# War and the State in Africa

*Jeffrey Herbst*

CONTEXT

Most analyses assume that in Africa, as elsewhere, states will eventually become strong. But this may not be true in Africa, where states are developing in a fundamentally new environment. Lessons drawn from the case of Europe show that war is an important cause of state formation that is missing in Africa today. The crucial role that war has played in the formation of European states has long been noted. Samuel P. Huntington argued that "war was the great stimulus to state building," and Charles Tilly went so far as to claim that "war made the state, and the state made war."[1] Similarly, two of the most successful states in the Third World today, South Korea and Taiwan, are largely "warfare" states that have been molded, in part, by the near constant threat of external aggression. However, studies of political development and state consolidation in Africa and many other parts of the Third World have all but ignored the important role that war can play in political development.

PROBLEM

The role of war has not been examined because the vast majority of states in Africa and elsewhere in the world gained independence without having to resort to combat and have not faced a security threat since independence.[2]

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1. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 123; and Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42. An important recent addition to this literature is Brian M. Downing, "Constitutionalism, Warfare and Political Change in Early Modern Europe," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 1988), pp. 7–56. The general literature on warfare's effect on society is voluminous. An early work which concentrates on some of the themes examined here is Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, Vol. III, trans. Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).
2. For instance, in Morris Janowitz's classic study of the military in the developing world, the political, social, and economic functions of the military are studied extensively but the potential effects of war, or of peace, are not analyzed. Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations: An Essay in Comparative Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 12.

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METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH Q

PROBLEM

Those scholars who have analyzed the military in the developing world have studied the armed forces' role in economic and political processes but have not examined the changes that war could potentially effect on a state.[3] Studying the military and studying warfare are not the same, especially in the area of state consolidation, because warfare has independent effects on economic policies, administrative structures, and the citizenry's relationship with the state that have very little to do with the military.[4] Finally, beyond the usual problem of trying to study the impact of a factor that is missing, there is a less excusable normative bias which has sometimes prevented students of politics from examining the effects of war. The question of whether it is only possible to create a nation out of "blood and iron" is apparently one that many analysts find too disturbing to examine.[5]

ARGUMENT

THESIS

Comparison of the European case with that of Africa is therefore crucial to understanding whether the analogy holds. War in Europe played an important role in the consolidation of many now-developed states: war caused the state to become more efficient in revenue collection; it forced leaders to dramatically improve administrative capabilities; and it created a climate and important symbols around which a disparate population could unify. While there is little reason to believe that war would have exactly the same domestic effects in Africa today as it did in Europe several centuries ago, it is important to ask if developing countries can accomplish in times of peace what war enabled European countries to do. I conclude that they probably cannot because fundamental changes in economic structures and societal beliefs are difficult, if not impossible, to bring about when countries are not being disrupted or under severe external threat.

ROADMAP

The next section of this article outlines how war affected state formation in Europe, with particular attention to two crucial developments: the creation of centralized and efficient structures to collect taxes, and the development of nationalism. I then compare the European experience of state-building through warfare to the relative peace that Africa has experienced since the 1960s. While African states have benefited from peace, their development

3. The literature is reviewed by Henry Bienen, "Armed Forces and National Modernization: Continuing the Debate," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (October 1983), pp. 1–16.
4. Gabriel Ardent, "Financial Policy and Economic Infrastructure of Modern States and Nations," in Tilly, *The Formation of National States*, p. 89.
5. A useful corrective to the conventional view is provided by John A. Hall, "War and the Rise of the West," in Colin Creighton and Martin Shaw, eds., *The Sociology of War and Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

ROADMAP

has been stunted by the very problems that war helped European countries to solve. I then evaluate the possibilities that African states might develop strategies to solve these fundamental problems in times of peace. I conclude that some states will probably be unsuccessful in finding ways of building the state in times of peace and will therefore remain permanently weak. Accordingly, the international community will have to develop non-traditional policies for helping a new brand of states: those that will continue to exist but that will not develop. Other states, perceiving that peace locks them into a permanently weak position, may be tempted to use war as a means of resolving their otherwise intractable problems of state consolidation.

THESIS

GOAL

*Effects of War on State Consolidation: The European Case*

CONTEXT

It is instructive to look at war's impact on European societies because, as will be noted below, war in Europe helped alleviate some of the problems that affect African countries today. At the most basic level, war in Europe acted as a filter whereby weak states were eliminated and political arrangements that were not viable either were reformed or disappeared. Weak states do exist in Europe today—Belgium is one example—but the near-constant threat of war did prompt most states to become stronger to survive. The contrast between this evolutionary development and the current situation in the Third World, where even states that are largely dependent on foreign aid will continue to exist for the foreseeable future, is dramatic. It is, of course, important not to generalize too much because war had many different effects over time, and even in the same period states reacted in a variety of ways to external threats. However, war did affect the ability of European states to increase taxation and contributed to the forging of national identities in many countries. It is therefore important to examine the potential impact of external threat to better understand state consolidation in the Third World.

ROADMAP

TOPIC SENTENCE

TAXES

Perhaps the most noticeable effect of war in European history was to cause the state to increase its ability to collect significantly more revenue with greater efficiency and less public resistance. Given the freedom of European states to attack each other, those states that could raise money quickly could successfully threaten their neighbors with a war that might lead to significant damage or even complete destruction. Richard Bean writes, "Once the power to tax had been successfully appropriated by any one sovereign, once he had

used that power to bribe or coerce his nobility into acquiescence, that state could face all neighboring states with the choice of being conquered or of centralizing authority and raising taxes."[6] While success in war depends on many factors including technology, tactics, and morale of the troops, raising sufficient revenue was a necessary condition to prevent defeat. States that did not raise sufficient revenue for war perished. As Michael Mann notes, "A state that wished to survive had to increase its extractive capacity to pay for professional armies and/or navies. Those that did not would be crushed on the battlefield and absorbed into others—the fate of Poland, of Saxony, of Bavaria in [the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries]. No European states were continuously at peace. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that a peaceful state would have ceased to exist even more speedily than the militarily inefficient actually did."[7]

War affects state finances for two reasons. First, it puts tremendous strains on leaders to find new and more regular sources of income. While rulers may recognize that their tax system is inadequate, a war may be the only thing that forces them to expend the necessary political capital and undertake the coercion required to gain more revenue. For instance, in Mann's study of taxation in England between 1688 and 1815, he finds that there were six major jumps in state revenue and that each corresponds with the beginning of a war.[8] The association between the need to fight and the need to collect revenue is perhaps clearest in Prussia, where the main tax collection agency was called the General War Commissariat.[9]

Second, citizens are much more likely to acquiesce to increased taxation when the nation is at war, because a threat to their survival will overwhelm other concerns they might have about increased taxation. In fact, taxation for a war can be thought of as a "lumpy" collective good: not only must the population pay to get the good, but it must also pay a considerable amount more than the current level of taxation, because a small increase in revenue

6. Richard Bean, "War and the Birth of the Nation State," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (March 1973), p. 220.
7. Michael Mann, "State and Society, 1130–1815: An Analysis of English State Finances," in Mann, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 109.
8. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 486.
9. Michael Duffy, "The Military Revolution and the State, 1500–1800," in Michael Duffy, ed., *The Military Revolution and the State, 1500–1800*, Exeter Studies in History No. 1 (Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter, 1980), p. 5.

STRUCTURE EMBEDDED IN LANGUAGE

TOPIC SENTENCES

is often not enough to meet the new security threat facing the state.[10] In this way, taxation for a war is like taxation for building a bridge: everyone must pay to build the bridge and a small increase in revenue will not be enough, because half a bridge, like fighting half a war, is useless.

Thus, war often causes a "ratchet effect" whereby revenue increases sharply when a nation is fighting but does not decline to the *ante bellum* level when hostilities have ceased.[11] Once governments have invested the sunken costs in expanding tax collection systems and routinized the collection of new sources of revenue, the marginal costs of continuing those structures are quite low and the resources they collect can be used for projects that will enhance the ruling group's support.

While it is not a universal rule, war in other societies at other times often played the same kind of role that war did in Europe. For instance, Joseph Smaldone writes in his study of the Sokoto Caliphate (in what is now Nigeria) between 1500 and 1800:

EVIDENCE

> War was the principal instrument for the establishment and extension of political authority over subject people and foreign territory, and for the organization, maintenance, and reinforcement of that authority. The demands of perennial war evoked institutions to subordinate the sectors of society crucial to the interests of these militarized polities. The permanent requirement to mobilize human and material resources for military purposes [i.e., taxation] intensified tendencies toward the monopolization of power and the elaboration of auxiliary institutions of social control.[12]

Similarly, the South Korean and Taiwanese states have been able to extract so many resources from their societies in part because the demands to be constantly vigilant provoked the state into developing efficient mechanisms for collecting resources and controlling dissident groups.[13] A highly extractive state also could cloak demands for greater resources in appeals for national unity in the face of a determined enemy.

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10. "Lumpy" goods are products which are not useful if only part is purchased. Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 56–57.
11. Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, pp. 483–490.
12. Joseph P. Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 139. The same point is made by Richard L. Roberts in his *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 20.
13. Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 274.

NATIONALISM

War also had a major impact on the development of nationalism in Europe. Indeed, the presence of a palpable external threat may be the strongest way to generate a common association between the state and the population. External threats have such a powerful effect on nationalism because people realize in a profound manner that they are under threat because of who they are as a nation; they are forced to recognize that it is only as a nation that they can successfully defeat the threat. Anthony Giddens recounts the effects of World War I: "The War canalized the development of states' sovereignty, tying this to citizenship and to nationalism in such a profound way that any other scenario [of how the international system would be ordered] came to appear as little more than idle fantasy."[14] Similarly, Michael Howard notes the visceral impact of wars on the development of nationalism throughout Europe:

> Self-identification as a Nation implies almost by definition alienation from other communities, and the most memorable incidents in the group-memory consisted in conflict with and triumph over other communities. France *was* Marengo, Austerlitz and Jena: military triumph set the seal on the new-found national consciousness. Britain *was* Trafalgar—but it had been a nation for four hundred years, since those earlier battles Crecy and Agincourt. Russia *was* the triumph of 1812. Germany *was* Gravelotte and Sedan.[15]

In Europe there was an almost symbiotic relationship between the state's extractive capacity and nationalism: war increased both as the population was convinced by external threat that they should pay more to the state, and as, at the same time, the population united around common symbols and memories that were important components of nationalism. Fighting wars may be the only way whereby it is possible to have people pay more taxes and at the same time feel more closely associated with the state.

### *The Absence of Interstate War in the Modern Era*

While trying to study the chaos caused by administrative disintegration, the forceful crushing of ethnic challenges, and large-scale human rights abuses,

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14. Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, vol. II of *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 235.
15. Michael Howard, *War and the Nation State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

many scholars have generally assumed that poor countries today face even more external challenges than European states did in their formative periods.[16] In fact, since the end of the Second World War, very few Third World states have fought interstate wars of the type that affected the evolution of European states. The few Third World interstate wars that have occurred (e.g., India-Pakistan, Iran-Iraq, China-Vietnam) have obscured the fact that the vast majority of Third World states most of the time do not face significant external threats. States like Israel, South Korea, or Taiwan, where national survival has been a real consideration in national politics, are exceptional and even these countries have survived intact.

Even in Africa, the continent seemingly destined for war given the colonially-imposed boundaries and weak political authorities, there has not been one involuntary boundary change since the dawn of the independence era in the late 1950s, and very few countries face even the prospect of a conflict with their neighbors. Most of the conflicts in Africa that have occurred were not, as in Europe, wars of conquest that threatened the existence of other states, but conflicts over lesser issues that were resolved without threatening the existence of another state. For instance, Tanzania invaded Uganda in 1979 to overthrow Idi Amin, not to conquer Uganda. Similarly, the war in the Western Sahara is a colonial question, not a conflict between independent states. Even South Africa's destabilization efforts against its neighbors are primarily attempts to influence the policies of the majority-ruled countries, not to change the borders of the region. Lesotho or Swaziland would not exist today if South Africa had any real territorial ambitions. In the few conflicts that did have the potential to threaten fundamentally the existence of states—Somalia's attempt to invade Ethiopia in the 1970s and Libya's war against Chad in the 1970s and 1980s—the aggressor did not succeed.[17]

African states have seldom fought interstate wars and the continent has not witnessed significant boundary changes, because independent leaders

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16. See, for instance, Joseph LaPalombara, "Penetration: A Crisis of Governmental Capacity," in Leonard Binder, et al., *Crises and Sequences in Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 222.

17. In 1977 Somalia, as part of its irredentist project to create "Greater Somalia," invaded Ethiopia in the hope of annexing the Ogaden; the Ethiopians, with significant help from the Soviet Union and Cuba, defeated Somalia in 1978. David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), pp. 140–143. In 1973 Libyan forces invaded Chad by moving forces into the disputed Aozou strip. The Libyan military presence gradually expanded until a dramatic series of conflicts with the Chadian government (heavily supported by France and the United States) in 1987 forced the Libyans to agree to an end to hostilities. John Wright, *Libya, Chad and the Central Sahara* (London: Hurst, 1989), pp. 126–146.

have continued the system of boundary maintenance that the colonial powers first developed to regulate the scramble for Africa in the late 1800s.[18] African leaders recognized in the early 1960s that a potentially large number of groups would want to secede from the states they are presently in, to join others or create entirely new ones. In order to prevent the continent from being thrown into the chaos of large-scale boundary changes in which the stability and integrity of any state could be threatened, they created a system of explicit norms, propounded by the Organization of African Unity in 1963, which declared any change in the inherited colonial boundaries to be illegitimate. Most of the continent has, accordingly, refused to recognize boundary changes (e.g., Biafra, Eritrea) even where the principle of self-determination might have led them to do so. This system has been successful in preserving African national boundaries and has so far deterred almost all countries from initiating the kind of conquest wars that were so common in European history. The system that maintained the inherited borders as inviolate was strengthened somewhat inadvertently, because two of the largest states on the continent (Nigeria and Zaire), which could conceivably have threatened their much smaller neighbors, faced significant secessionist threats (from the Ibo and Kataganese respectively) and therefore worked resolutely to strengthen the norm that the borders should not be changed.

The stability of new states, especially in Africa, is a remarkable development given that the vast majority of the over one hundred countries in the Third World that have gained their independence since 1945 are poor, have weak administrative structures, and consist of populations that are splintered along regional or ethnic lines. In other words, they are precisely the kind of states that before 1945 were routinely invaded and taken over by stronger states in their region or by external powers. Yet, very few states in the Third World, despite their evident military and political weaknesses, face any significant external threat.

In contrast, Tilly estimates, the "enormous majority" of states in Europe failed. Peace was the exception and long periods with no major fighting were almost unknown, as for centuries weak states were routinely defeated and populations regularly absorbed by foreign rulers.[19] The psychology of Europe in its formative centuries, where state survival was a very real issue of

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18. This argument is developed in Jeffrey Herbst, "The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa," *International Organization*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Fall 1989), pp. 673–692.
19. Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," p. 38.

constant concern to leaders, is so different from the outlook facing Third World leaders today as to suggest that there has been a fundamental change in the survival prospects of weak states and that control of territory is no longer correlated with military power.[20]

*Problems of State Consolidation in Africa*

African states face numerous problems in their efforts to consolidate power. They are poor, short of trained manpower, and confront societies that are often fragmented and have little orientation to the state as a whole. Many other Third World nations face these same problems although they are often most extreme in Africa, given the poverty of the continent and the fragility of the states. Elites can come to power but, given the precariousness of control in countries where rules governing leadership and succession have not been institutionalized, they may be displaced. Once they lose power, or are prevented from gaining it, ambitious politicians have no other opportunity to accumulate wealth or power because the state controls the badges of status and many of the free-floating resources in the economy, such as they are.[21] Even when they do control the apex of the state, elites may feel that because of their country's vulnerability to exogenous shocks (e.g., sudden sharp drops in the price of their raw material exports) and the presence of sophisticated multinational enterprises and well-connected minority groups (e.g., Lebanese in West Africa, Indians in East Africa), they are not really in control of their own destiny and therefore are vulnerable. As a result of their gross insecurities, these "lame Leviathans"[22] try desperately to control ever-greater parts of society through outright ownership or regulation. However, since they are weak, their efforts are almost inevitably clumsy, heavy-handed, and authoritarian.

Therefore, although the average state in Africa compared to other states is small (as measured by government spending as a percentage of gross do-

20. Ibid., p. 81.
21. Richard Hodder-Williams, *An Introduction to the Politics of Tropical Africa* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 95.
22. Thomas M. Callaghy, "The State and the Development of Capitalism in Africa: Theoretical, Historical, and Comparative Reflections," in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, eds., *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988), p. 82.

mestic product [GDP]),[23] it appears to be too large because its clumsy extractive efforts cause so much damage compared to the benefits that it delivers. Thus arises the image of so many African states as "overdeveloped" or "swollen."[24] The problems confronted by states in Africa can be illustrated by comparing their experience with European states in two areas where war had a significant impact: the state's ability to extract resources through taxes, and the degree of nationalism in the countries south of the Sahara.

A classic example of how weak state power causes the state to institute desperate and self-defeating economic policies is in the area of government revenue. Government revenue poses a major problem for all African states and many others in the Third World. These states are desperately short of revenue to fund even minimal state services (e.g., pay nurses' salaries, buy books for schools, supply transport for agricultural extension services) that their populations have long been promised. In addition to these recurrent costs, Third World countries are in need of more extensive and more efficient tax systems because the process of development requires large expenditures on infrastructure to promote economic activity throughout the country and to handle the ramifications of development, especially the large expenses incurred by urbanizing countries.[25] W. Arthur Lewis estimates that the public sector in Third World countries should be spending on the order of 20 percent of GDP on services, exclusive of defense and debt repayment.[26] However, when defense (2.5 percent of GDP) and debt repayments (3.4 percent of GDP) are subtracted, the average African country spends only 15.7 percent of its GDP on all government functions.[27] While these figures are only rough estimates given the problems associated with African economic statistics, they do illustrate the extent of the fiscal crisis facing African states.

Due to the weakness of administrative and statistical structures in Africa, many governments rely on taxation of foreign trade, because imports and

23. The share of total gross domestic product of sub-Saharan African states is smaller, at 21.6 percent, than the developing country average of 25.5 percent. (Both figures are from 1984.) International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook 1988* (Washington, D.C.: IMF, 1988), p. 94.
24. See, for instance, Larry Diamond, "Class Formation in the Swollen African State," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 1987), pp. 592–596; and Nzongola-Ntalaja, "The Crisis of the State in Post-Colonial Africa," in Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 1987), p. 85.
25. W. Arthur Lewis, *The Evolution of the International Economic Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 39.
26. W. Arthur Lewis, *Development Planning: The Essentials of Economic Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 115.
27. Calculated from IMF, *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook 1988*, pp. 58, 74, and 94.

exports must physically pass through a relatively small number of border posts that can be easily manned. Thus, the average African state depends on revenue from tariffs for 20.5 percent of total revenue, compared to all developing countries which, on average, gain 12.9 percent of their revenue from tariffs, and industrialized countries where tariffs account for only 1.3 percent of total revenue.[28]

Unfortunately, funding the state through indirect taxes on foreign trade damages national economies because leaders are compelled to erect ever-greater administrative controls on imports. These tariffs promote corruption, smuggling and, most importantly, over-valued exchange rates, because governments grow to rely on administrative controls rather than the market to regulate imports. Overvalued exchange rates in turn lead to wide-spread damage within poorer economies as exporters are universally hurt, the population is encouraged to become dependent on imported food, and black markets quickly develop to take advantage of distorted prices.[29] Beyond the immediate damage caused by a tax system dependent on imports and exports, this *type* of tax system is particularly inappropriate for Third World countries. These countries need guarantees of slow and steady increases in government revenue above the rate of economic growth in order to accomplish the tasks crucial to development: build transport and communications systems, establish utilities, and create educational systems.[30]

Another major problem facing leaders in Africa is the absence of a strong popular identity with the state. The lack of a popular consensus over national purpose both aggravates the state's clumsy efforts to extract resources and is itself exacerbated by an insecure, authoritarian elite. Indeed, the picture of African societies widely accepted today is of populations trying desperately to escape the clutches of the state, rather than becoming more involved in it, and certainly not willing to pay more taxes to it.[31] Twenty-five years after "the nationalist period," there are few signs of nationalism in most African countries despite the now *pro forma* exhortations from propaganda organs to engage in state-building. Indeed, the majority of states still have difficulty creating viable symbols to attract the loyalties of their citizens.

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28. Calculated from ibid., p. 54.
29. See World Bank, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1981), pp. 24–30.
30. Alex Radian, *Resource Mobilization in Poor Countries: Implementing Tax Policies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980), pp. 13–17.
31. See Rothchild and Chazan, *The Precarious Balance.*

Not surprisingly, therefore, there are today very few attempts in African countries to forge a national consensus on major issues, much less a national identity. For instance, most formulas to decrease inter-ethnic tension concentrate only on ameliorating the negative aspects of ethnic conflict by accommodating it through decentralized government structures and preferential policies.[32] However, formulas such as federalism often are inappropriate in countries where national institutions are not strong. Federalist solutions broke down in Sudan and Uganda, among other places, because the incentives for leaders to attempt to gain total control were much greater than the barriers posed by recently adopted institutional arrangements.[33] Moreover, no matter how well accommodationist formulas of intra-societal conflict work, almost everyone in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World would agree that a more basic national loyalty by all societal groups would still be desirable. However, the means by which to induce a disparate society to identify more with the nation-state are unknown in Africa and few in the current era are even attempting to speculate on how to develop a national consensus.

### *Difficulties of State Consolidation without War*

War in Europe played such an important role in the evolution of the state mechanism and society's relationship with the state because it is extraordinarily difficult, outside times of crisis, to reform elemental parts of the governmental system, such as the means of taxation, or to effect a real change in national identity. For instance, since taxes are so consequential to every business decision, the tax system over time reflects a large number of political bargains made by the state with different interest groups. Often governments find it too politically difficult to provide direct subsidies to those they want to favor, so the tax system is a convenient backdoor to aid politically impor-

32. See, for instance, Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 563–680.
33. Buganda had a degree of autonomy when Uganda gained independence and the Kabaka, the traditional ruler of the Buganda people, was the country's first president. However, this arrangement fell apart in 1966 when then Prime Minister Milton Obote overthrew the Kabaka and invaded Buganda. Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 149–156. In 1983, President Gaafar Mohamed Nimeiri of the Sudan effectively abrogated the Addis Ababa agreement which had given autonomy to Southern Sudan. The Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war ever since. Mansour Khalid, *Nimeiri and the Revolution of Dis-May* (London: KPI, 1985), pp. 234–240.

tant groups without incurring opprobrium. The political bargains that constitute the tax system develop a momentum of their own because individuals and businesses base their future economic decisions on the incentives and disincentives in the existing tax code. Indeed, Joseph Schumpeter called the fiscal system "a collection of hard, naked facts" and claimed that "the spirit of a people, its cultural level, its social structure, the deeds its policy may prepare—all this and more is written in its fiscal history, stripped of all phrases."[34]

Therefore, even minor changes such as alterations in the level of taxation or shifts in the tax burden, as the United States and most Western European countries have made in the last few years, engender tremendous political battles. Not only the previously favored political groups but all those that simply followed the signals sent out by government will forcefully oppose fiscal reform. Greater changes in the nature of the tax system are even more difficult. Edward Ames' and Richard Rapp's conclusion that tax systems "last until the end of the government that instituted them" and that tax systems in some European countries survived "almost intact" from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until the late eighteenth century may be an exaggeration, but their conclusions suggest just how much inertia a particular system for collecting government revenue can develop over time.[35] Other than war, no type of crisis demands that the state increase taxes with such forcefulness, and few other situations would impel citizens to accept those demands, or at least not resist them as strongly as they otherwise might have. It is therefore hard to counter Tilly's argument that "the formation of standing armies provided the largest single incentive to extraction and the largest single means of state coercion over the long run of European state-making."[36]

Domestic security threats, of the type African countries face so often, may force the state to increase revenue; however, these crises are almost never as grave as the type of external threat the European states had to confront, because they do not threaten the very existence of the state. In addition, domestic conflicts result in fragmentation and considerable hostility among different segments of the population. As a result, the state does not necessarily achieve the greater revenue efficiency gains engendered by an external

34. Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Crisis of the Tax State," in Alan T. Peacock, et al., eds., *International Economic Papers*, No. 4 (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 6–7.
35. Edward Ames and Richard T. Rapp, "The Birth and Death of Taxes: A Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 1977), p. 177.
36. Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," p. 73.

crisis. Indeed, in a civil war—as in Nigeria in the late 1960s—parts of the state are fighting against each other, which hardly promotes efficiency in tax collection. Public acceptance of tax increases, a crucial factor in allowing European states to extract greater resources in times of war, will be a much more complicated issue in civil disputes. As Mann notes, "the growth of the modern state, as measured by finances, is explained primarily not in domestic terms but in terms of geopolitical relations of violence."[37]

The obstacles posed by large peasant populations, significant nonmonetarized sectors, and widespread poverty are, of course, important contributors to the revenue crisis of the African state. However, these problems do not fully explain why poor states do not extract greater resources from society in a manner that is less economically harmful. Factors such as political will, administrative ability, and the population's willingness to be taxed—issues that can be affected by the decisions of political leaders—are also crucial in understanding why states are unable to achieve their potential level of taxation in a benign manner.[38] For instance, Margaret Levi successfully shows that in such diverse cases as republican Rome, France and England in the Middle Ages, eighteenth-century Britain, and twentieth-century Australia, levels of taxation were affected primarily by political constraints faced by rulers, despite the fact that most of these economies also posed significant barriers to increased tax collection.[39]

Nor has there been any success in developing means to cause the population to identify more with the state, other than fighting a war. Nationalism, which was never nearly as strong or widespread (especially outside the major cities) in Africa as many had thought, was palpable in the late colonial period because there was a "relevant other"—the colonialists—who could be easily identified as oppressors and around which a nominal national identity could be built.[40] However, since independence in most African countries, there has been no "relevant other" to oppose, so it has been extremely difficult to create nation-wide symbols of identity. There has therefore been no way of generating a national identity in Africa such as wars forged in Europe.

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37. Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, p. 490.
38. Raja J. Chelliah, "Trends in Taxation in Developing Countries," *International Monetary Fund Staff Papers*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (July 1971), p. 312. On the possibility of changing fiscal arrangements in Africa, see Dennis Anderson, *The Public Revenue and Economic Policy in African Countries*, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 19 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1987), pp. 14–15.
39. For instance, see Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*, p. 105.
40. The importance of the "relevant other" concept in developing group cohesion is explored by Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, p. 42.

Anthony Smith writes, "the central difficulty of 'nation-building' in much of Africa and Asia is the lack of any shared historical mythology and memory on which state elites can set about 'building' the nation. The 'nation' [is built up] from the central fund of culture and symbolism and mythology provided by shared historical experiences."[41] The result is the anomie in most African countries today.

It could be argued that the lack of nationalism simply reflects the fact that African countries are artificial groupings of disparate peoples and therefore are not really nation-states. However, no "natural" nation-states are mature at birth with populations that have readily agreed to a central identity. Rather, the goal of those who want to create the nation-state is to convince different groups that they do, in fact, share a common identity. This is why even in Europe, which today seems to have nation-states that are more "natural" than Africa's, war had such a crucial role to play in the forging of common identities.

Indeed, the symbiotic relationship that war fostered in Europe between tax collection and nationalism is absent in Africa, precisely because there is no external threat to encourage people to acquiesce in the state's demands, and no challenge that causes them to respond as a nation. Instead, the African state's clumsy efforts at greater extraction are met by popular withdrawal rather than by a populace united around a common identity.

Of course, not all wars led to the strengthening of administrative institutions and greater nationalism. For example, Joseph Strayer notes that the Hundred Years War "was so exhausting for both sides that it discouraged the normal development of the apparatus of the state. There was a tendency to postpone structural reforms, to solve problems on an ad hoc basis rather than [to create] new agencies of government, to sacrifice efficiency for immediate results."[42] However, the Hundred Years War was exceptional because of its length and it therefore did not allow rulers to consolidate the gains usually achieved after facing a short period of external danger. Yet overall, the historical record suggests that war was highly efficient in promoting state consolidation in Europe, and that it would be much more difficult for states to accomplish the same tasks in peacetime.

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41. Anthony D. Smith, "State-Making and Nation-Building," in John A. Hall, ed., *States in History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 258.
42. Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 60.

*Are There Peaceful Routes to State Consolidation?*

Since African and other Third World countries need to transform important parts of their governmental systems, including their fiscal arrangements, and to promote nationalism, but do not have the traditional avenue of war to aid them, the immediate question is whether they can follow a path other than that adopted by Europe to consolidate state power and to develop new national identities to reduce the divisions between society and the state.

Once again it is interesting to focus on government revenue because the issue is so decisive in its own right and because tax systems are such a good reflection of the basic bargains in society. In an age with reduced levels of interstate war, African countries are faced with the problem of trying to increase the capacity of the state without being able to use wars to "ratchet up" the state's extractive ability. Given the evidence of European fiscal inertia, it is clear that it will be even more difficult to institute major reforms when states are operating in normal circumstances. The one clear chance African countries did have to institute major reforms was at independence, because at that moment political arrangements were in such flux that significant new initiatives could be undertaken. Indeed, some African countries (e.g., Mozambique, Angola) did make massive changes in their political economy (e.g., nationalization, collectivization); unfortunately, these particular reforms were economically ruinous because their socialist policies distorted economies even more than in most African countries. Once independence becomes the normal situation, as it has in African countries, it becomes extraordinarily difficult for leaders to make basic reforms of political arrangements, such as fiscal systems, which might hurt powerful groups. As Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz noted in the context of American politics, dominant values, myths, rituals, and institutions quickly ossify so that crucial issues, such as fiscal reform, are not even on the agenda.[43] There appears to be no impetus from inside African countries to disrupt the current fiscal arrangements significantly. Indeed, much of the argument that there is currently a significant economic crisis in Africa, and that this crisis was caused by malfunctioning government policies, came from outside the continent.[44]

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43. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (December 1962), p. 950.
44. For instance, the World Bank's report, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, was crucial in noting the dimensions of Africa's economic crisis; it set the agenda for reform of African economies.

However, it could be argued that structural adjustment, pressed on African countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and bilateral donors, could serve many state-making functions. As external actors dedicated to fundamental reforms of the economy and of the way the state operates, the IMF and other donors are not subject to the same rigidities that paralyze domestic reformers. The IMF and other actors who insist on fundamental reform could pressure African states for significant changes in their tax system. Demands from an external actor are similar to war, in that a leader can legitimately argue to its population that it has no choice in asking them to make very difficult sacrifices because it is under too much external pressure.

It would be a major mistake, however, to take too far the analogy between pressure from actors such as the IMF and the effects of war. For instance, war produced such spectacular gains in governmental efficiency because the state itself felt threatened. The IMF, or any other actor, cannot produce that feeling; indeed, structural adjustment has been least successful when it has tried to address the issues of how the state itself operates in areas such as public enterprises or fiscal arrangements.[45] The cost to the state itself in failing to adopt a structural adjustment program can be severe, but falls far short of what war would threaten. The IMF will never cause a state to disappear. At worst, a state can simply opt for the high cost of breaking off relations with the IMF.

Nor does external pressure of the type the Fund exerts produce any change in national identity. While leaders can occasionally rally people against the external threat posed by "imperialists," these sentiments usually are not long-lasting because the population may be unable to distinguish between international actors supposedly draining away the nation's funds during a structural adjustment exercise, and those national leaders who led their country into such a spectacular economic debacle. While Europe's leaders in previous centuries hardly treated their populations well by modern standards, it was usually unambiguous that people would be better off if they won the war than if they lost.

The prospects of structural adjustment fostering some kind of nationalism based on resisting foreigners is also limited because the IMF is not really a

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45. Jeffrey Herbst, "Political Impediments to Economic Rationality: Why Zimbabwe Cannot Reform its Public Sector," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 1989), pp. 67–85.

"relevant other" to a largely peasant population, and cannot induce changes in national consciousness of the type that wars in Europe produced. Unlike a war where the entire population was threatened because of its national identity, structural adjustment will help certain groups unambiguously (e.g., peasants who grow export crops), clearly hurt some (e.g., the urban population dependent on imported food), and have ambiguous effects on many others. Further, the intensity in shared experience that a war generates simply cannot be replicated by, say, protracted negotiations over the IMF's Extended Fund Facility.

### *The Likelihood of War in Africa*

If internal reform seems improbable and there is no other external threat that can perform quite the same role as war, the question becomes whether at some point in the future African leaders will begin to see war as a potential avenue for state-making. Some leaders may look to war simply because they are truly concerned about the fate of the nation and see no other option. Others may not be concerned particularly with nation-building, but may find that their countries have suffered economic decline for so long that the possibilities for their own personal enrichment have become severely limited, and therefore will seek to seize the assets of other countries. So far, the system that has preserved the continent's boundaries has not been significantly tested because most leaders considered it obvious that they were better off with their inherited boundaries than they would be in a chaotic war situation where sovereignty or considerable territory might be lost. However, especially in the context of decades of economic decline, it is possible that some African leaders may recalculate the benefits of a peace that locks them into perpetual weakness. Instead, they may try to increase their state's extractive ability and divert their citizens from inter-ethnic squabbles by seizing upon the multitude of provocations, always present, to provoke a fight with neighboring states. Paul Colinvaux presents the extreme case for the prospects of interstate war in Africa:

Africa holds the greatest possibilities for the aspiring general. . . . That there will be battles between African nations as they build their African continent in a new image is as certain as anything in history. For each country there must come times when wealth, hopes, ambitions, and numbers all rise

together. It then needs only access to high-quality weapons for an aggression to be an attractive undertaking.[46]

If significant interstate wars break out when provocations are small but elites realize what war could do for the state and the nation, it would not be a strikingly new development. Rather, increased interstate warfare in Africa would simply be a return to the European norm. Whether war in Africa today would actually bring about the same kind of changes that it did in Europe centuries ago is unclear, but the possibility that leaders might become so desperate that they try in some fundamental way to alter the political rules under which their nations function should not be ignored.

Many are the possible provocations that could bring about significant interstate war in Africa. Certainly, there are plenty of border disputes and fragments of ethnic groups that need to be rescued from "foreign domination" to provide enough rationalization for hostile action against other African countries. Conflicts between language blocs (e.g., English versus French),[47] disputes over control of crucial rivers and railroads (especially given the number of land-locked countries), or the simple need to have more land for populations that double every twenty years provide many other potential reasons for war in Africa. More than a few African leaders might someday agree with Bismarck, a brilliant consolidator of a "new nation," on the only real way to unite a fragmented people:

> Prussia . . ., as a glance at the map will show, could no longer wear unaided on its long narrow figure the panoply which Germany required for its security; it must be equally distributed over all German peoples. We should get no nearer the goal by speeches, associations, decisions of majorities; we should be unable to avoid a serious contest, a contest which could only be settled by blood and iron.[48]

Although African countries had more or less equal defense capabilities at independence, the growing differential in force projection capabilities have led some to suggest that Africa will experience much greater resort to force in the future. Inventories of tanks and other armored vehicles as well as

46. Paul Colinvaux, *The Fates of Nations: A Biological Theory of History* (London: Penguin, 1980), pp. 219–220.
47. Ibid., p. 219.
48. Otto, Prince von Bismarck, *Bismarck, the Man and the Statesman: Being the Reflections and Reminiscences of Otto, Prince von Bismarck, Written and Dictated by Himself after his Retirement from Office,* translated under the supervision of A.J. Butler, Vol. I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), p. 313.

artillery, jet fighters, and naval craft have increased considerably throughout the continent. For instance, just in the period between 1966 and 1981, the number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa with tanks increased from two to eighteen, the number with field artillery went from seven to thirty-six, the number with light armor went from thirteen to thirty-six, and the number possessing jet aircraft went from six to twenty-one.[49] Countries such as Nigeria and Zaire have developed military capabilities that are far greater than their neighbors'. So far, the assurance of stability that is the central advantage of the current African state system has almost always been more attractive than whatever reasons African leaders may have had to begin conflict with their neighbors. However, as President Nyerere of Tanzania showed when he invaded Uganda to depose Idi Amin, even strong proponents of African norms can be driven to interstate conflict if they believe that the costs of not acting are high enough. In the future, African leaders may find that, despite all their efforts, economic reform cannot progress and they cannot get their citizenry to unite around national symbols; it is conceivable that then the deterrent value of the norms of sovereignty may seem much less powerful than they do now. If these norms no longer provided protection to a large number of states, they would lose all meaning throughout the African continent. While the timing of these wars is not predictable, it should be obvious that the incentives that African leaders have to incite wars for the purposes of state-making are significant and may become much stronger in the future when the futility of domestic reform during times of business as usual, that is, peace, becomes clear.

### *The Permanently Weak State: A New Development*

Much of this discussion has focused on the potential opportunities for African states that, in a European-type state system, might have engaged in battle, won (or at least not lost too badly), and thereby used war in order to further state building. However, it should be recognized that another class of states

49. William G. Thom, "Sub-Saharan Africa's Changing Military Capabilities," in Bruce E. Arlinghaus and Pauline H. Baker, eds., *African Armies: Evolution and Capabilities* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), p. 101. See also Walter L. Barrows, "Changing Military Capabilities in Black Africa," in William Foltz and Henry Bienen, eds., *Arms and the African: Military Influence and Africa's International Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 99 and p. 120; and Henry Bienen, "African Militaries as Foreign Policy Actors," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1980), p. 176.

in Africa is directly affected by the current absence of war: those states that would have lost badly and would have been absorbed by the winners. These states range from those that are just geographic anachronisms left by colonialism (e.g., The Gambia, Djibouti), and very small states in the shadow of giants (e.g., Benin and Togo, close to Nigeria, or Rwanda and Burundi bordering Zaire), to those that simply lack significant resources for development or defense (e.g., Mali, Mauritania). In Europe during the formative centuries, disintegration of weak states like these was a regular occurrence. Weak states that were defeated then became the poorer regions of richer countries, but at least they had a chance to share in the revenue and resources of a viable state. Yet the absence of a truly competitive state system that penalizes military weakness means that even those states that have no other prospects than long-term dependence on international aid will survive in their crippled form for the foreseeable future. Perhaps the only task of state consolidation that these otherwise weak states can accomplish is to physically capture their populations within the stable boundaries of the African state system.[50]

The presence of permanently weak states that will not be eliminated is a new development in international relations and one that poses novel development challenges. All theoretical work on development so far, no matter what the ideological predisposition of the authors, has implicitly assumed that somehow the nation-states as they currently exist are viable arrangements for development, if only they follow the proper strategies and receive enough help from the international community. This assumption was appropriate for the European context where centuries of war had eliminated states that simply were not viable. However, for Africa, whose states have not been tested by an international system that severely punishes political weakness, there is little reason to believe that many of them will be able to have a favorable enough geographic position, control adequate natural resources, gain the support of a significant portion of their populations, and construct strong administrative structures to ever develop. In the long term, these states may disappear if interstate wars finally do break out in Africa.

In the meantime, what is to be done with states that exist but cannot develop? It is far too early to write off any state's prospects. We have been wrong about the development prospects of many states both in Africa (where

50. See Jeffrey Herbst, "Migration, the Politics of Protest, and State Consolidation in Africa," *African Affairs*, forthcoming.

scholars were too optimistic) and elsewhere in the world, such as East Asia.[51] It would also be morally unacceptable simply to allow these countries to gradually slide from the world's view into a twilight of perpetual poverty because nature and history have been unkind to them. However, thought must be given to nontraditional alternatives for aid to states that in previous times would simply have been defeated and absorbed by stronger neighbors in a war. For instance, the international community might consider rewarding those countries in the Third World that have taken in economic migrants from non-viable states.[52] The West could consider providing additional aid to those countries willing to engage in some kind of regional integration to mitigate the problems of unchanging boundaries, much as countries that have adopted more rational economic policies have attracted greater aid from donors. The world may simply have to recognize that a certain number of countries are locked into non-viable positions, and develop a long-term approach to their welfare rather than acting surprised every time the inevitable famine or ecological disaster occurs.

### *Conclusion*

It is important not to glorify war. The wars that Europe went through caused immense suffering for generations and wholesale destruction of some societies. Yet it is undeniable that out of this destruction emerged stronger political arrangements and more unified populations. No one would advocate war as a solution to Africa's political and economic problems, where the costs of interstate war could be even higher than in Europe. It is doubtful that, if African countries do start fighting wars, they will undergo exactly the same processes of state consolidation that war engendered in Europe. However, it should be recognized that there is very little evidence that African countries, or many others in the Third World, will be able to find peaceful ways to strengthen the state and develop national identities. In particular, the prospects for states that will not disappear, but simply cannot develop, must be examined. At the same time, we must recognize the possibility that

51. In the 1950s American administrations debated whether South Korea could achieve any increase in living standards and if American aid should be devoted to simply preventing the country from getting poorer. Clive Crook, "Trial and Error," *The Economist*, September 23, 1989, p. 4.
52. See Jeffrey Herbst, "Migration Helps Poorest of Poor," *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1988, p. 12.

some African leaders in the future may come to believe that the costs of peace—limits on reform possibilities and a fragmented population—are so high that war may not seem like such an undesirable alternative. If African leaders do indeed make this calculation, the suffering that Africa has seen in the last twenty-five years may only be a prelude to much more dangerous developments.