was critical to the development of strong and effective states in Europe. While this is a troubling lesson, it is an entirely historic lesson and one not revived in a contemporary context until quite recently. The resurgence of the theory and its application to contemporary states in the developing world has been quite disturbing to me as a Christian and as a Mennonite, due to my strong objections to war and more specifically to the suggestion that war is a method of achieving political development.

This paper is an attempt to tackle the theory of war as a tool of state formation. Though I use the tools of my discipline to refute the theory in its contemporary manifestation, the paper is motivated by a theological belief regarding the sinfulness and depravity of war. I begin the paper by thoroughly exploring the benefits of strong states from a comparative historical perspective, since this has been critical to the theory's revival. Then I will discuss the theory that war makes strong states, looking first at the work of Charles Tilly, the best-known theorist in the area of European state formation, then at Jeffrey Herbst's application and expansion of the Tilly thesis in the African context. In the second section of the paper, I will articulate the Mennonite perspective regarding both war and the state and discuss why the idea of war as a tool of state formation is fundamentally problematic from a Christian and Mennonite perspective.¹ I will also justify a rejection of the revival of the war and state formation theory from the viewpoint of comparative political science.

Sandra F. Joireman argues that the theory that war is an effective tool of state formation is both morally objectionable and faulty. This essay challenges the current revival of the theory from both theological and empirical perspectives. Beginning with an explanation of why strong states are considered to be desirable, the essay examines the argument regarding state formation and the benefits of war. Theologically, Joireman argues that the theory elevates the state above the church and is therefore objectionable. Empirically, she argues that in this new era of post-modern warfare the theory is also incorrect. Ms. Joireman is an associate professor of politics and international relations at Wheaton College.

182 I. The Importance of Strong States

The birth of the nation-state dates back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which brought an end to the Thirty Years War in Europe and established the sovereignty of rulers over their population.² From the time preceding the Treaty of Westphalia until about 1900, Europe was wracked by wars between European states that were religious and territorial in nature, such as the Napoleonic wars and the wars of German unification orchestrated by Otto von Bismarck. Since that time it has been observed that international war, in spite of all of its negative effects, helps states to become stronger. Indeed, scholars have long argued that wars are critical to state building.³

This thesis regarding war and European state formation has been recently revived and recontextualized in the work of Jeff Herbst. His award-winning book *States and Power in Africa* (2000) has taken the European state formation argument and masterfully applied it in the African context. Herbst has argued that the European pattern of state formation via international wars was able to produce strong states, but the African pattern of state formation without international war has not done so. In fact, Herbst argues that many African states are so ineffective that they should no longer be recognized as states but be decertified. He posits that non-state institutions, such as warlords, cities, or other subnational institutions might more effectively govern than the African states currently in their place.⁴

¹In choosing this topic, I am attempting to address the problem of both the fallenness of our institutions and our approaches to the analysis of those institutions in a fashion consistent with the call to the integration of faith and learning articulated by Joel Carpenter: "Our cultural creations, our modes of thought, our theories, our practices, and our institutions all bear the marks of both God's creative genius in us and also our fallenness. By God's providence we and our societies are preserved and are capable of some provisionally good things. Hence, we can do research in the disciplines as they now exist with some assurance that good will come of our efforts. Yet, we should also be able to discern the ways in which they have been marred by our fallenness and to see the great difference between God's ways and those of fallen humanity. Therefore, we should also support critical approaches to the world's ways and means, including our disciplines." Michael S. Hamilton, Joel A. Carpenter, Dorothy F. Chappell, and Don W. King, "Reflection and Response: The Elusive Idea of Christian Scholarship," *Christian Scholar's Review* 31.1 (Fall 2001): 13-30.

²It is worth noting, since this is a paper from a Mennonite perspective, that sovereignty was established with the determination that the religion of the ruler would be the religion of the ruled and that Protestants and Catholics would tolerate one another. The arbitrary determination of religious belief is something that Mennonites objected to as it *prevents* individual choice with regard to faith. From the end of the Thirty Years War forward, Mennonites specifically and then Anabaptists generally were persecuted due to their belief in individual choice and their resistance to the state control of religion.

³The idea that war might be beneficial rather than abhorrent is something with which political scientists are quite comfortable. In fact, one of the major schools of international relations, political realism, views war as essential, not just for reasons of security but also in pursuing other state goals. Carl von Clausewitz, writing in the early 1800s, noted that "War is just the continuation of politics via other means," an adage frequently quoted by his followers and an idea widely supported by political realists.

⁴Here the obvious examples are the former state of Somalia, which is currently divided into

In the lexicon of political scientists, a strong state is an able state; it has a positive connotation. A strong state can provide an array of benefits to the people living within its border. Weak states cannot. Weak states are, therefore, undesirable. We also assume that strong states will be somehow limited. There are historic examples of note when states have used their strength in an unlimited fashion with the specific goal of the oppression of their own population or their neighbors. Examples of Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Cambodia under Pol Pot, and Romania under Ceaucescu come immediately to mind. These states were exceptional in both their goals and the means they used to achieve those goals. They were strong, exceptionally so, but we do not perceive the state as used in an appropriate way and therefore refer to them as totalitarian or authoritarian. The leaders of Germany, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, and Romania did not have an encompassing interest in the well-being of their populations. It is not necessary for leaders to be altruistic in order to have an encompassing interest in their society. A leader can be solely interested in power and extraction and still have an encompassing interest in the population of a state.

Mancur Olson has argued that there is a critical difference in the effect of rulers who have a narrow interest in a society and those that have an encompassing interest.⁵ He argues that rulers with a narrow interest will be more dangerous and damaging to a society than those with an encompassing interest. It is worth pointing out that Olson sees both kinds of leaders as interested in extracting revenue from the population. The critical difference is that leaders who have an encompassing interest understand that the more their populace is able to produce, the more reliable and greater their personal take will be. Leaders with a narrow interest will only be concerned with taking as much as they possibly can without an eye to future returns, which are ultimately dependent on the well-being of the population. Olson argues that no matter how venal they are, as long as leaders have an encompassing interest in the society, they will end up providing some public goods. Thus a government need not necessarily be "good" in order to provide critical public goods.

Provision of Public Goods

Public goods are benefits that can be used by all of the citizens of the state at the same time, without exclusion. The three critical public goods that any state can provide are security, a functioning domestic market, and infrastructure. States are

three different contested territories—Somalia, Somaliland, and Puntland—and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has at least two and possibly three different administrative apparatuses—none of them functioning effectively.

⁵Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

184 able to provide public goods through money they acquire through taxation; therefore, taxation will be addressed following the discussion of public goods below.

Personal Security. If one believes Thomas Hobbes, it is the pursuit of security of our persons in a world that is fraught with conflict and violence that leads us to desire to enter into the social contract and be citizens of a state. It then follows that the most critical public good that a state can provide is security. Personal security in this sense can also be thought of as social order by those of us used to living in states where order exists. I expect that tomorrow I will be able to drop my children off at a school run by the state where they will be safe, then drive my car unaccosted to work where I will be free to earn my living. I anticipate returning in the evening to a home that will have been protected by the state in my absence. I assume these things because I live in a state that provides order and security. Security is a public good that everyone in the society receives, whether they want to receive it or not, whether they pay for it or not.⁶

Strong states reduce the level of violence within the society. They do this through two specific functions, one institutional and one legislative. Institutionally, they establish courts and a judicial process that create a forum for the nonviolent resolution of conflict. If I have a dispute with my neighbor over our mutual property line, I can go and speak with her about it. I need not threaten her with the use of force if she will not resolve the dispute with me. Instead I can take her to court and we can rely on the coercive nature of law rather than physical violence. A forum for dispute resolution may exist in societal/cultural institutions, but these may be insufficient for issues that involve people within different communities within the state.⁷ Establishing courts is critical to contract enforcement as well, a point mentioned above as beneficial for creating an environment in which people want to do business. The second reason European states were able to decrease violence as they developed was due to the restrictions they placed on the rights of citizens to bear arms. By making it criminal for citizens to carry their own weapons, European states effectively reduced the level of violence within their societies while establishing the supremacy of the state.⁸

Domestic Market. The second essential public good that a state provides to its people is a functioning domestic market. Several actions of a state enable the thriving exchange and contracting that characterize a functioning domestic market.

⁶This is a generalization to be sure. There are glaring examples of neighborhoods and communities where people do not have the protection of the state in the way that I do in the comfortable suburb in which I live.

⁷My own work in the Horn of Africa demonstrated that individuals would often avoid traditional dispute resolution mechanisms because they promote compromise. On many important economic issues such as land ownership or rental contracts, compromise was viewed as insufficient and undesirable. Sandra F. Joireman, *Property Rights and Political Development in Ethiopia and Eritrea: The State and Land, 1941-1974* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000).

⁸Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992).

- A state prints money and ensures its stable rate of exchange.
- A state serves as the ultimate contract enforcer, jailing, fining, or otherwise penalizing those who break contracts.
- A state also regulates businesses, undergirds the banking system, and, ideally, establishes and regulates a domestic stock market.

All of these functions are provided by the state and serve as public goods. Citizens cannot be excluded from the benefits of a domestic market, and it is possible for all people living within the borders of a state to use the market provided by the state at the same time in thousands and thousands of different transactions.

Infrastructure. The final benefit of a strong state is its ability to develop the internal organization of the country through the building of both physical and institutional infrastructure. States create educational, health, and administrative systems as they gain revenue in an attempt to exert control over territory and citizens. In its benign form, this is a tremendous benefit to citizens. However, states are not always benign and certainly some states have gone beyond the provision of public goods to the exertion of social control. The ability to which a state can provide these goods depends upon the condition of public finance, and this is dependent upon the states' ability to tax its constituency effectively.⁹

Taxation. Taxation is a critical component of state strength. Without the ability to collect revenue, a state will not have the resources to provide public goods, even the most basic public good—security. It is also the case that some forms of revenue collection are better than others. The most effective forms of revenue collection are those that achieve an optimal rate whereby all citizens pay something but not enough to eliminate their interest in making more money for themselves (and ultimately the state).

States need money in order to survive and provide services. Money is typically gained via the taxation of citizens' income; however, there are other ways to gain income. One is to tax imports and exports through a customs authority. A state that relies on this mechanism alone or for the majority of its revenues will be taxing trade at a very high rate and will most likely end up negatively impacting the ability of businesses within the country to realize significant economic gains from trade. Another equally problematic form of taxation that has often been used in developing countries is the agricultural marketing board. Agricultural marketing boards serve as the exclusive buyers of agricultural products within their borders, and they indirectly tax producers by setting a fixed price for purchase (which is lower than market rates) and then exporting or selling agricultural goods domestically and keeping all of the profits for the state. This is one technique that weak states

⁹As a counterpoint, we can witness the current situation in Liberia, where the state is so weak that it has virtually ceased to function. In the capital city of Monrovia, it has become necessary for people to dig wells in their yards because the city municipal water supply has not worked in years.

have used to gain revenue from a countryside that they do not effectively control.

Effective taxation systems identify taxpayers and elicit their compliance. They provide a consistent source of revenue to the state. Consistent revenue to the central state allows the state to pay its workers as well as provide services. This is critical, as a well paid and disciplined coterie of state workers, whether they be members of the bureaucracy, police force or judiciary, is less likely to be involved in corruption because they have an assured livelihood. Corruption becomes intractable when a state hires people to positions and then pays them irregularly or an insufficient amount to ensure their ability to survive without resorting to venality. Bribery develops as a way of life when bureaucrats, police officers, and other public servants seek remuneration directly from the citizenry they are serving.

States that wish to be strong and able to provide public goods to their citizenry and revenue to the state (for war or whatever purpose) must learn to tax their citizens effectively. Margaret Levi has argued that "the history of state revenue production is the history of the evolution of the state."¹⁰ She has also observed that "the greater the revenue of the state, the more possible it is to extend rule. Revenue enhances the ability of rulers to elaborate the institutions of the state, to bring more people within the domain of those institutions, and to increase the number and variety of collective goods provided through the state."¹¹ While it may be difficult to make a population happy to be taxed, it is the case that effective taxation systems enable states to provide a variety of public goods to citizens. Without taxation, critical public goods are not provided and the door is opened for the entry of venality. If people need bureaucratic or civil services and those that provide them are poorly paid because of low state revenues, the incentive exists for bureaucrats to demand payment for those services beyond their salaries—to demand bribes.

Scholars of comparative politics are more or less in agreement about the benefits of strong states.¹² Many scholars would also agree that it is one of the problems of the developing world that states are typically not strong enough to tax their citizenry effectively and as a result are unable to provide critical public goods such as a functioning market and security. But how strong states develop is more controversial.

II. Strong States are a Result of Warfare

If scholars can agree on the benefits of strong states, how then does a state become strong? The answer, developed in the context of European political history

¹⁰Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Although it is important here to reiterate the point made above, it is certainly possible for states to intervene in the economy and in the social and cultural institutions of a country far more than is necessary or desirable. The interesting contrast from the point of this paper, however, is those states that are *unable* to provide public goods, for example The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, or Liberia.

but widely applied, is that states become strong through war. This thesis is most closely associated with the work of Charles Tilly who has famously argued that "War made the state and the state made war."¹³ Tilly's work is supported by other comparative political scientists such as Samuel Huntington who, in his seminal work on political development argued, "War is the great stimulus to state building."¹⁴

The era of European state formation occurred from approximately 1500, when there were about 500 independent political entities in Europe, until 1900 when there were 21.¹⁵ During this period, states were engaged in the process of attempting to arrange the administration of territory while at the same time defending against foreign aggressors or trying to claim new territory for themselves. Though these conflicts resulted in great loss of life and costs for the population, they had some benefits because participation in war forced states to engage in behavior that benefited their populations in the very long run. There are four specific ways in which war created strong states:

1. War forced states to control their boundaries and to control the populations living within the state. States had to police their borders actively in order to determine any violations of those boundaries by other states. Additionally, war aided states in controlling their populations because a state at war needs people to fight for it; and it needs them to provide revenue to the state via taxation in order to pay for food for the soldiers, salaries for mercenaries (often used during European state formation), and money for weapons and ammunition. This need for revenue leads us to the second impact that war had on states.
2. War forced states to tax efficiently. The need for revenue compelled states to identify sources of revenue, usually its population, and then devise means of exploiting those revenue sources. Because the state needed all of the resources it could garner in order to survive and since the ruler's survival was dependent on the survival of the state, incentives during times of war were structured in such a way as to make it counter to the interests of rulers to take state funds and use them to line their own pockets (or build themselves bigger and more expensive castles).
3. War encouraged populations to see their own interests as the interests of the state. In other words, war developed and encouraged nationalism. European states, for the most part, did not develop organically out of people who saw themselves as unified. The states were formed by conquest over diverse populations. It was the process of war that led to a sense of unity and nationalism.¹⁶

¹³Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly, *Studies in Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

¹⁴Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 123.

¹⁵Tilly, "Reflections," 21.

¹⁶Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987).

Nationalism strengthened states and prevented challenges to state power from within. Moreover, as nationalism developed, states also become less able to wage war because they had to respond to the interests of their populations.

4. A process of coalition building among elites was necessary to wage a war.¹⁷ This was particularly important during European state formation when the various elites would bring to the conflict the men serving under them. Coalition building served as a constraint on the power of the ruler. Stronger states developed when rulers were not dictators, but ruled with, minimally, the consent of elites and the consent, or at least acquiescence, of the population at large.

War leads to effective taxation, boundary control, nationalism, and constraints on rulers, and for these reasons it helped strong states to develop.¹⁸ But is it desirable for the process of state formation in the current era?

Jeffrey Herbst invokes the war and state formation argument; he argues that in the case of Africa—the area of the world with the weakest states and most ineffective governments—interstate war would have led to stronger states.¹⁹ Herbst makes no further normative statements regarding the future and the role war might play in African politics in the new century. Critical to Herbst's argument is the assumption that the weak states that we currently see on the African continent are not effective forms of governance and that some alternative to the current state system must be sought to put an end to state failure in Africa.

... leaders in Africa and elsewhere should end their state of denial and accept that serious thinking must begin regarding alternatives to at least some of the political arrangements that were initially demarcated by the Europeans. If they do not, the response to the ever more serious political and humanitarian challenges to state failure in Africa will inevitably be too little, too late.²⁰

Many African states are not providing the critical public goods that are necessary for a state to be strong. Moreover, they do not effectively control the territory within their boundaries, and they do not tax efficiently. Ethnic groups rather than the state tend to be the primary form of political affiliation for citizens, and the leaders of many African states are authoritarian, not democratic. Herbst argues that ineffective states have developed in Africa in part due to the daunting geography of the countryside, which impedes strong linkages between the urban and rural areas. When Africa was colonized, state boundaries were arbitrarily established at the Conference of Berlin in 1884-1885 without any regard to the ability of the colonizers to control the territory they were being allocated. When colonial govern-

¹⁷Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*.

¹⁸Again, it is worth noting that a positive historic assessment of war is something with which most political scientists would be perfectly comfortable.

¹⁹Of course, this generalization is unfair to the few African states such as Botswana that have well-developed, democratic, and effective governments.

²⁰Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 272.

ments were established, they were unable to manage thousands of square miles under their de jure administration effectively.²¹

At independence, African states inherited colonial boundaries and agreed among themselves in the founding charter of the Organization of African Unity to ensure that the boundaries determined by the colonizing powers at the Berlin conference remained in place. The thinking at that time was that if the boundaries were contested, there would be interstate wars over borders and there was a desire to avoid war. Interstate wars fought at that time might have strengthened the states that survived the wars, but they did not occur because of a consensus opinion by state leaders that war was not in their national interest. Since independence, African countries have fought relatively few interstate wars but many wars within the borders of their states. As Herbst notes, "Thus, African politics were the exact opposite of traditional political science models of domestic and international politics: the politics between countries was extremely well-ordered (as opposed to the Hobbesian model of international relations) while domestic politics did not evidence many signs of stability."²²

While falling short of advocating outright war, Herbst does propose that the African system of states needs to be completely redesigned so that the borders of states coincide with the area that they rule and we no longer see states recognized as sovereign over territory that they do not actually control. Herbst argues that states need to fail, break up, and reestablish themselves as viable entities with the ultimate goal being that they will become stronger and more able to provide public goods. Clearly, this is a process that would involve war, even though Herbst does not explicitly say so. He proposes that the state system in Africa should be restructured but seems to think this can happen through peaceful means, despite the fact that up to the present date most alternatives to the state have come about through violence.²³ In Herbst, we see a recontextualization of the European state formation thesis first articulated by Tilly. War would help to form states that could stand on their own in terms of taxation and control over their population. Redrawing African state boundaries would lead to stronger and more effective states.

III. War and State Formation in the Twenty-first Century

There are two fundamental tenets of Mennonite theology, which set it apart from the Reformed theology regarding the state: (1) Mennonites object to any sort of church alliance with the state and are instead strong proponents of individual

²¹It is interesting to note that precolonial African kingdoms simply did not try to control all of the territory of the continent. They controlled limited geographical areas but maintained clearly defined property rights in people as labor, not land, was the scarce factor of production.

²²Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, 109.

²³Herbst notes the succession of Somaliland as a "peaceful" transition to an alternative to the nation-state (Herbst, 267). This seems a rather narrow understanding of events in a country where political violence has been rampant for the past decade.

choice in both a political and a religious sense, and (2) Mennonites are opposed to violence, particularly state violence in times of war. It is ironic but not surprising that these Mennonite ideas regarding the state developed during the period of state formation identified by Tilly, Huntington, and others.

Both of these theological positions are particularly Mennonite and stem from a belief that the church takes precedence over every other institution in the created world, including the state.²⁴ Mennonites believe that government exists in the world with a particular function—to provide order. Mennonites arrived at this particular position with regard to the state and other institutions as a result of early theological positions that rejected the role of the state in determining people's religious beliefs.²⁵ In the early years of the Reformation, Mennonites objected to forcible conversions of people from Catholicism to Protestantism, arguing that conversion should be an individual and not a political choice. It was this opposition to the role of state religions that led both to the persecution of Mennonites and to their strong conception of the church as separate from political powers. This belief about the role of government was reinforced by another formative experience during the Reformation period—a failed attempt to create a religious state based on Old Testament law in the city of Muenster in 1534-35. Lessons from the "Muenster Tragedy" instilled in the early Mennonite community the belief that the New Testament teaching on nonviolence takes precedence over the Old Testament teachings on government.

Mennonites believe that the role of the state is to provide order, and the role of the Christian is to obey the state in its order-providing function insofar as that does not contradict his or her call as a Christian. It derives from both historical experience and an interpretation of Romans 13 that assumes the state does not have the right to command a Christian to do what God has forbidden.²⁶ To quote John Howard

²⁴One could argue from a Christian perspective that more harm is generated by the presence of weak states than would be caused by war. War, after all, would likely only effect one generation, whereas weak states can be devastating to generation after generation of people in a country because they do not encourage economic development or provide public goods.

²⁵The perspective that the church takes precedence over the state is yet another Mennonite belief that would divide the Mennonite scholar from the rest of the discipline of political science.

²⁶Here, to use violence. The most controversial Biblical passage addressing the role of the state is Romans 13:1-5, which has often been viewed by Christians as a call to obey the state in all matters. Mennonites have long held a suspicion of the state and interpret the same passage through the hermeneutical lens of Jesus' call to nonviolence in the Sermon on the Mount. The New International Version of Romans 13:1-5 is as follows: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only

God is not said to *create* or *institute* or *ordain* the powers that be, but only to *order* them, to put them in order, sovereignly to tell them where they belong, what is their place. It is not as if there was a time when there was no government and then God made government through a new creative intervention; there has been hierarchy and authority and power since human society.²⁷

Because it is a Mennonite belief that the state is not the Christian's fundamental allegiance and because Mennonites believe violence to be ultimately sinful, Mennonites are particularly suspicious of calls to engage in violence on behalf of the state. Mennonites believe that Christians live in a different reality than that faced by the nation-state and indeed, a different reality than that faced by non-Christians because they acknowledge the existence of the spiritual world and the interaction of that world with the temporal.²⁸

As a Mennonite and a political scientist, I find myself deeply suspicious of the purportedly value-neutral nature of political science, specifically when it addresses the need for war both in terms of security and in this case in terms of state building.²⁹ There are a number of possible responses that I can make to this theory as a Mennonite political scientist. One would be simply to stand back from the theory and critique it from a purely theological perspective. Another might be to accept the historical usefulness of the theory and reject the modern application, again from a theological perspective. I prefer a third way, which is to engage the discipline fully on its own terms from a theological position. If I am to convince scholars of comparative politics that war is not an effective tool of state formation in the contemporary era, then I must use empirical evidence to back up my claim.

Rethinking War and State Formation

Arguments of political scientists regarding the role of war should not be taken

because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." A full Mennonite interpretation of this particular text is offered in John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), Chapter 10.

²⁷Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 203.

²⁸This belief about the ability of God to act in this world and limitations set on human actions certainly separates Mennonite political scientists from our non-Christian colleagues and from some of our Christian colleagues. For example, I have had numerous conversations with fellow pacifists who are pacifists because of a particular political belief about why we oppose war, and I find that we have little in common. As a Mennonite, I am opposed to war because I believe Jesus has commanded us to reject violence, not because I think it is the most politically effective or advantageous position. This belief sets me at odds with pacifists who are coming from the political left and with Christian colleagues who support Just War theories.

²⁹In this regard, I imagine that I fit Thomas Heilke's model of Mennonite political scientists (all ten of us). Thomas W. Heilke, "At the Table? Toward an Anabaptist Political Science," in *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*, eds. Thomas W. Heilke and Ashley Woodiwiss (New York: Lexington Books, 2001).

lightly. We should be careful to count the cost of these ideas particularly insofar as they have the potential to have an impact outside of the academy in the policy-making community. Tilly examines war purely in the historical context and makes note of the fact that he doubts the applicability of his theory to the current political era.³⁰ Herbst also appears to be motivated by a desire to see strong governments in place in Africa, anticipating the positive benefits that will come about from the peace and stability that they will bring. Yet Herbst is assuming too much in believing (1) that transitions will occur peacefully and (2) that the governing units that emerge will be constructive rather than destructive. The uncertainty and political violence that would *necessarily* come about from any radical change in the state system in Africa is so dangerous that the suggestion seems to me to be morally reprehensible. If I believed, as many of my colleagues in the discipline do, that war might be developmental for these states, my discomfort with the uncertainty resulting from a change in state boundaries would be far weaker.

At least one serious flaw becomes apparent in any reasoning that attempts to use the European state formation thesis in the contemporary world. The type of war that developed Europe no longer exists today—wars are more lethal, globalized, and less ordered. Indeed, rather than wars in the developing world becoming more like European wars, quite the opposite is occurring and European wars are becoming more like those in the developing world with the involvement of non-combatants and spillover effects to other states in terms of refugee flows.

Postmodern War

When writing his seminal work on state development in Europe, Tilly noted that although war served a critical function in building states in the European context, it was not a role that could be repeated in other contexts. Tilly argued that “the European state-building experiences will not repeat themselves in new states. The connections of the new states to the rest of the world have changed too much.”³¹ In attempting to apply Tilly’s theory of war and state formation to the Middle East, Steven Heydemann and his collaborators were frustrated, not by the absence of war, but by the fact that taxation was not used to fund the war. Therefore the state did not become stronger through war. Instead, wars and external threats led to the buildup of the military via grants of military equipment and training from abroad, alleviating the need for large domestic taxation and ultimately undermining any

³⁰In fairness to both Herbst and Tilly, I don’t believe either of them would naively argue that war is good in the fashion that it was entertained as a policy option prior to WWI in Europe. In fact, Tilly explicitly acknowledges the costs of war saying, “. . . the building of states in Western Europe cost tremendously in death, suffering, loss of rights and unwilling surrender of land, goods or labor” (“Reflections,” 71). Herbst is less explicit, but appears to be weighing the costs of weak states, which in Africa have been tremendously high, against the costs of war.

³¹Tilly, “Reflections,” 81.

constraints on authoritarian states.³² In Iraq, the state was in virtually a constant state of war through the 1980s, but no constraints on the ruler developed and the people did not become more nationalistic. Instead, the wars were funded via oil revenue and few of the expected benefits derived. In these cases, Tilly was correct: globalization and the effect of the international market prevented states from gaining the “benefits” of war.

There is further reason to challenge the relevance of the war-state formation link. It is not just the changes in the world system of states that make the relationship between war and state formation unlikely to hold true in the current era, but also changes in the nature of warfare. War today takes a different form than during the time of European state formation. There are numerous advances in technology and the financing of war that have altered warfare and undermined the potential gains from war that might strengthen a state. In this next section I will be drawing heavily on the conception of postmodern warfare that has been articulated by Mary Kaldor in her book *New and Old Wars*.³³

Wars in the post-Cold War era are fought in a distinctly different fashion than they have been fought in the past. Kaldor labels them postmodern because they are of a different cloth than previous wars. We expect that technological and methodological changes in warfare will always be making wars more efficient than before. What is new in this conception of postmodern warfare is that civilians are the targets of warfare and war is financed through means other than taxation. Kaldor argues that globalization and privatization have eroded the monopoly on the use of force that used to be characteristic of the state. During the era of state formation in Europe and even during the Cold War, it was the case that states fought their own conflicts with members of their armed forces targeting the armed forces of other states.³⁴ As a result, at the turn of the twentieth century, the ratio of military to civilian deaths in warfare was 8 to 1. Since the 1990s, this has been reversed with the ratio of military to civilian casualties now 1 to 8.³⁵ In postmodern warfare, civilians rather than military personnel are the targets. They are also the soldiers.³⁶ This inverting of casualty figures has come as a result of the targeting of civilians in so many outbreaks of conflict.

³²Steven Heydemann, *War, Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

³³Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

³⁴During the era of European state formation, it was certainly the case that mercenaries were frequently used to augment and sometimes even replace members of the armed forces of a state, but this would not be inconsistent with Kaldor's view.

³⁵Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*. Kaldor is writing about the context of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which began as a civil war, but expanded to become an international war as the state collapsed.

³⁶Armed gangs, vigilante groups, and other civilians—people outside of the military chain of command—have provided the manpower for the Bosnian War and the other Yugoslav wars of secession, the war in Afghanistan, and conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The same statistics and facts hold true in the African context that Herbst addresses. In many of the wars of the past twenty years on the African continent, civilians rather than members of the armed forces of other states have been the targets.³⁷ Moreover, it is also the case that civilians have been the perpetrators of violence, and on the African continent, these civilians have often been children coerced into violence via threat and/or abduction.³⁸ When violence is conducted by civilians and targeted at civilians, it is unlikely to serve the purposes of state formation envisioned in the war-state formation theory. Rather than controlling the population within a state, postmodern warfare is most likely to create incentives that lead people to flee the state in pursuit of their own security. Not surprisingly, it is the case that postmodern warfare fought in Africa has led to tremendous refugee problems as people leave their state to seek personal security in another. Liberian refugees fled their country when the civil war began in 1989 and are living throughout West Africa waiting for their state to become safe again.³⁹ However, that same war spread to Guinea and Sierra Leone. Similarly, a civil war that began in Rwanda with genocide spreading to neighboring states such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Postmodern wars can be either civil or international; it is increasingly difficult to draw sharp lines between the two.

When the state ceases to protect its citizens and citizens become substitutes for the armed forces, there is a clear failure of the Hobbesian social contract in which individuals sacrifice their liberty to live under the rule of a state in exchange for security. Further, it is difficult to determine how a state will gain in terms of the ability to tax a population (one of the presumed benefits of war) when the population is no longer present because they had to flee for safety.

The war-state formation theory posits that war leads to stronger states because states are forced by war to tax more effectively and use their resources more efficiently. Apart from the problem of population loss explained above, there is another problem in this era of postmodern war, particularly in the African continent: wars in Africa are not financed by taxation nor even by theft and plunder of the population, but from the exploitation of natural resources. In Sierra Leone, Angola, and Mozambique, diamonds have fueled conflicts between groups, across borders, and within states. In the Congo the exploitation of timber and koltan has funded conflict. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler have argued that the presence of valuable natural resources in a state is likely to be a destabilizing factor and to contribute to

³⁷One example is the conflict that developed along the Sudanese/Ugandan border due to the activities of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA was composed predominantly of civilians and attacked civilians, wreaking havoc on the lives of many Ugandans and Sudanese and only involving the governments of those countries in the most peripheral way. See Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and Holy Spirits* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999).

³⁸The most tragic and well-documented cases of this type of violence involving child soldiers has taken place in Sierra Leone and in Uganda, but these are by no means the only examples.

³⁹Renewed fighting in 2002 has made it unlikely that Liberia will be a safe place to live for some time.

the likelihood of civil wars.⁴⁰ Africa is a continent that is resource rich. It has an array of valuable resources from mineral deposits to timber to oil.⁴¹ If postmodern wars are funded by the exploitation of natural resources, then they will thrive on the African continent. Insofar as the exploitation of resources is used to fund conflicts, it is not necessary for states either to be strong or to become strong in order to fight wars. Thus, the idea that interstate war would strengthen the states on the African continent seems unlikely due to the way wars have been financed in Africa over the past twenty years. Yet we need not limit our focus to Africa. The war in Afghanistan prior to U.S. involvement was largely financed through the trafficking of opium. The Bosnian War and the war in Kosovo targeted civilians and were financed by theft and extortion.

IV. Conclusion

The lessons learned by examining the long history of state formation are disturbing. It is disquieting to see how long it took for states to consolidate effectively in the European context. Four hundred years and multiple wars led to the small number of stable states we now see in Europe. It is also unsettling to see the benefits that accrued to states as a result of their willingness to use violence in pursuit of their political agendas. We look to the developing world and rightly ask how can these states develop quickly? We cannot appropriate the answers from Europe. Though comparative historical analysis can be useful, I am unconvinced that the European context can give us useful lessons for the strengthening of states in the developing world. The changed nature of warfare makes the use of warfare as a tool of state formation both impracticable and, from the Mennonite perspective, immoral.

What we can learn from comparative historical analysis is that constraints on rulers are critical to state development, effective taxation is necessary for the provision of public goods, and the control of populations is critical to state strength. Historically, war has helped to achieve these benefits to society, but at a tremendous cost that cannot be ignored. Because taxation does not finance the wars that we see around the world, it is not necessary for states to become stronger and more complex in order to control people and better extract resources. Indeed, the fueling of conflict via the extraction of natural resources, particularly in wars on the African continent, has made African states more marginalized than they have been in the past. Strong states in Africa would mean the potential for better governments

⁴⁰Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50.4 (1998): 563-74. They have noted that the presence of natural resources in a state is likely to encourage the development of civil wars because the potential payoffs are much higher than in states that are resource poor.

⁴¹Recent evidence from Somalia, a country that has been destroyed by years of fighting without a state, indicates that they are exporting their forests in the form of charcoal to the Middle East.

196 and the provision of public goods to citizens. However, means other than warfare should be sought, and indeed are being sought, to strengthen states.

A Mennonite perspective rejects war as a means to state development and raises a set of concerns regarding war that lead me to challenge this approach to political development. We are called by the prophet Amos to “seek good, not evil and to hate evil and love good (Amos 5:14, 15). I believe that this call, along with New Testament teachings on both government and violence, forces us to reject the use of war in pursuit of state development. War, with all of the harm it brings to Christians and non-Christians alike, can never be justified as a means of state building.⁴²

⁴²My thanks go to P. J. Hill, Alan Jacobs, and Ashley Woodiwiss for their comments on this paper. The mistakes remain my own.