Military Revolution and the New State Power

The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)

David S. D'Amato

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Introduction: the Empire and the Thirty Years' War

The dimensions of the modern state are remarkably little well understood given its dominant role in social and economic life today. As Peter Kropotkin argued in The State: Its Historic Role, to confuse society and the state "is to forget that for European nations the State is of recent origin—that it hardly dates from the sixteenth century." Though he was writing before the dominant contemporary view of the Westphalian peace as ushering in the modern understanding of sovereignty, it was nonetheless clear to Kropotkin that something had changed, that the modern state did in fact represent a meaningful break from preceding forms of political government. The truth is that war transformed the nature of political power much more deeply than did Westphalian sovereignty, however construed. The fire and pressure that first fused capital and the modern state came from war. And throughout the modern age into the present day, the alliance between capital and the state remained on its firmest footing on matters of war and empire. War has been a highly lucrative business for private capital, and it has served the interests of the state by allowing it to extend its will—both geographically and against its own people. As the modern world develops, particularly during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), we find the growth of a different kind of sovereignty, forged not through carefully worded legal instruments, but through sheer centralized might—that is, through the power of a new, stronger kind of military. As we shall see, modern warfare changed the state in a number of measurable and direct ways, leading to the kind of consolidated, geographically contained power we associate with today's states.

Contemporaries discussed the Thirty Years' War in terms that can only be described as apocalyptic, reflecting an "obsession with prophesy, conspiracy and end-times imagery." The war's generation of horrors connects several related trends at the center of which is a revolution in military capacity and practice whose transformation of weapons and warfare demanded an increase in state capacity fiscally and administratively. Though we will never have a fully accurate accounting of the death that reigned in Europe from 1618 to 1638, some 8 million died. This was a massive portion of the overall population, and large swaths of present-day Germany lost up to half of their people to fighting, wanton pillaging and murder, disease, and famine. In polling after World War II, Germans still placed the Thirty Years' War ahead of both Nazism and the Black Death as Germany's worst disaster. In the early seventeenth century, "the dynasty was, with few exceptions, more important in European diplomacy than the nation." Powerful families like the Habsburgs in Austria and Spain and the Bourbons in France ruled over the Empire's many principalities, the territories of which were often not contiguous. Partly due to the way that the princes of the Empire had passed their lands to their sons for centuries, territories were forever being divided and redivided. The German nation, such as it was, became more fragmented and decentralized over time. "Thus a population of twenty-one millions depended for its government on more than two thousand separate authorities." Political power was layered and divided. There was no single, central place in which to look for it. "In the old world, religious loyalties counted for just as much, if not more, than loyalty to the state. Meanwhile, political borders sat awkwardly beside overlapping networks of personal fealty and obligation leftover from the medieval era. In the post-1648 world, the political sovereignty of the state would reign paramount." Many historians have counseled caution against the extraction of deeper meanings from the chaos and destruction of the war. The historian C.V. Wedgwood, for example, writes, "Morally subversive, economically destructive, socially degrading, confused in its causes, devious in its results, it is

the outstanding example in European history of meaningless conflict." Wedgwood, who had an incredibly deep knowledge of the primary materials and preferred them to scholarship, adjudged the Thirty Years' War "unnecessary" and said that it "need not have happened" and "settled nothing worth settling." If it settled nothing and should never have happened, the war nonetheless contained fundamental alterations to the political order that remain with us today.

By 1600, the Holy Roman Empire was home to at least 20 million people, in thousands of "semi-autonomous political units, many of them very small." Many of these polities were geographically fragmented or divided between a number of territories. While the vast majority were small duchies, counties, and bishoprics with little power or political importance, there were several powerful kingdoms with power and populations rivaling those of the other major European kingdoms outside of the Empire. The Empire had a deep history and a venerable constitutional order. The bond between the Papacy and the Empire had centuries-deep history, arguably preceding the founding of the Empire itself and including even older episodes such as the Donation of Pepin, the Frankish king whose son, Charlemagne, would become the first emperor in the West since the fall of Rome. The emperor was chosen by seven electors, representing the most powerful crowns and territories in an empire that, while predominantly German, spanned by 1618 from its western boundaries in the present-day Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Italy to the Baltic coasts of present-day Poland in the northeast. The empire's easternmost boundaries ran down through present-day Austria, dominated traditionally by the Habsburg dynasty, the Czech Republic (roughly corresponding with the Kingdom of Bohemia), and parts of Slovenia. By the time of the war, the Empire had a defined constitutional system, which had long required a level of autonomy for the electors and the various lesser crowns and estates. Within this system, the Pope looms large. Though the Vatican was far away, the power of the Church was real and tangible in the lives of the Empire's peoples. Church officials were often members of important noble families, with great landholdings—often even whole principalities—and real-world political power. Perhaps one-seventh of the Empire fell under these ecclesiastical principalities, but this does not fully reflect the power or importance of the Church in its politics. There were dozens of clergymen in the Imperial Diet in 1618, and the electoral system itself prescribed that three of the seven prince-electors be senior members of the Catholic clergy, the Archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne.

The Development of State Capacity Through War

Today, our discussions about the relations between states take for granted vast, well-equipped, and highly professionalized militaries, sophisticated in both battlefield and political terms. Even states much smaller than the United States today spend tens of billions every year on their military forces and surrounding bureaucracy. But at the dawn of the modern age, there were very few standing armies. A standing army was a luxury too costly even for the richest and most powerful figures in present-day Germany. When Emperor Ferdinand II needed an army, he went to market to procure one with gold. The Thirty Years' War stretched the fiscal and administrative capacities of the state as it existed, transforming it into something much more like the state we know today; war preparations and intensive military buildup provided the motivating force necessary to the kinds of hierarchical bureaucratization associated with the modern state. War is the predicate of the modern state because only the state structure is strong enough to steer the

extraordinarily expansive and expensive systems familiar today. This transformation came with the rise of professionalized military recruiting personnel and strategies, which became stable and lasting features of the new political order. We can trace the emergence of the present-day political order by understanding the connections between the growing warmaking capacity of early modern polities, new weapons and technologies, and changes in the relationships between existing sources of social and political power. As we shall see, persistent problems associated with the recruitment and compensation of soldiers become one of the major drivers of a metamorphic military revolution and the coalescence of the strong modern states of today. Lack of funds needed to pay for armies made them reliant on mercenaries—siege warfare was extremely expensive, governments across Europe were in debt, and soldiers frequently mutinied and changed sides. For the more adventurous of the period, soldiering was the closest they could get to the promise of regular pay, and purchased loyalties often did not correspond to nationality. In one more famous example, John Smith had served the Habsburgs fighting the Ottomans before ending up in present-day Virginia. Even powerful rulers often could not extract enough resources from their kingdoms, and the phrase "no money, no Swiss" became a common way to express the high demand for mercenaries. To make matters worse, the generals commanding private mercenary armies often could not exercise sufficient levels of control the movements and missions of their men.

Many of these historical connections between war and the formation of the state are familiar in left-libertarian and anarchist circles. Albert Jay Nock did not pull punches when he accounted for the state in his essay Anarchist's Progress:

The State did not originate in any form of social agreement, or with any disinterested view of promoting order and justice. Far otherwise. The State originated in conquest and confiscation, as a device for maintaining the stratification of society permanently into two classes—an owning and exploiting class, relatively small, and a propertyless dependent class.

Contemporary citizens have mostly accepted the post-facto description of state power we receive from modern social contract theory. In this story, the state is an artificial legal person we create to stand apart from society, protecting us by removing us from a violent and brutal state of nature. But we need an account of the state that is not only philosophical and theoretical—hypothetical to put it more precisely—but also material and historical. From the latter approach, we learn that the modern state is nothing like your friendly neighborhood activist, committed to peace, love and standing up for the little guy. The state is decidedly not there to protect you. It is the author of war, a churning machine of violence and destruction, the greatest and the first among monopolies. Its abilities to dominate and subdue are its characteristic qualities. This framework may be summarized in a claim associated with the work of sociologist Charles Tilly: "war made the state and the state made war." Tilly wanted a neutral term, "state formation," an alternative "to the idea of political development," which he eschewed due to its teleological connotation. But, as he recounted, the problem is that scholars naturally started using it teleologically: "There is no neutral term because people have teleological agendas whenever they think about the history of states."

"If protection rackets represent organized crime at its smoothest," argues Tilly, "then war making and state making—quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy—qualify as our largest examples of organized crime." Modern political philosophers have been unable to decide on their role, vacillating between stating the obvious (of course the state is violence and organized crime, and the common good was far from the minds of its founders)

and upholding the polite pretenses of official history (the state has somehow acquired legitimacy despite its origins in conquest and aggression). Mafia-like criminal organizations can and do become "political organizations in the Weberian meaning," ensuring their continuation and their claims to validity "through the threat and the use of physical force." Indeed, historically it is only mafia-like criminal bodies that have ever grown into fully developed state power. States are mafias that have become sufficiently powerful that they have removed rivals from the territory in which they operate, monopolizing violence. Tilly notes that the extractive mechanisms of the state range and develop from "outright plunder to regular tribute to bureaucratized taxation." Peasants of the early modern period would not have associated taxation with the provision of public services. They would have associated taxes with war, as a payoff in place of military service. Ultimately, this extraction and predation impart the organized criminal character of the state, where its victims must pay for the privilege of being protected from it. State-making is merely the systematization, development, and perfection of this cycle of violence and extraction.

Recently, a group of researchers wanted to better understand the relationship between warfare and its unique organizational demands and the formation of modern states. They wanted to test Tilly's bellicist framework, which suggests that the wars of the early modern period give birth to a new and distinctive form of government in the state. Reviewing data from the years between 1490 and 1790, they examined changes in European state borders and conflict data. In a paper published in 2023, the researchers confirmed "that warfare did in fact play a crucial role in the territorial expansion of European states before (and beyond) the French Revolution." The state is not just a racketeer—it is history's best and cleanest example of a racketeer. As an object of historical study, the state is a series of relationships between "war-making, extraction, state-making, and protection," which ossified into the most powerful organizing force in society. When Kropotkin and other anarchists talk about the state as being separate from society, they acknowledge that the state is never truly separate, the pull of its power touching everything. They mean that the state is separate from, or at least different from, everyone else in society in its protection-racket role. The modern state says something extraordinary: I am the only one who can use violence, and I will decide when its use is appropriate. Despite this fact, in some corners of the world, there remains widespread approval of the government and trust in the public institutions. The state takes nothing off the table when it attacks its own subjects in order to dominate and control them; indeed it is the modern state that produces the worst crimes against humanity. Because it has cleared away its historical rivals, the state sees no reason to limit itself. Until today, when you could be spied on or held indefinitely with no trial, or you could be put on a kill list and end up dead. The state's "laws" are fundamentally the death threats of an organized criminal cartel.

The Military Revolution

In a notable 1955 lecture, the historian Michael Roberts suggested his hypothesis of a Military Revolution between roughly 1560 and 1660, spurring the modern era of statecraft. Roberts theorized that a revolution in the tools and methods of warfare transformed the social order in enduring ways. Larger armies with higher numbers of infantry, more complex choreography and strategic planning, new weapons, and new mechanisms of administration and management required sophisticated brain trusts to take shape around the military apparatus; this is arguably

the early dawn of the modern military-industrial complex. The increasing use of muskets, expensive in itself, also required costly and time-consuming training. But interestingly these new weapons also helped to scale up and professionalize the military by de-skilling many fighters: the muskets of the seventeenth century were not as accurate as the longbow, but they were easier to learn and use to the desired effect. This new firepower touched off an arms race that demanded stronger fortresses, leading to the introduction of the Italian trace (trace Italienne) or bastion trace. Many historians have suggested that this shorter, thicker fort sounded the death knell of the feudal system itself, increasing the power of the urban merchant class and centralized political power. These were the cutting edge military installations of their time, complex, resource and labor-intensive projects whose construction would take years and cost tens to hundreds of millions adjusted to today's dollars. The combination of gunpowder weapons, artillery fortresses, and large infantry armies subverted the viability of the existing political order. Roberts and other historians have drawn attention to the ingenious military exploits of the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, contending that advances in complexity of military strategy, hierarchical organization, and increased economic and political power led to the rise of modern centralized states. Yet this revolution was less a single military one than it was the site of several revolutions, concurrent and related, not only military in nature, but also broadly social, political, and economic. The mobilization of force in the Thirty Years' War changed much about society, including importantly the position of political power relative to the individual and the broader social order. Military environments are suffused with the insignia of difference, dominated by complicated gradations of rank and position. This is the kind of learned, sincere cultural respect for hierarchy and the chain of command that was necessary to the creation of the extremely strong contemporary.

Gustavus Adolphus was not a novice to the battlefield by the time of the Thirty Years' War. He had commanded incredibly well-organized brigades of loyal, disciplined troops as Sweden fought on multiple fronts in the first years of the seventeenth century, and he became a battlefield innovator, adopting some of the methods of the enemies that had defeated him in the past. His armies maneuvered in new, unpredictable ways and used strategic deployments of reserves, putting opponents off-balance before striking fatal blows. He is remembered as one of the ushers of the military revolution, a modernizer and pioneer in sophisticated warfare. His military tactics are often associated with the decline of a cavalry maneuver called the caracole in favor of more traditional mounted attacks. Among other factors, the widespread use of pistols among cavalrymen had "caused the abandonment of the system of true mounted attacks." Instead, men on horseback lined up in ranks that could be very deep, firing from some distance before moving to the back of the ranks. But Gustavus Adolphus came to hate this tactic after facing formidable armies in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that made adept use of dramatic cavalry charges from Poland's famous winged hussars. His reputation for trailblazing military genius owes in large part to the stunning and overwhelming combination of musket and artillery volleys with the shock of such ferocious cavalry charges. Gustavus Adolphus dramatically increased and improved the use of both firearms and light artillery, for example, state of the art small cannons: in 1624, he introduced the first regimental field piece in military history, giving his men 625-pound mobile cannons (the first cannons had appeared centuries before, around 1325, playing a minor role during the Hundred Years' War). Sweden's naval power also set it apart from the forces at the control of the Empire, and this, too, presaged the transformational changes that would come from sea power and the riches to control shipping lanes and therefore trade. Habsburg victories in the first half of the war effected a massive transfer of land to nobles loyal to the Empire, but the

tide was about to turn. Gustavus Adolphus's victories in the war represent the successful deployment of a program of administrative, tactical, and technological projects, all resource-intensive and complex. His system of recruitment through systematic, bureaucratic conscription and compensation, which divided his kingdom into zones, anticipated the systems used today by the most powerful states.

True to the feudal DNA of the European system, military service during the war was rewarded with lands and titles. Albrecht von Wallenstein, for example, was elevated to the status of a duke for raising an army for Emperor Ferdinand II—before being assassinated by his enemies with Ferdinand's blessing. Wallenstein is a fascinating figure in his own right, worthy of closer attention both on his own terms and as a symbol of a new, modern order. He personifies the provision of war as a sophisticated professional service, an influential and ambitious warlord at the helm of a private mercenary army assembled at the request of Ferdinand II. He was, like Gustavus Adolphus, a military innovator and an accomplished strategist. The importance of Wallenstein's capital and his unique institutional ability to mobilize and effectively command 100,000 men foreshadowed the need for the state to integrate this then-privatized and outsourced function. In the new, more secular political framework that would follow the treaties of Westphalia, capital and the state were a natural match, ascendant against more traditional and ecclesiastical centers of power. During the war, Wallenstein argued that "the time had arrived for dispensing altogether with the electors; and that Germany ought to be governed like France and Spain, by a single and absolute sovereign." It would take centuries for the unification of Germany to be accomplished, with the military and bureaucratic superiority of the Prussians leading the effort. Wallenstein's meteoric rise proved unsustainable, and perhaps unsurprisingly, he received the death of a mercenary, branded as a traitor and killed on imperial orders.

The Peace of Westphalia and the Features of Sovereignty

After three decades of fighting back and forth across central Europe, the war comes to its official close in the fall of 1648, with negotiations in two demilitarized Westphalian cities of Osnabrück and Münster. The meaning of the treaties within the existing political order remains the subject of debate. "Cross-disciplinary and cross-paradigmatic convergence on 1648 as the origin of modern international relations has given the discipline of IR a sense of theoretical direction, thematic unity, and historical legitimacy." Despite its outsized reputation and importance to scholars, particularly in international relations, the impact of Westphalia on the interactions between countries has been overstated significantly. By no means did the documents signed at Osnabrück and Münster bring peace to Europe or unite its great powers in a new era of tolerance and harmony. War continued, though at scales of death and loss of treasure that were more tolerable to rulers who had just overseen the most destructive period of war in Europe's history. Even if the importance of Westphalia to the concept of sovereignty has been overstated, it nonetheless reduced a messy patchwork of political obligations and diminished the stature of sources of supranational authority, the Empire and the Roman Church. This exaltation of local state power and the attendant demotion of the Vatican in the international arena enraged the Pope. In a Bull issued shortly after the finalization of the Westphalian treaties, Pope Innocent X damned them as "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane, empty of meaning, and effect for all time." Innocent's incensed reaction to the treaties that officially ended the Thirty Years'

War sheds light on the continuing debate regarding the relative importance of the Westphalian diplomatic instruments in the creation of state sovereignty as we know it today. By the time of the Westphalian agreements, the Church and the Holy Roman Emperor had maintained a special, cooperative relationship since the time of the Carolingian kings more than eight centuries before.

The Westphalian aftermath shows that the meaning of the peace had less importance to how states would treat one another, and relatively more to say about the relationships between the potentates of the Empire on one hand and the Emperor and Pope on the other. No longer would the great princes suffer the dictates of either. The treaties effected an important constitutional shift, introducing "protoliberal religious liberties" on the estates of the Holy Roman Empire, which left the subjects with exclusively secular duties towards their authorities. The agreements did not create modern sovereignty, but rather affirmed the rule of the Holy Roman Empire's many rulers against the supervening power of the Emperor. They did not alter the fundamental paradigm of international relations, for the generations following the war were defined by several major wars including the English Civil War, the continuation of the Franco-Spanish War, the Second Northern War, and the Franco-Dutch War, each of which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths on its own. In years immediately following the end of the Thirty Years' War, the impact of other wars on Poland wiped out up to half of its population.

Nonetheless, through the Westphalian peace, the features of the modern state come into sharper relief. In their 1972 book Anti-Oedipus, the first volume of their work Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explore the fundamental features of the state. They want to argue that the state finds its point of departure in two fundamental acts: (1) the fixing of territorial residence, and (2) an "act of liberation through the abolition of small debts." Historically, such relief from small debts was among the mechanisms state power employed to consolidate its political and economic control and bring peasants into dependence upon a centralized, state-managed system of taxation and economic exchange more generally. But the advent of the state carries the permanent indebtedness of the subject, a debt that only death can release. The new realities of apparently endless, extremely resource-intensive war required the permanent conquest of a citizen whose foremost obligations would be to the political government. The state begins to cut off traditional, local cultural ties by imposing new centers of power, organized around abstractions and intensively focused on taxation, bureaucracy, and the rule of law. "The feudal system had presupposed a world in which everyone was connected with the land and the responsibility for his bodily welfare rested with the landlord." The state alienates the individual from a direct relationship to land and familial bonds, enclosing and absorbing them into impersonal systems. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "the State inaugurates the great movement of deterritorialization that subordinates all the primitive filiations to the despotic machine." That is what we expect from modern government: it is treated as impersonal, neutral. Society begins to reward a new type of behavior, as very centralized and bureaucratic organizations grow and proliferate. The state grows strong enough to absorb and incorporate all lesser mercenaries. This begins a feedback loop in which taxation is required for standing armies and standing armies make taxation easier. Government becomes even more anonymous and institutional. In an interesting historical turn, this modern development perhaps represents a return to the expensive Roman system, in which most of the tax revenue was dedicated to the recruitment and maintenance of the soldiery (in the year 150, approximately 80 percent of the Roman budget was dedicated to the military). The Thirty Years' War remains a crucial piece of the puzzle in understanding the

formation of the kinds of political power that dominate the world today, the site of intersection between several of the major forces that still turn the gears of politics both domestically and between nations.

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