The Crisis of the State System

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Translated from the original Swedish

The December 2017 decision by the US President to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel threw the Israeli/Palestinian conflict into high tension; the Syrian wars and Saudi Arabia's challenges to Iran combine to illustrate the crisis of the state system. Not only are there 32 states in collapse[1], the level of corruption in the governance of many states and internal violence[2] has become a pandemic. There are many more examples of how poorly the global state system is working. It also brings into the open the impotency of state controlled institutions, like the United Nations, which was originally designed to ensure that state governments are behaving in a proper and decent fashion.

The "modern" state is a fairly new concept having come into being as a result of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia ending the Thirty-Years War.[3] The concept of the modern state is based on one state with one central government, one currency, one legal system, one mili-
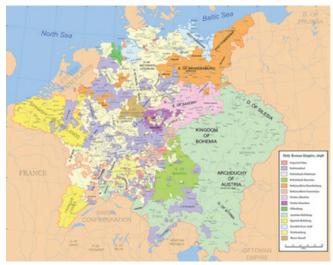

Figure 1: Holy Roman Empire in 1648

Figure 2: Westphalian Territorial Changes in 1648 Central Europe

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[1] Christopher Reese in his manuscript contends, "… just as states exert sovereign power within their own boundaries, there has been a recent rise in states and bodies of states using the same kinds of sovereign power outside of their domestic state boundaries, and that this application of power is dependent upon the ability of the international community to delegitimize the citizenship and sovereignty of other states." Reese, C. (2014) International Power Relations and state Collapse: Ephemeral state of Sovereignty in the Modern World Order, Honors Thesis (unpublished) University of Tennessee, Knoxville. p. 5. Quoting Yoffee, "…collapse usually entails the failure of "centralized institutions that facilitate the distribution of resources and information." Norman Yoffee, 2005 Myths of the Archaic state: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, states, and Civilizations, Cambridge University Press, p. 139.

[2] Rotberg in his excellent analysis notes that since 1990 more than 10 million people have been killed in failed states "and hundreds of millions more have been deprived of their fundamental rights." See: Rotberg, R. (2003) "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-states: Breakdown, Prevention and Repair." in When states Fail, Causes and Consequences. Ed. Robert Rotberg. Princeton University Press: NJ. ISBN 9780691116723, ISBN 9781400835799.

[3] It was in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation that the Thirty-Years War began (1618, and ended 1648) where more than 1000 different "sovereign duchies" and subordinate duchies ruled territories and peoples by independent dukes. Each duchy was distinguished by religion (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, or mixtures of these). Duchies were also distinguished by their economic, commercial, and natural resource claims. The combination of competitions between dukes, religions, cultures, customary laws and commercial interests and aggressions by outside kingdoms such as Spain (it controlled Spanish Netherlands), the House of Hapsburg, Archduchy of Austria and the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary gave rise to the Thirty-Years war. The Roman Catholic Church became the primary mediator to bring the vicious battles, eventual starvation and disease in the region to an end with the creation of specific states.

tary entity and established boundaries. The state as we know it now was born in the "Holy Roman Empire."[4]

Central Europe's 16th century duchies reflected religious diversity and frequently overlapping religious practices in a single duchy. The Thirty-Years War did not stop all conflicts in Central Europe, but with this and other treaties, boundaries were formed around much larger tracts of land inside of which a single ruler instead of many determined how the territory was governed. As one can readily see in the Map of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648 (Figure 1), Europe was a cacophony of diverse and competing cultures, political jurisdictions, and religious commitments.

The Treat of Westphalia and subsequent treaties sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church produced significant changes in the territorial landscape (Figure 2). Powers to control territories were shifted to polities such as Sweden, Brandenburg, Saxony, France, Bavaria and to Poland. The Catholic and Imperial forces battled to victories as well as defeats during the wars, and territories were consolidated and authorities distributed.

The families or often self-designated groups in power in a state were lucky–during the last century and a half since the founding of states it was possible to continue to gather and enjoy concentrations of wealth and power and start building an international peer state system. The rest of the people who fell under centralized state control would see their political and administrative powers moved to the state capital. They would see their languages, cultures, and traditions diminished—and their pride and dignity with it.

The new state border-makers did not care very much on whose traditional territories they drew the new border lines.[5] In many cases old and ancient regions and peoples were split into pieces and incorporated into adjacent states as state leaders fought over borders. Even today the rigid state borders are the cause of many conflicts both in parts of Europe and elsewhere in the world where states were traced on the map from colonial boundaries and sometimes simply arbitrary "line-drawings" for economic convenience.

Fortunately for Europe, the founding fathers of the European Union realised that to reduce the chances of more wars and conflicts in Europe, the state governments had to be stripped of the ability to start new wars. The process of weakening the states started with the Schuman Declaration on May 9, 1950[6] and is still going on. The state nationalists, victims of a century or more of nationalistic state propaganda, are objecting. But the process of depriving the states of the right to start new wars in Europe is continuing, whether the state nationalists like it or not.

The establishment of Israel, and before that also Palestine, and the states of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Kuwait as well as states in Africa, the Americas and Asia re-

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[4] The Sacrum Romanum Imperium in the Latin was claimed by the Frankish and then German kings for ten centuries from 800 AD to 1806 AD. The Franks rose as a political force in the 3rd century of the Common Era from the east bank of the Lower Rhine River. Their mother peoples were the Salians, Ripaurians and the Chatti (Hessians)—each an independent polity though linguistically related. During the succeeding centuries, the Frankish peoples expanded west into what is now Belgium and eventually in what was Roman-claimed Gaul. While the Merovingian Dynasty ruled in the Frankish-claimed territories, they were replaced by the first "Holy Roman Emperor" Charlemagne who wore the mantle from 768-814 AD. German Kings claimed the "Holy Roman Empire" after the partition of the Frankish Empire in 843 AD with the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation becoming the successor made up of mostly Central Europe with the Peace of Augsburg (1555). Two hundred twenty-four German polities were given the right to choose the religion (Lutheranism or Catholicism) would dominate each population under the "Peace."

[5] Christopher Reese calls attention to this phenomenon in his manuscript noting: "Archaic states were usually formed in regions with a shared culture, such as in Uruk and Sumer (Yoffee 2005), whereas the modern nation-state frequently contains artificially constructed boundaries which do not always accurately reflect the diverse identities of the citizens therein" (Reese, 2014, p. 7).

[6] French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the foundation for what became the European Union in the form of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with founding members France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg that pooled coal and steel production so that "war would become impossible." See: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en

Photo of a destroyed ambulance in the Gaza Strip taken during a 72-hour ceasefire between Hamas and Israel on Aug. 6, 2014.

sulted from the state nation-building mentality that has created so many wars and violent conflicts in the past. Rigid borders – drawn in the sand of the Arabian deserts – have created inter-state hatred and state nationalistic extremism. The Europeans have seen it all before.

The solution? Support the creation of a European Union equivalent in the Middle East and elsewhere with similar or region-appropriate controlling institutions that govern present day Europe. Other regions need not duplicate Europe's institutions, but certainly consider the factors that contribute to wars (religion, war-supporting raw materials [oil?]) and then consider the social and economic factors that are mutually beneficial. Weaken the state governments' ability to start new wars and conflicts by stripping them of their present undisputed right to defer to state sovereignty regardless of how badly these governments treat their own people or their neighbours.

The next step would be to open up the state borders for free movement of people, goods, services and capital, just as we are now doing in the EU. Allow people to socially intermingle freely and they will eventually learn to live with each other even as they retain their languages, cultures, social order and customs. Use the money, now spent on guns and rockets to kill and maim each other, on efficient policing to prevent individual people from initially jumping at each other's throats. Eventually

people will come to the point where the state and other from top-down propaganda have ceased to twist the minds of the people so they can start to live their daily lives peacefully.

This solution may sound naïve knowing the situations in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. But no matter how strongly the majority of people are indoctrinated to believe in the state system as the only solution the historical realities are fairly plain: interdependence breeds constructive democratic pluralism.

The European Union framework of diminishing state influence and depriving them of their tools to start new wars is working, at least in my little region of southern Sweden. I was born during World War II. I belong to the first generation—for centuries of Northern Europeans and Europe's Regions—that was never summoned by a state government to go to war to kill people in its name. Not once during my active life have I been drafted to serve the state in a military capacity, which is quite amazing when you think about it.

For that reality, I can thank the founders of the European Union—Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman—for their idea of a Europe consisting of weaker states less disposed to war and destruction and, as an extra bonus, stronger cultural regions—the Regions of Europe. ∎

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