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War, Violence and the State

1. Introduction

Citizens of the Western world live in an unprecedented era of peace and security. Of course, the headlines from Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and parts of Central America remind us that this pacific order is not global. But there is little doubt that the incidence (and probably severity) of armed conflict – and, more importantly, levels of domestic or internal violence – have declined dramatically when compared over a long historical perspective. Many explanations for the pacific era have been advanced, ranging from the philosophical, to the biological, social and political, reflecting most often different disciplinary approaches (Pinker 2007). Viewed holistically, these different perspectives are perhaps not incompatible, at least if one believes that political institutions and social norms are ultimately the product of human agency and that they shape each other in complex ways.

My focus in this essay is on the links between the long-term ebb and flow of different forms of lethal violence and the varied historical configurations of state power. A monopoly over the legal use of violence is, Max Weber reminds us (in *Politics as a Vocation*), a *sine qua non* of the modern state, yet this observation alone tells us little about how violence and state power are inextricably intertwined – with the state simultaneously both constraining and enabling the large-scale use of violence and force. In order to unpack this relationship, and to advance some tentative ideas about how it might have changed over time, I will present the historical argument and evidence for the decline in armed violence, both between and within Western polities. One reason for our relative neglect of the long-term decline in armed violence (organized or not) has been a disproportionate focus on interstate war – the *déformation professionnelle* of international relations scholars – and a relative lack of attention to other forms of violence that implicate the state in various ways. I will then, by putting different forms of violence at the centre of analysis, situate the Western experience in a broader global context of contemporary violence. I will argue for a broadened focus on the phenomenon of violence that will not limit our perspectives of violence to either ‘war’ or ‘crime’, categories that are analytically inadequate for understanding contemporary manifestations of the lethal use of force.

More importantly perhaps, I will attempt to ‘bring the state back in’ by focusing on the relationship between the state and contemporary violence, and by highlighting some of the research puzzles that emerge from a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to violence. Overall, I will argue – loosely following Carl von Clausewitz – that the scope and nature of violence vary ‘like an object suspended between three magnets’, represented by Clausewitz’s trinitarian triangle of the army, the government and the people (Howard and Paret 1976: 101). Thus, patterns of violence cannot be understood outside of the ways in which state power is mobilized and exercised as part of the shifting balance between state and society, and between the state and military ‘technique’ (including both forms of organization and technology).⁷² But going beyond Clausewitz, I want to look at the way in which institutions and instruments of organized violence are mobilized within and between states, both to use force and to constrain its use by others. To put it in simple terms: a state can use violence against another state and other organized groups (warfare), it can use violence against its citizens (state violence), or it can wield its monopoly of the legitimate use of force to constrain or reduce the use of violence within society (public order). This chapter thus seeks to look at the ways in which these three usages of force relate (if at all) to changing configurations of state power.

At least one caveat is in order: this focus on state power can only shed light on the conditions that make possible, or enable, the use of force, either between or within states. Many other factors – be they socio-cultural, normative or idiosyncratic – determine when individuals or groups will actually resort to violence to achieve their ends and can only be explained at the micro level. However, at the macro-level, thinking about the changed relationship between the state and violence, and what ‘makes possible’ the large-scale use of violence, can perhaps provide a historical context to the contemporary situation.

72 This is one version of Clausewitz’s trinity that I have slightly recast as state–society–military technology. The other version of the trinity focuses on ‘primordial violence, chance and rational policy’, and maps loosely onto the people, the army and the state. See Vallacres and Bassford (1995); von Clausewitz (1976: 89).

2. The Declining Role of International Armed Force

If we take war – defined as a form of conflict between two or more hostile groups (following Quincy Wright) – as our traditional starting point, virtually all analysts agree that recent decades have witnessed the near-total disappearance of major interstate war, as well as a fairly steady decline in the number of violent intra-state conflicts. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) recorded a total of 34 armed conflicts as active in 2007, only 4 of which were classified as ‘wars’ with more than 1000 battle-related deaths in a single year (Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia) and all of which were internal armed conflicts. Only three recent wars – Eritrea–Ethiopia (1998–2000), India–Pakistan (1998–2003) and the United States–Iraq (2003) – can reasonably be classified as interstate, although several more have been ‘internationalized’ in the sense that they involved troops from states that were not primary parties to the conflict (Harbom and Sundberg 2008: 72–86). Figures from Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr broadly concur, with 20 major armed conflicts active in 2005 and fewer than 30 states involved in an armed conflict.⁷³

These figures represent a significant decline since the 1980s: ‘the general magnitude of global warfare has decreased by over sixty percent since peaking in the mid-1980s, falling by the end of 2004 to its lowest level since the late 1950s’ (Marshall and Gurr 2005: 11). Other data put the peak at 1992, coinciding with the outbreak of many post-cold war civil conflicts (Harbom and Sundberg 2008: 14).

But does a decline in the number of armed conflicts also mean a decline in lethal violence and does this trend hold over a longer historical period? For the first question we should examine the most recent century. Most analysts would agree that, compared to the 20th century as a whole, the numbers of victims of armed conflict violence in the last two decades is relatively low. A recent meta-analysis of eight major datasets on armed conflict concluded that between 2004 and 2007 at least 208,400 violent deaths were recorded in armed conflicts – an average of 52,000 people killed per year. Although this figure is somewhat higher than reported by single-source data sets (such as the UCDP or the Human Security Report), it remains a conservative estimate because it includes only recorded deaths; the real total may be much higher, but is still unlikely to reach more than 100,000 or so violent deaths per year

73 See ‘Figure 4, States Experiencing Warfare, 1946–2007’. In: Marshall and Gurr (2005): Global Conflict Trends, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflict.htm>.

in contemporary armed conflicts.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, conflict-related deaths are highly concentrated: three-quarters of all reported direct conflict deaths took place in just ten countries, and the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Sudan in 2007 accounted for more than two-thirds of the death toll.

The problem is that, despite much scholarly effort, we have no good figures for the total number of deaths in armed conflict in the 20th century (or any preceding period) with which to compare these figures. The numbers are extremely uncertain, and range from a low of 35 million to a high of 148 million, with authors offering also figures of 61 and 87.5 million conflict deaths. Much of this variation depends, however, on what is being counted and how it is being done so.⁷⁵ The low figure of 34 million counts only ‘battle deaths’ and thus seems to exclude all civilian deaths in war, as well as most civil war victims. The somewhat higher figure of 61 million includes 42 million military deaths (likely equivalent to ‘battle deaths’) and 19 million civilian deaths. Zbigniew Brzezinski, whose total war dead is 87.5 million, calculates that 33.5 million deaths were military and 54 million deaths were civilian. All three appear to be relatively close on the figure for ‘military (battle) deaths’ – between 33 and 42 million. By contrast, the high figure of 148 million deaths in armed conflict includes all civil wars, genocides, and civilian casualties in armed conflicts, whether violent or not; in other words, virtually all deaths from organized armed violence.⁷⁶ It is worth noting that the victims of what Rudolph Rummel has called ‘democide’ (Rummel 1997) (loosely synonymous with state violence) almost certainly exceed the victims of war.

Either way, if we assume that the total number of 20th century violent deaths in war (military and civilian) was somewhere between 60 and 140

74 Geneva Declaration (2008). Recorded violent deaths are subject to significant undercounting in high-violence areas due to reduced media coverage and NGO access, and due to the inability to determine the perpetrator or classify the nature of the death. For other figures see Human Security Centre (2005). These figures do not include the excess mortality (indirect deaths) also caused by war-induced displacement or deprivation, as people lose access to water, food, shelter, and basic health care and services. Excess mortality in almost all contemporary conflicts vastly exceeds the number of violent deaths.

75 Sources: Rummel (1997), 35 million; White, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat8.htm>, 61 million (of which 42 million military and 19 million civilian); Brzezinski (1993); Leitenberg (2006), http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2006/20060800_cdsp_occ_leitenberg.pdf.

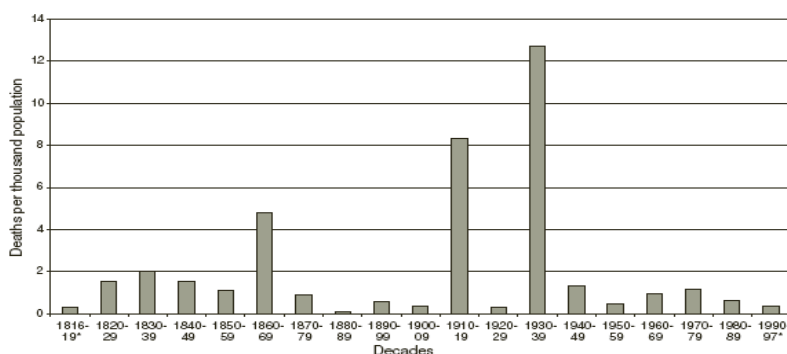
76 E.g. Leitenberg’s total for World War II alone is 65–75 million (Leitenberg 2006). He probably also counts excess mortality from conflict, which includes victims who do not die violently or directly in armed clashes.

million, we would have an average of one million violent deaths in war (plus or minus 40 percent) for each year of the 20th century. Relatively to this dismal record, the last two decades, and last few years in particular, have been rather less violent. Of course, the figures for the 20th century are skewed by the two world wars and other episodes of major conflict (the Korean and Vietnam wars), but even so, there appears to be a general decline in violence from armed conflict since World War II, with significant drops after 1945 and after the end of the cold war (Lacina et al. 2006: 673–680).

In historical terms, however, this needs to be situated against an even longer backdrop if we are to make sense of the changing role of state, society and instruments of armed force. If the 20th century was potentially the most violent in human history, perhaps recent declines are simply a return to a norm. Some scholars, such as Meredith Sarkees and J.D. Singer, have argued that recent declines from the high levels of the 20th century do not necessarily represent a longer-term trend. As Figure 1 shows, there have also been historically periods of relatively low violence, in particular in the mid- and late 19th century (with only an estimated 7 million war deaths between 1816 and 1900). When corrected for population growth, and compared to figures over two centuries, these figures seem to suggest that there has been no discernable decline in war deaths since 1816.⁷⁷ Such evidence, however sketchy and contradictory, should at least give us pause when we attempt to project into the medium-term future the experience of a particular – and potentially unique – century of human history, and certainly of the last 30 or so years.

77 Sarkees, Wayman and Singer (2003: 49–70): ‘the correction between deaths per thousand and the passage of time is insignificant’. For a partial critique of this analysis, see Lacina et al. (2006). The debate partly turns on how wars have been classified (and data gathered) in the Correlates of War project, illustrating the confusion that occurs when conceptual categories are too narrowly defined.

Figure 1: War Deaths per 100,000 Population, 1816–1997



Source: Meredith Reid Sarkees, Frank Whelon Wayman and J. David Singer, 'Inter-State, Intra-State, and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at their Distribution over Time, 1816–1997', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2003), p. 66.

Indeed, centuries other than the 20th have ~~been~~ also been exceptionally bloody. The Napoleonic wars of 1792–1815 probably resulted in 2.5–3.5 million war deaths (excluding civilian casualties), which would produce an annual war death rate of 13.3 per 100,000.⁷⁸ Further back, one merely needs to recall the Thirty Years' War of the 17th century, in which between one quarter and one-third of the population of Central Europe died from war-related causes (beyond violence) – making it, in a sense, the first 'total war'.⁷⁹ This war accounted for a large percentage of the more than 6 million war deaths estimated for the entire 17th century, which itself represented a more than three-fold increase over the 1.6 million estimated war-related deaths between 1500 and 1600. Global figures for war-deaths are notoriously uncertain, but if we take William Eckhardt's total of 6.1 million war-related deaths in the 17th century, and calculate it over the average population for the century (545 million), the annual war-related death rate would be about 7.8

78 For the total of 2.5–3.5 million deaths see *Statistics of Wars, Oppressions and Atrocities of the Nineteenth Century*, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/wars19c.htm#Napoleonic>. I have used the mid-point of 3 million, and world population figures of 980 million in 1800. Many of these war deaths were from disease and famine; conversely, I have not included the 1 million or more civilian deaths.

79 Parker (1997). The majority of these deaths were likely from excess mortality rather than direct violence.


per 100,000 – a peak not reached again until the Napoleonic wars (Eckhardt 1991: 437–443). There are problems with these figures, most of which relate to great uncertainty and/or problematic counting rules (concerning for instance, civil or colonial conflicts, genocides, etc., as well as including violent and non-violent deaths related to wars). But overall the picture provided usefully highlights that armed violence is not a constant, but rather ebbs and flows dramatically.

Much more important than simple correlations or trends analyses, however, is an analysis of the relationship between the potential and actual use of armed violence, which could provide some basis for thinking about the shifting relationship between the state and violence, and for determining the effectiveness of mechanisms or institutions to control or regulate its usage. One obvious point is that relative to the ability to wreak large-scale armed violence, its incidence today is extremely low. From a military–technological point of view, if one constructed a chart of ‘destructive potential’, measured in terms either of the numbers of weapons or their lethality and ‘reach’, then the 20th century would certainly rank the highest. From a social–organizational point of view (number of soldiers under arms, or size of internal and external security forces more generally), although there has been a decline since the height of the cold war, the ability of the state to mobilize its citizens for violent ends is certainly greater than in pre-Napoleonic times.

Such changes in the potential for the lethal use of force have not been linear over time, and they reflect shifts in Clausewitz’s pendulum between the relative strength of institutions of organized violence (the state), the instruments (the army) and society. One useful starting point for historians has been the concept of ‘revolutions in military affairs’ that ‘recast society and the state as well as military organizations [and] ... alter the capacity of states to create and project military power’ (Knox and Murray 2001:6). There is a large debate over how to classify these ‘revolutions’, but most analyses have focused on social and technological changes in organization for warfare, and seldom have these reflections been extended to thinking about the impact of the changing scope and lethality of force on the relations between states, and between state and society.⁸⁰ Perhaps the most consensual list of ‘military revolutions’ has been presented by MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, who distinguish five modern military revolutions:

80 For good overviews of the historical debate, see Parker (1988); Knox and Murray (2001); Rogers (ed.) (1995); McNeill (1982).

- the 17th century changes in military tactics and organizational scale, associated also with the widespread use of cannon and firearms (roughly 1560–1660);
- the national mobilization associated with the Napoleonic wars (1789–1914);
- the Industrial Revolution in armaments (roughly 1840–1880);
- the revolution in mobility and three-dimensional warfare associated with the First and Second World Wars; and
- the missile and information revolution (from 1945 to today).⁸¹

These examples all point to the general conclusion that technological change itself is not ‘revolutionary’ outside of its application in a particular social and political context, and that so-called revolutionary change can also occur as a result of social and institutional transformations (such as the Napoleonic ability to mobilise the levee en masse  the rise of the bureaucratic-administrative state in the 19th century).

What could this mean for the actual use of violence, in all three of its modes (war, state violence, and public order)? I do not go so far as to make the causal claim that the incidence of war was (or is) simply a product of innovation in destructive potential, but I can argue that the destructiveness of war (measured in lives lost) is of course related in some way to the ability to mobilize or constrain the use of lethal violence. In this sense, the destructiveness of 20th century warfare, or of Napoleonic warfare, is not surprising; what is more unusual is today’s relatively low incidence of armed violence between states, the relatively low incidence of state violence (discussed below), and the near-total evacuation of non-conflict violence from Western societies (also discussed below), given the vast destructive potential that is widely available worldwide today.

3. State Violence

As the state increasingly asserted its legal – and practical – monopoly over the use of force, the balance between state and social power shifted in favour of the former. Bitter and bloody struggles to consolidate state power against an

81 Knox and Murray (eds) (2001: 6, 13). See also Rogers (1993: 241–278). I have slightly adapted Williamson and Knox’s categories and have omitted the nuclear revolution, given the tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons.

array of challengers to the state's monopoly on violence gave way, by the 18th century, to the relative pacification of states. As Charles Tilly points out, 'up to the great eighteenth-century consolidation of Western states ... marauding mercenaries, bandits, private armies, town militias, and armed rebels repeatedly brought large-scale collective violence home throughout Western Europe' (Tilly 2003: 60). But what we think of as 'state violence' – the abuse of the Weberian monopoly to inflict violence and insecurity on its population – only becomes conceivable after that point, since it requires that the state act on a relatively defenceless population, otherwise something resembling civil war erupts.

The scope and scale of state violence is, at least in broad terms, thus related to the expansion of state power. Although state authorities could occasionally trigger large scale violence by mobilizing one group of the population alongside state forces against another (such as, for example, in the 16th century massacres of the Huguenots, which resulted in approximately 20,000 deaths), only with the advent of bureaucratic means of control did modern large-scale forms of state violence, culminating in genocide, become conceivable. And until the 19th century, the means of state violence were seldom concentrated enough for sustained episodes of mass killing and² large-scale violence. Not surprisingly, just as the scope and scale of interstate warfare increased after the potential for the exercise of force was revolutionized, major episodes of state violence appear in the 20th century. According to the best (rough) estimates, 'between 60 and 150 million people probably have perished in episodes of mass killings during the twentieth century'.⁸² The names and places are depressingly familiar: Turkish Armenia, Stalin's Soviet Union, the Holocaust, China's Cultural Revolution, Uganda, Cambodia and Rwanda. But added to that must be a wide range of lesser predations, from both right- and left-wing governments, throughout the cold war: one study by Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr documents 48 cases of genocide and 'politicide' between 1945 and 1994 (Harff and Gurr 1989: 23–41).

Even today, incidents of state violence are relatively widespread. According to the Cingranelli–Richards dataset, in 59 states more than 50 extra-judicial killings (a good indicator of state violence) occurred in at least one year since 2000 (the total for 2007 was 17 states) (Cingranelli and Richards 2008). While perhaps not endemic, extra-judicial state violence is certainly widespread enough to suggest that constraining the state's ability to

82 Valentino (2004). He reviews the estimates by the same authors cited above in note 9.

prey on its population is as great a concern (politically, if not in terms of lives lost) as a number of small wars that have erupted. It is also important to note – again keeping in mind the uncertainties around numbers – that more people were killed by state violence than by interstate (or even intrastate) war in the 20th century. Again, we have no historical data, but it is unlikely that this was the case in the 19th or 18th centuries. Even the French revolution resulted in perhaps no more than 40,000 deaths during the Reign of Terror in France and upwards of 150,000 in the war in the Vendée, while the Napoleonic wars killed hundreds of thousands (Tilly 2003: 219; Secher 2003; Gough 1998: 77).

No one has yet attempted to construct a schema of ‘revolutions’ in state power that would correspond to the revolutions in military affairs, and which could help to shed some light on how the state’s ability to exercise force against its citizens increased between the 17th and 21st centuries. Perhaps this would be impossible, since the potential for state violence depends on a range of institutional capacities and can take many forms, ranging from the highly bureaucratized and machine-like killing of the Holocaust, to the highly organized but seemingly less ‘modern’ mass violence in Rwanda and Cambodia, or the pre-modern massacres such as the Vendée in France.

At least two sets of important changes can be identified, however, that had a bearing on the state’s power to exercise domestic violence. The first would be the centralization of power implicated in the transition from what Charles Tilly calls ‘indirect’ to ‘direct’ rule, which takes place roughly between 1750 and 1850 (Tilly 1989: 71–97). This involved a shift from a system in which ‘states generally relied on privileged intermediaries – nobles, priests, municipal oligarchies, officeholders licensed but no more than loosely controlled by the crown – to collect taxes, contract loans, recruit soldiers, administer justice, and carry on the rest of royal business at the local level’ to one in which ‘states had substituted their own officials for the patrons of old, tax farming and similar practices had almost vanished ... [and] national bureaucracies attempted to monitor and regulate whole countries and all their residents’ (Tilly 1989: 74). The potential for successfully mobilizing and using force against the population is limited when the state is vulnerable to localized resistance or outright opposition from powerful intermediaries who control (in one way or another) the means of violence. Revolutionary France represents a paradigmatic case of the new model of direct rule; not surprisingly, it also first realizes the potential for violence that these new state forms contain.

The second transformation would be the emergence and spread in the late 19th and early 20th century of Weber’s iron cage of administration and rational–legal bureaucracy as an institutional form, in which individuals are

subordinated to a decision-making hierarchy, with ‘rules, means–ends calculus, and matter-of-factness predominating’. As Weber notes, ‘the march of bureaucracy accordingly destroyed structures of domination which were not rational in this sense of the term’, but it instantiated even more perfectly rational – terrifyingly so – forms of domination, epitomized perhaps by the ruthless modern efficiency of the Holocaust (Weber 1968: 1002–1003). And if ‘modernity’ is taken as something more than a set of technological artefacts (lists of names and residences, radios, weapons) and more as an orientation of ‘social control’ by the state towards its citizens (means of mobilization, surveillance and discipline), it can be argued that what links 20th century state violence is usually a distinctive attempt to remake society through a thorough ‘cleansing’ of undesirable elements.⁸³ This potential for large-scale violent social engineering is only made possible by the expansion of the reach of state bureaucracies, in particular the ability of the state comprehensively to monitor and catalogue its citizens, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Dandeker 1990).

In this way we can perhaps make sense of the fact that the scale of violence between states expanded much earlier than did the scale and incidence of state violence against its citizens. Much of the early ‘energies’ of state builders were directed towards external rivals, and early modern states were hypertrophied military machines, with the development of other administrative institutions lagging somewhat behind. In many cases, more than half of the state budget was devoted to the armed forces. It was also often the case too (especially for taxation, transportation, and perhaps mass education systems) that other administrative functions of the state developed in response to the needs of modern war-fighting, and hence developed also later (Posen 1993: 80–124). Only when the destructive potential of the modern military structure had been fully diffused throughout the state could state terror be inflicted on the masses. Of course, large-scale episodes of mass killing are usually explained through idiosyncratic factors, and it is clear that a political catalyst of a dramatic sort (revolutionary leadership, extremist ideology, societal crisis, etc.) is needed. But the background conditions of state power that can be rapidly and relatively easily mobilized also needed to be present.

83 I obviously rely here on ~~XXXXXXXXX?~~ (1989) and Foucault (2007).

4. Peaceful States

The final piece of the puzzle concerns the states' use of its monopoly of the legitimate use of force to constrain or reduce the use of violence within society (public order). Here there appears to be strong and consistent evidence of a long-term decline in inter-personal violence in Western and Northern societies. Historically speaking, residents of the global North are extraordinarily secure. The most severe form of inter-personal violence – homicide – has systematically and dramatically declined in Western Europe from the high levels of the Middle Ages. Homicide rates dropped precipitously from the late middle ages to the early modern period (1400–1600), declined roughly by half from the early 17th to early 18th century, and by the 19th century had dropped three to five times further. This holds across Western Europe, from England and Scandinavia to Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Italy. The homicide rate in England dropped from about 23 per 100,000 in the 13th and 14th centuries to 4.3 per 100,000 by the end of the 17th, to 0.8 per 100,000 by the first half of the 20th century. In the Netherlands and Belgium, equivalent figures were 47.0, 9.2 and 1.7 per 100,000, respectively; in Germany/Switzerland, the figures fell from 43 per 100,000 to below 2.0 for the 20th century (Eisner 2001: 618–638; Gurr 1981: 295–353; Monkkonen 2001: 5–26). Although the exact timing and scope of the decline vary from place to place, there is no doubt about the decline in lethal violence within European states.

Many forces explain this decline, but my focus here is on the role of state power, this time in a constraining mode, and as expressed in institutions for maintaining public order. Again, there appear to be two (perhaps three) broad transformations that track reasonably well the declines in lethal non-conflict violence. The first is the emergence of 'policing' as a function of the state distinct from the occasional use of the armed forces to put down uprisings or maintain public order. This first manifestation of policing, which took hold in the mid-17th century, was considerably broader than what we think of as modern policing, and including public health concerns, urban planning, order maintenance, and some economic functions (price regulation). It was in line with the growing emphasis of the state on assessing and enhancing the strength of its body politic as the social source of its power. Maintaining public order (against crime and violence) was, however, an important if not distinct part of this function. The practice of policing was slow to develop, however; in France, for example, as late as 1714 there were perhaps only 1,000 men policing the whole of rural France, and a centralized policing structure was eventually in place only by the end of the 17th century. In the early 1700s, public order in England was provided by three different

institutions: the army, the militia, and the constables, all of which were relatively weak. However, beginning in about the 1730s, British policing underwent a process of reform characterized by the rationalization and centralization of police authority (Bailey 1975: 328–379).

The ‘real’ revolution occurs in the 19th century, with the creation of recognizably modern police forces focused on crime, violence and public order, and exemplified by Robert Peel’s creation of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829, and similar forces in France in the 1820s (similar developments occurred in the United States and elsewhere at around the same time). This was a reflection of the massive socio-economic transformations of the Industrial Revolution, and expressed concerns (not always justified) about criminal and otherwise undesirable elements in society rubbing shoulders with (and preying upon) decent citizens. One concrete result was that the ongoing surveillance of society reduced the incidence of lethal violence, and probably of criminal activity as a whole (Tilly 1992: 75–76; Elmsley 2007).

This general decline of lethal violence has accompanied and perhaps even been driven by a third transformation – a slowly changing normative understanding about the legitimate use of violence and the importance of personal security – at least in public space. This has been called by Norbert Elias the ‘civilising process’ (Elias 1994). Violent practices that were commonplace a century or so ago (public executions, torture, lynching, etc.) had been stigmatized to the point of near-extinction in the West, although there are notable exceptions. And the everyday use of violence to resolve conflicts had also been condemned; reaching even now deep into what was hitherto considered the ‘private sphere’ where intimate partner violence was beyond the reach of the state. This is less true elsewhere, where the moral economy of violence still legitimizes some practices (such as grave desecration, systematic rape, or even the choice of instruments with which to kill certain groups) that are repugnant to most, but acceptable to many.⁸⁴

84 On the use of machetes versus firearms in the Rwandan genocide see Verwimp (2006: 5–22). On grave desecration see Fearon (1994); on ritual rape see Skjelsbaek (2001: 211–237).

5. The West and the Rest: Forms and Distribution of Contemporary Violence

It is not possible in this essay to link my observations into a complete and conclusive argument, let alone a theory of violence and the state. But to summarize my main claims briefly, the potential for the state to exercise lethal violence can be understood in three 'modes' – war making between organized groups, predatory state violence used against a population, and the threat or use of force to maintain public order. These three modes are linked in complex and poorly understood ways, and scholars have traditionally told the story of state formation by focusing on one or another mode, rather than approaching the problem in an integrated way. Table 1 summarizes the argument in a table, highlighting the major transformations in potential state power that had a bearing on the ability of the state to use, or constrain the use of, violence. There are many things that this table does not capture, and in particular the changing social norms and attitudes towards the use of violence, either by individuals or institutions, but against the backdrop of these transformations it would be important to situate the rise and diffusion of such concrete things as the development of democratic control of Weberian institutions of organized violence, or the changing relationship between states and their citizens.

There are also, however, some *prima facie* paradoxical aspects to the relationship of the three modes, since the qualitative increases in the ability of the state to inflict lethal violence in warfare has been accompanied by a steady increase in the provision of public order and decline in violence within states – representing the evacuation of violence from public space and its external projection onto the canvas of inter-state relations. But at the same time, the potential for state violence was reaching new heights and realizing some of its most violent manifestations. It would be somewhat tautological to attribute episodes of state violence to a breakdown (or lack of development) of institutional and normative constraints on the state, but in a long-term and comparative context, it would be worthwhile to make some attempt to situate the oscillations of the Clausewitzian pendulum between different modes of violence.

Table 1: Transformations in Violence and the State

Mode	Transformation	Period
Warfare Violence between organized groups	Changes in military tactics and organization, wide use of cannon and firearms	16 th -17 th century
	National mobilization associated with the Napoleonic wars	End 18 th century
	Industrial Revolution in armaments	Mid-19 th century
	Revolution in mobility and three-dimensional warfare	Early 20 th century
	Missile and information revolution	Late 20 th century
State Violence Violence against the population	Transition from 'indirect' to 'direct' rule	Mid-18 th century
	Expansion of rational-legal bureaucracy and the reach of the state	Late 19 th century
Public Order Use of force to constrain violence	Modern police	19 th century
	Development of police forces directed towards maintaining public order	19 th century

What preliminary observations can we make from this when we look at the broad sweep of contemporary forms of armed violence? As documented by the Global Burden of Armed Violence report, an estimated 490,000 persons died in 2004 in non-conflict violence. This figure underscores that violent deaths in non-conflict settings comprise a much larger proportion of the global burden of armed violence than the number of people dying violently in contemporary wars – perhaps two to five times greater.⁸⁵ The majority of non-conflict violent deaths occur as the result of everyday criminally- or politically-motivated armed violence. In national and international statistics, these deaths are called 'homicide', but this is an inadequate term to capture the scope and scale of insecurity in places where violence from crime, gangs or armed groups is as intense as in some war zones. Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South America have homicide rates of more than 20 per 100,000 population per year, compared to the

85 Geneva Declaration (2008: 5, 67–88). It would not be reasonable to compare directly the 490,000 to the 52,000 recorded violent deaths in armed conflict cited above, for two reasons. First, considerable undercounting of conflict deaths occurs; second, the majority of victims of armed conflict die 'indirectly' (3–10 times the number of violent deaths). Even so, the number of non-conflict deaths will still almost certainly exceed those from armed conflicts.

global average of 7.6 per 100,000 and the Western European average of fewer than 2 violent deaths per 100,000. Some countries in Southern Africa, Central America, and South America – including Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, South Africa, and Venezuela – report among the highest recorded rates of violent death in the world, ranging from 37 (Venezuela) to 59 (El Salvador) per 100,000 in 2005. These rates are higher than in all but four contemporary conflict zones (Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan).⁸⁶

These manifestations of armed violence are usually treated separately, on the assumption that their underlying causes and dynamics are fundamentally different. Yet the rise of economically motivated wars, the blurring of the line between political and non-political violence, the growth of transnational criminal gangs, and the expansion of non-state armed groups makes drawing clear distinctions between different forms of armed violence practically and analytically impossible. More importantly for my argument, all of these manifestations of violence implicate the Weberian state in one of its three modes: war-fighter, predator or protector, and hence it would be important to analyze different expressions of state power in light of their embodiment of potential and actual violence.

Perhaps the first observation is that state capacities for providing public order are highly variable, and linked to the overall development of the state.⁸⁷ Generalizing somewhat carelessly, it is not surprising that sub-Saharan Africa witnesses high levels of non-conflict violence, given the very weak reach of the state and its provision of public order. It is not difficult to find stories of police forces with no vehicles, irregular pay, and in places such as Burundi, the post of police officer being an opportunity for rent-seeking, rather than security provision. It is also, by this logic, not surprising that levels of non-conflict violence are relatively low throughout Asia and the former Soviet Union, given the legacy of central (and authoritarian) states in the regions. It is, however, more puzzling that Latin America, with its relatively well developed state (and police/military) institutions should be so insecure. Regional figures, however, conceal a great diversity of experience in Latin America, ranging from relatively peaceful states such as Chile or Argentina, to extremely violent ones (Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela). Extremely high levels of violence in countries such as Brazil or Venezuela remain a bit of a puzzle, in comparative terms, although obviously idiosyn-

86 Geneva Declaration (2008: 5, 27). The conflict death rate e.g. in Afghanistan was 20.2 per 100,000 in 2007.

87 See, among others, Cawthra and Luckham (eds) (2003).

cratic explanations (gangs, drug trafficking, illicit activities) can be offered. The question should, however, be reversed: what is it that makes these states prone to such breakdowns in public order while roughly similar neighbours are not affected in the same way.

When looked at through the lens of state violence, however, the episodic experience of state violence cuts across regions in the last few decades, ranging from Cambodia, Indonesia, Uganda, Rwanda, Iraq, Burundi, Guatemala, El Salvador and Chile. All of these states have emerged from their darkest periods, but few are wholly peaceful. The generalized potential for state violence is again not surprising, since the modes and institutions of state surveillance and social control have been successfully exported by the West. Since these capacities are so widely diffused in modern states, perhaps the most important question is to understand more fully what kinds of institutional and socio-political restraints have been (or must be) in place to prevent more frequent episodes of mass killing. The weak reach of the state in many regions (analogous to Tilly's 'indirect rule') may be one answer; global or local norms may be another. When focusing on the former, however, we need to be aware that one of the unintended consequences of efforts to strengthen the state may be a greater potential for state violence (if not actually an increase in its incidence).

6. States of Violence: Power, Legitimate Authority and the Weberian State


I want to end on a cautionary note. As this rapid sweep through history suggests, the issue of how violence and the state are related is not a purely theoretical concern. Whether one accepts the progressive liberal vision in which concentrated state power is a necessary step towards the establishment of domestic (and perhaps even international) order; or the pessimistic vision that sees the state as an often-predatory institution designed to enforce compliance through physical and non-physical coercion, the regulation and control of the means of violence is central to the nature of contemporary state-building. From a Western perspective, the past six decades have brought unparalleled security to citizens, both in terms of domestic and international order. Armed conflicts have become rare and probably relatively lower in intensity, state violence is almost unknown, and the ability of the state to police its territory and evacuate violence from everyday life is unprecedented. But these happy conditions do not hold in many parts of the world. In some, weak states create the space for large-scale criminal and social violence; in others, the state still preys systematically on its citizens.



The fact that the incidence of war (intrastate or interstate) has diminished should not blind us to these other sources of insecurity and violence.

Precisely how one combats armed violence is difficult to say. But in virtually every case, the recipe includes strengthening state institutions. Certainly one of the major planks of contemporary post-conflict peacebuilding, and security sector reform efforts more generally, has been to (re)build state institutions that could provide greater security to citizens. Modern state builders should, however, keep in mind the double-edged nature of state power, and pay great attention to the delicate institutional, political and social balances that need to be struck in order to keep the Clausewitzian pendulum from veering towards the more bloody and violent poles.

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