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Blasts from the Past: War and Fracture in the International System[1]

Jens Bartelson

I. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the rise of new forms of organized violence has been seen as a source of fracturing in the international system, dividing the world into distinct zones of war and peace (Singer and Wildavsky 1993). In the attempt to come to terms with this new world order, scholars were initially focused on the emergence of new wars, and how these were pushing already weak states to the brink of collapse. Doing this, many of them came to agree that the modern concept of war has lost its analytical purchase in a world in which sovereign states no longer were the main belligerents, and in which the distinction between international and domestic conflicts had ceased to make much empirical sense. Instead it was believed to be necessary to study violent conflicts without presupposing the existence of any specific kind of actor or any definite level of hostilities beforehand, since these ought to be contingent upon

[1] This article is based on talks given at UC Berkeley in 2012 and University of Cambridge in 2014. I wish to thank Duncan Bell, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Ayse Zarakol for having invited me. I also want to thank Douglas Brommesson and the anonymous reviewers of *IPS* for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to Linda Eitrem Holmgren for her assistance in preparing the manuscript for publication.

the political context rather than upon established definitions (see Holsti 1996; Kaldor 1999; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Kalyvas 2003; Coker 2004).

Following the upsurge in interventions that soon ensued, the focus was less on different definitions of war and more about its moral and legal justifications and their ideological implications. The global wars that since have been waged were often justified with reference to the threats to international order posed by state failure and terrorist groups, which made the former legitimate targets of military interventions and the latter fair game for exceptional measures and the extra-legal use of force (Werner 2004; Mégret 2006; Kessler and Werner 2008; Zarakol 2011). As the critics of these wars often pointed out, since they were justified with reference to universal values and rights, they implied contestable claims to boundless political authority or presupposed the possibility of a world community as the ultimate warrant of these rights and values (see Brunkhorst 2004; Hardt and Negri 2004; Van Munster 2004; Jabri 2006). Much as a consequence of these debates, the once rather solid distinction between peace and war appeared more fluid. From having referred to two states of affairs incapable of coexisting within the same portion of time and space, war and peace now occupy the extreme points of a continuum with many shades of grey in between (Grove 2011). Hence those very distinctions that once made the modern concept of war both meaningful and analytically useful seem to have been blurred if not dissolved by the attempts to make sense of the new practices of war and warfare that have emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, leaving us with few intellectual tools with which to make sense of violent conflicts in the present.

As I would like to suggest, however, these debates about the nature of contemporary war have failed to note what I take to be the most important change that the understanding of war has undergone in recent decades. That is the return of the atavistic view that war is a *productive*

force in human affairs. I speak of return here, since we have long been accustomed to think of war as primarily *destructive* of sociopolitical order so as to forget that this is a relatively recent view. The horrors of the First World War brought changes in the public attitude towards war, and led to widespread pleas for its abolition (Mueller 1991). The invention and use of nuclear weapons further reinforced the awareness of the destructive character of war to the point of institutionalizing that awareness in the meta-ideology of nuclear deterrence after the Second World War (Brodie 1946). Since then, the study of war in international relations has been based upon the conviction that war is profoundly destructive, and has been devoted to understanding the causes of war with the aim of minimizing the likelihood of future wars (see Schmidt 1998, 157-65; Schmidt 2002).

But before the twentieth century, there was a widespread conviction among European elites that war – however defined – was an impersonal yet productive force in human affairs that should be harnessed for the right ends, such as the creation of political communities and their protection from internal and external enemies. John Ruggie (1993, 162) touches briefly upon this kind of background understanding when he argues that during the early modern period, the wars of religion were constitutive wars in the sense that the identity of the belligerent units was yet unsettled, but emerged only gradually as the consequence of these wars. Perhaps symptomatically of our current predicament, this conception of war has recently been revived by critical theorists in search of a fresh approach to the study of war. Despite their otherwise profound differences, some critics of contemporary wars start out from the assumption that war is a productive force in politics. For example, as Jabri (2007, 12) has argued, '[e]ven in its most instrumental articulation, therefore, violence has a constitutive manifestation and is hence seen as being formative of the subject.' Furthermore, as Barkawi and Brighton (2011, 126) have stated, 'war is a generative force like no other. It is of fundamental significance for

politics, society and culture…War, the threat of war and the preparation for war mark the origins, transformation and end of polities.' As they go on to elaborate, the 'transformative effect, the capacity to rework the reality of social and political existence, is…the objective of waging war' (*ibid.*, 136).

Since view of war is arguably already at the heart of many contemporary understandings of war, I think that this conception should be contextualized and historicized rather than used uncritically as a starting point for the study of war. Even if the attribution of constitutive powers to war makes little sense to the modern mind, the fact that such powers *have* been consistently attributed to war is a historical fact in its own right that merits some serious attention. As I would like to maintain, from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, war has been saddled with an almost magical capacity to produce sociopolitical order out of its manifold negations, and has been involved in the shaping of actors and in the drawing of the boundaries separating them. Yet since I cannot provide a full historical account of this process given the limited scope of this article, I shall remain content to supply a few examples intended to illustrate how the concept of war has been put to such use when defining the spatiotemporal limits of the state and the international system, arguing that the belief that war is constitutive of political order has informed the conditions under which the concept of war itself became intelligible and analytically useful in its recognizably modern sense. When those conditions are challenged – as they arguably have been during the past decades – the modern concept of war has lost some of its analytical purchase, while meanings and functions previously attributed to war but which long have been downplayed have now taken on renewed salience in contemporary justifications of war. Pursuing this argument, I shall first describe the functions performed by the concept of war and its cognates in early-modern historiography, and then move on to its role in early-modern geography and cartography. The reason for this choice in my conviction that a historical account of the productive view of war

ought to focus on those very things that war has been believed to be constitutive *of* in order to understand the function of the concept of war war in its proper context. I shall end this article with a few reflections on the recent return of the productive view of war in contemporary justifications of war and the limits this has imposed on the possibility of critical inquiry. In doing this, I would like to argue that many contemporary practices of war ought not to be seen as symptoms of fracturing of the international system, but rather as more or less desperate attempts to preserve the integrity of this system against a host of threats, real or imagined.

II. The Worlds War Made

We are all familiar with the contested commonplace according to which, 'war made the state, and the state made war' (Tilly 1975, 42). On this view, the state is the outcome of violent competition between groups in society. As Weber argued 'having established the monopoly of physical violence as a means of rule within a territory', the state can then freely deploy its capacity for organized violence against other states (Weber 1994, 316). By the same token, according to what has long been an equally common but no less contested view within international relations, relations between states are best characterized as a state of war. On this view, wars between states occur because there is no overarching political authority there to prevent them from breaking out (see Waltz 1959; Waltz 1979).

Rather than seeking to contest or corroborate these views, I would like to argue that this intimate connection between war and sovereignty is the result of a long-standing tendency in European historiography to explain the emergence of the state and the international system with reference to a transhistorical state of war. From the beginning of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, such a state of war was frequently invoked to define the temporal limits of states and the international system by demarcating them from what allegedly had existed before and which now was condemned to the past. It would be tempting

to construe the emergence of the productive view of war in European thought as a source of fracturing of the medieval world that is widely believed to have antedated the rise of modern states and the international system. Yet I believe that we should resist this temptation and instead focus on the 'Middle Ages' was assembled within this historiographical tradition as a consequence of its insistence on a co-constitutive relationship between war and sovereignty.

As Schmitt (2006, 110) famously argued, the decisive step from a medieval to a modern understanding of war lies in the separation of questions of just cause grounded in moral arguments from the idea of legal equality of belligerents. This means that before war became a prerogative of sovereign states, no two parties could be equally justified in their resort to violence, since the justness of one's cause implied the necessary injustice of that of the adversary. The gradual acceptance of the former view had profound implications for the grounds on which war could be fought and justified. In the absence of any common authoritative source of moral or legal judgment, war becomes the final arbiter of conflict, and hence also justifiable on grounds that it serves the causes of the political community, or at least parts thereof. As Machiavelli states in the preface to his *Arte Della Guerra* (1519-20), 'For all the arts that are ordered in city for the sake of the common good of men, all the orders made there for living in fear of the laws of God, would be in vain if their defenses were not prepared' (Machiavelli 2009, 4). The common good could be defined in terms of protection against external enemies and the preservation of domestic order, but it could also easily be stretched to include imperial aggrandizement and glory (see Viroli 1992; Hörnqvist 2012). Since then we have grown accustomed to regard war as a prerogative of sovereigns stuck in a condition devoid of common authority. In the absence of such authority, politics becomes a continuation of war with other means, involving formally equal parties in a constant test of strength that was believed to be the final arbiter of the legitimacy of their authority claims.

With no other method for resolving disputes at hand, 'war was accepted as integral to the conduct of relationships between polities; *all* polities faced a struggle to maintain their relative position in what was a cut-throat environment' (Tallett & Trim 2010, 22). As we shall see below, to conceptualize war as a default condition of human affairs also implied that it was up individual rulers to harness its flames for their own purposes. Given this background understanding, it would make little sense to posit any sharp distinction between domestic and international wars, since war was widely believed to be the very instrument by which such a distinction was to be drawn.

While it would be anachronistic to speak of recognizably modern state at this point in time, I think it is possible to argue that such a conception emerges as a consequence of sustained efforts to harness the impersonal forces of war for the purposes of secular statecraft. If war has the power to pass verdicts on the actions of rulers, it has also the power to make or break political communities. As the Habsburg general Montecuccoli summarized his vast experience of war in his *Mémoires* (1703), 'Battles give Crowns and take them away, resolves disputes between Sovereigns without appeal, conclude the war and render the conqueror immortal' (Montecuccoli 1712, 183). And as he went on to elaborate the implications of a general state of war among European states, 'no State can be at peace, ward off attacks, defend its Laws, its Religion without Arms… its majesty will not be respected without them, neither among its subjects, nor among Foreigners' (*ibid.*, 76). If warfare indeed is a productive force in human affairs, it follows that the task of rulers is to harness it for the purpose of creating and maintaining their states. Thus, in a widely read treatise titled *Tesoro Politico* (1589), Comino Ventura could persuasively argue that the foundation of the 'machine of the state' lies in the systematic use of force, both as an instrument of internal domination as well as to protect the state from foreign violence. Since wars are likely to occur

anyway, or so Ventura believed, it is a matter of prudence on behalf of the ruler to avoid that internal rebellions and foreign war occur at the same time. To maintain a relative state of peace within their states, rulers have to face a peculiar trade-off: while mobilizing resources for the conduct of foreign war easily lead to grievances at home that might result in domestic rebellion, failing to mobilize against external threats might subject the state to defeat and ruin at the hands of foreigners (Ventura 1608, 1-23). Consequently, it was plausible to argue that foreign wars sometimes were necessary to detract attention from domestic unrest. As Courtilz de Sandras (1686, 158-9) later argued, it is a maxim of good statecraft to always have some foreign war going on in order to prevent internal strife and to keep up the martial spirit in the populace.

By the same token, while it would seem no less anachronistic to speak of nationalism in any recognizably modern sense during the early-modern period, the constant possibility of war was often invoked in the construction of rudimentary notions of national identity. As Hirschi (2012, 34-9) has pointed out, while the symbolic legacy of the Roman Empire was still very much alive and widely shared among European elites, the obvious mismatch between the imperial ideal of a single hegemonic power and the actual rise of territorial states gave rise not only to a quest for supremacy among them, but also to distinct appropriations of parts of this legacy in order to justify their claims to supremacy with reference to their distinct national characters. As Hirschi goes on to explain, 'in a world of nations, one needs to have an idea of how other nations see themselves in order to characterize oneself' (*ibid.*, 39). Thus early-modern harbingers of nationalism emerged in the context of rivaling claims to uniqueness and grandeur, each capitalizing on the same Roman legacy, and each being formed in opposition to each other. Accordingly, as Ventura noted in passing, 'not only are the customs of Nations different, but often also opposed' (Ventura 1608, 13).

Finally, while it would be even more inaccurate to speak of an international system during the early-modern period, efforts to create political order by means of war eventually issued in the emergence of something akin to an international arena. Whereas Renaissance warfare had been a local or regional affair at most, the geographical scope of early-modern warfare expanded, as did the number of parties involved and the scope of their strategic ambitions. As de Vries (2010) has shown, what was peculiar to early modern warfare was that the security of states increasingly depended on their ability to formulate grand strategies that spanned vast geographical areas and long periods of time, and to implement those strategic visions by projecting military power correspondingly.

Hence, when insights from the geographical and cartographical revolutions of the sixteenth century began to penetrate military thinking, it resulted in geopolitical guidebooks such as the *Relazioni Universali* (1591-98) by Giovanni Botero and *Les Estats, Empires, Royaumes et Principautes du Monde* (1625) by Pierre d'Avity. The geographical scope of these books extended far beyond the European continent and into hitherto unexplored parts of the world. But whereas Botero focused primarily on the Christian world and its relations with non-European actors, d'Avity sets out to compare every known polity, from the great powers and the tiniest principalities in Europe, to the most distant kingdoms of the Orient, providing thick and fanciful descriptions of their geography, climate, customs, wealth, government, military capability and religion, all in order to pass judgment on their foreign policies and relative power (Botero 1593-98; D'Avity 1625; Headley 2000; Rubiés 2005).

Appeals to the generative capacities of war were thus crucial to the framing of states as independent actors, to the concomitant construction of nations as distinct and unique, and to

the creation of an international arena on which states could perform and interact. Yet the persuasiveness of this worldview depended on new practices of historical rewriting, through which a boundless and transhistorical state of war was projected backwards in time in order to explain how individual states had first emerged out of primordial strife, and then entered an international state of war by virtue of their ability to overcome inner threats to their existence. What supposedly was buried in past was therefore also very much present in the present, as well as conversely.

The theoretical principles governing this kind of historical writing were derived from what I previously have termed the *analysis of interests* (Bartelson 1995, 154-85). Integral to that analysis was the idea that the politics is governed by considerations of self-interest, rather than being motivated by religious zeal or blind passions (see Gunn 1968; Gunn 1969; Church 1972; Hirschman 1977). As Rohan argued in his *De l'interest des Princes et Estats de la Chrestienté* (1643, 1), 'princes command the people and interest commands princes', and since 'knowledge of this interest is as much elevated above that of the actions of princes, as they are above the peoples', then identifying and sticking to rational interest becomes imperative to the survival and flourishing of princes and their states. The aim of this analysis was to infer maxims from the past that could be used to judge state conduct in the present. Since the interests of a state were thought to include its security, reputation, and wealth, and since these were believed to vary according to the geopolitical situation and form of government of each state, knowledge of these factors was believed to be an important requirement for rational action in domestic and foreign politics during much of the early-modern period.

Perhaps the foremost exponent of this mode of historical writing was Samuel von Pufendorf. While he is widely known for his contributions to natural law and the law of nations, his

historical works have received less scholarly attention. Written during his appointment as a court historian in Stockholm, they were translated into numerous languages, widely circulated and read as viable guides to European great power politics well into the eighteenth century (see Krieger 1960; Piirimäe 2008). True to the methodological principles guiding his narrative, Pufendorf felt no contradiction between his ambition to write in a style at once impersonal and impartial in order to uncover the truth from authentic sources, while simultaneously purporting to interpret and express the motives of the states whose history he wrote.

As Pufendorf writes in the preface of his *Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten, so itziger Zeit in Europa sich befinden* (1682), 'he who has no Relish for History, is very unlikely to make any great Progress in the Way of Knowledge' (Pufendorf 1719, ii). He then criticizes the contemporary focus on ancient history in favor of the 'considerable Advantage it is to understand the Modern History as well as of our Native Country, as of its neighbouring Nations' (*ibid.*, ii-iii). In order to provide the reader with valid historical knowledge of the past of each individual state and its relations with other states, Pufendorf sets out to describe the 'good and bad qualifications of each Nation…(and) what concerns the Nature, Strength and Weakness of each Country, and its form of Government' (*ibid.,* iv). To this end, he introduces a distinction between the imaginary and the real interests of states. Whereas the former 'consists in such things as cannot be performed without disquieting and being injurious to a great many other states', real interests are further subdivided into perpetual and temporary ones. While the former 'depends chiefly on the Situation and Constitution of the Country, and the natural Inclinations of the People', the latter is determined by the 'Condition, Strengths and Weakness of the neighbouring Nations' (*ibid.*, v). Drawing on existing histories of European states, Pufendorf sees no reason to

correct them, but rather wants to take them as indicative of the perceptions these states entertain of their own past and present. That these histories are biased and are based on all sorts of myths is of less concern to him, as long as these biases and myths can be taken as expressive of their distinct identities and interests. Since he takes such narratives to be indicative of particular claims to dynastic and territorial sovereignty, it does not strictly matter to him whether they are based or ascertainable historical facts or not, as long as they can be made intelligible with reference to a general and boundless state of war between seemingly cohesive and self-interested actors.

But if states are, or at least should be, governed by the maxims of real interests in their relations with each other, how had individual states come into being, and how did they manage to consolidate themselves into autonomous actors? To the same extent that the precepts of secular statecraft are reflected in the contemporary relations of states, states have invariably been constituted through violent conflict between primordial groups. Thus, as if to substantiate the speculative account of the origin of civil societies we find in the first pages of *De jure naturae et gentium* (1672), the real reason why mankind left behind paternal forms of government after the Deluge is that 'among the Neighbouring Families, sometimes Quarrels used to arise, which being often decided by Force, drew along with them very great Inconveniences…And to guard off such Injuries, the Neighbours that lived so near as to be able to assist one another in case of Necessity, did enter into a society to defend themselves against their common Enemies' (Pufendorf 1719, 2). But this state of war did not end with the constitution of societies, but was now instead manifested in the relations between these, eventually culminating in the consolidation of distinct and bounded states. To Pufendorf, one of the main propellants of state formation is foreign invasion, which compels otherwise rivaling groups to unite against the intruders. Thus we learn that Spain 'was in ancient times

divided into a great many States, independent of one another…But this multiplicity or partition exposed this otherwise Warlike Nation to the Inroads of Foreign Enemies (*ibid.*, 25). Likewise, England was originally divided into 'a great many petty States', which 'exposed them to the danger of being overcome by their Foreign Enemies' (*ibid.*, 84). And although the Gauls initially had conquered both Italy and Greece, 'this potent People, ignorant of their own Strength and Power, were in no capacity to exert it sufficiently against other Nations, because they were not then under the Government of one Prince, but divided into a great many petty States, which were always at variance with one another. This contributed much to facilitate the Conquest of the Romans over them…' (*ibid.*, 148). After the Frankish invasion, it was evident that 'the Race of the ancient Gauls was not quite extinguished, but that both Nations were by degrees united into one, though with this difference, that the Frankish families made up the Body of the Nation' (*ibid.*, 149).

This kind of historiography raises important questions. Why should this primordial state of war be projected back onto the past to structure historical narratives, and how was it possible to assume that European countries – at least in some embryonic form – had been present since the dawn of history? This is even more puzzling given that contemporary historical consciousness was still under the heavy influence of providential history, according to which humanity traversed preordained historical stages outlined in a providential plan (see, for example, Boussuet 1681). From the point of view of providential history, the precepts of secular statecraft were not only false but also profoundly destructive. Yet this state-centric historiography served to establish continuities between past and present that could be used to legitimize power politics in the present precisely *against* those who disputed the legitimacy of this conduct on moral grounds, as well as to constitute the temporal limits that separated a statist present from a stateless past marked by the inseparable forces of barbarism and

religion. This was less a matter of a medieval unity being fractured, but rather a way of furnishing the seed values of such a periodization by projecting the concerns of power politics back onto the past.

But the concept of war was not only instrumental in the constitution of the temporal limits of the modern state, but also in the establishment of its *spatial* limits. The geographical and cartographical revolutions made it possible to compartmentalize space into distinct portions by means of geometrical methods (see Cosgrove 2001; Cosgrove 2003). To this end, 'the machine of discovery…. not only produced an immense perceptual challenge and epistemological problem but also the realization of an almost totally accessible and inhabitable global arena in which to contend with this problem' (Headley 1997, 24). Dreams of unbounded sovereignty 'found the beginnings of its realization in the map or sphere that was dedicated to the monarch, framed by his arms and traversed by his ships, and that opened up to his dreams of empire a space of intervention stretching to the limits of the terraqueous globe' (Lestringant 1994, 23). But although such representations of global space inspired grand visions of imperial expansion and dreams of a community of all mankind, they also furnished the conceptual preconditions for the fracturing of that global space into what was to become the distinct and homogenous territories of modern states (Escolar 1997). As Branch (2014, 69) has recently argued, 'a mutually constitutive relationship exists between representations of political space, the ideas held by actors about the organization of political authority, and actors' authoritative political practices manifesting those ideas'.

While I am in broad agreement with those who have argued that advances in cartography and techniques of mapping played an important role in the creation of modern states and the international system, I would like to add that this role ought to be understood against the

backdrop of contemporary beliefs about the nature of war and warfare: As Foucault (2007, 64-5) rightly has pointed out, territory was a strategic concept before it became a geographical one. And as Machiavelli advised a captain marching through foreign territory, ’the first thing he must do is to have the whole territory described and pictured so that he knows the places, the number, the distances, the roads, the mountains, the rivers and marshes, and the nature of them’ (Machiavelli 2009, 111).

But well into the seventeenth century, ‘the demand for multipurpose topographical information prevented the evolution of a cartography primarily geared to the needs of war’ (Hale 2007, 735). But when the preferred method of warfare changed from siege to battle, properly knowing the terrain became crucial to the success of both attack and defense. Hence, during the seventeenth century, French topographical mapping was gradually entrusted to geographical engineers, and seen as an important preparation for future wars (Konvitz 1987, 1-31). Already in 1624, geographical engineers had accompanied French forces into battle, and by the beginning of next century, geographical engineers were entrusted with land surveys and the design of fortifications (Berthaut 1901, 1-10). The cartographic activities of military engineers during the seventeenth century resulted in the mapping of large parts of France, especially of the frontier regions (Buisseret 2003, 131).

Similar developments took place in England. As the instructions to the principal military engineer from the *Board of Ordnance* read in 1663, he was supposed to ‘take surveys of land…to have always by him…Engineers useful in Fortifications and Sieges, to draw and design the Situation of any Place in their due Prospects’ (cited in Anderson 2009, 7). A decade later, considerations of war and peace had become integral to the mapmaking enterprise in England. As John Ogilby claimed in the dedicatory epistle in his road atlas *Britannia* (1675), ‘[h]ere then I present your sacred majesty with an important novelty, the

scale of peace and war, whereby…a true prospect of this your flourishing kingdom may be taken, pregnant hints of security and interest gathered…' (see Ogilby 1675, dedication; Petto 2015, 27-30). As if to dissipate any remaining doubts about the usefulness of his masterpiece, Ogilby advices the reader 'not to press the infallible notions deducible in order to the security against civil dissension and foreign invasion' (Ogilby 1675, preface folio 1). These motives would become even more salient as mapmaking gradually went from being a way of propagating claims to territorial authority, to an instrument for actively *implementing* such claims on the ground.

During the late eighteenth century, the awareness of the importance of surveying and mapmaking to military planning increased further. As William Roy stated 1785, 'accurate surveys of a country are universally admitted to be…the best means of forming judicious plans of defence…Hence it happens, that if a country has not actually been surveyed, or is but little known, a state of warfare generally produces the first improvements in its geography' (cited in Anderson 2009, 21). In response, European states charged military officers with conducting systematic surveys and producing military maps of each country, to the point of mapmaking becoming the very epitome of military science (see Widmalm 1990; Edney 1994a). By then the map had become a potent metaphor for all knowledge, and the art of mapmaking was closely aligned with the interests and ideologies of ruling elites (Edney 1994b). While surveys and mapping were now perceived as necessary precursors to the unification of territories and the demarcation of state boundaries, they also informed processes of fortification through which political authority and territory were brought to coincide on the ground.

Although the great military engineer Vauban thought maps indispensable to military planning, their inexactitude prompted him to order reconnaissance missions to frontier regions in order to gather supplementary information (Vauban 1910c). Sometimes this issued in concrete advice to Louis XIV. Much of his advice focused on what he saw as necessary measures to create a unified and demarcated territory. His use of terminology indicates that he saw this territory as a dueling ground on which it was necessary to impose order by the drawing of boundaries and the building of infrastructure (Langins 2004, 70-1). As Vauban argued in a letter to Louvois, '[t]he King ought to think a little about squaring the field. This confusion of friendly and enemy fortresses mixed together does not please me at all. You are compelled to maintain three for one; your people is tormented, your expenses greatly stretched and your forces diminished' (Vauban 1910e; Zeller 1928, 60; Sahlins 1990, 1434). In those regions where there were no natural frontiers, the nascent vision of a unified territory resulted in the construction of what Vauban termed a *ceinture de fer*, consisting in a double line of fortresses demarcating French territory from those of its neighbors (Sahlins 1990, 1434*ff*; Langins 2004, 65). Prompted by the sudden porousness that the Peace of Nijmegen (1678) had brought to the northwestern frontier, this project was completed towards the end of the next century. As Vauban expressed his worries in a memorandum to Louis XIV, 'the frontier toward the Low Countries lies open and disordered as a consequence of the recent peace.' What should be done to avert this threat was 'to establish a new frontier and fortify it so well that it closes the approaches into our country to an enemy while giving us access to his.' This was to be done by making the fortifications large enough 'to contain not only the munitions required for their own defense but also the supplies needed if we invade enemy territory', but also by strengthening the line of defense with canals 'along whose banks entrenchments could be dug in time of war…while at the same time the canals would provide valuable assistance for the movement of goods, and commerce' (Vauban 1910b). In order to prevent the Spaniards from

posing a renewed threat from the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Strasbourg should be captured and duly fortified. In another *mémoir*, Vauban provides an assessment of those towns and frontier regions that can be sacrificed in the interest peace without weakening the state itself or its frontiers. These towns and their surroundings are evaluated as to their strategic importance, the revenues that can be extracted during wartime, whether or not they are easily defended, and whether or not they can offer bridgeheads during offensive campaigns into neighboring countries. In those towns that could be ceded without too much loss to the crown, he recommends existing fortifications to be razed to the ground before they are handed over to the enemy (Vauban 1910d).

In sum, '[b]y fortifying France's coastal and inland borders and by adopting a strategy of rapid, forward movement into the territory of a potential enemy, France achieved a level of security for its cities which was altogether unprecedented' (Konvitz 1990, 11). As Langins (2004, 69) has summarized the role of the military engineering corps, while their fortification of the French state 'may have given them a distorted view of the national space of the country, it was also a view that saw that space as becoming more coherent, more rational and more defensible.' Attempts to assert boundaries that were believed to be 'natural' found expression not only in an expansive scheme of fortification, but also in an aggressive foreign policy: although Vauban urged the king not to expand beyond natural frontiers, properly establishing them nevertheless required swallowing a host of neighboring principalities and bishoprics (Vauban 1910a).

Although the concerns of historical writing and those of geography had been closely aligned for much of the early modern period, they converged during the nineteenth century, giving rise to the field of historical geography. A core assumption made within this nascent field was that the differentiation into distinct political communities in Europe and elsewhere had

resulted from the fracturing of primordial races and language groups into lesser units through incessant warfare. As a consequence, each state had its own unique trajectory established in time and space, their temporal limits and spatial boundaries being but the outcome of constant struggles between races (see Freeman 1881). With the limits of the state and the international system being settled in theory and practice alike, the contrasts between the latter and its non-European and supposedly uncivilized outside became increasingly apparent. As Benton (2010) has shown, whereas the European states system was structured according to the principle of territorial sovereignty, the methods of rule used by imperial powers outside Europe gave rise to multi-layered and variegated geographies composed of semiautonomous spaces where sovereignty was divided among different actors rather than anything resembling territorially demarcated states with historical trajectories of their own.

III. Wars of the World

Many of us are inclined to believe that practices of war of the kind described above belong to a past that we have left behind in favor of an international system in which the identities of actors and the boundaries separating them are sufficiently stable to permit some regulation of the use of force. But since the end of the Cold War, the rise of new forms of war and warfare has widely been interpreted as symptomatic of an ongoing fracturing of this system into zones of war and peace. Yet attempts to make sense of this predicament by replacing the modern concept of war with alternative conceptions of violent conflict have not been very successful, since these latter also presuppose that the identity of actors and the boundaries separating them are already given when they are in fact up for grabs. Thus the modern concept of war and its many cognates seem unfit to capture a situation in which wars are neither simply wars *between* states nor simply wars *within* states, but in which what looks like an international war

to one party will look like a civil war to the other, and no one will be in a position to produce any impartial judgment as to its true nature. Yet as I have argued in the previous section, before it was possible to speak of war in a recognizably modern sense as a contest between readily identifiable actors, wars were often waged under the conviction that it was an effective and fully legitimate means of creating social and political order out of its manifold negations and absences, thereby effectively producing the very actors and boundaries that since then have rendered the modern concept of war meaningful and analytically useful.

For better or worse, I think that the productive view of war has returned after the end of the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear war temporarily subsided. Soon enough laments of state failure were followed by pleas for intervention and arguments in favor of the restoration of state capacities by external actors. In an article that set the tone for much of the debate, Helman and Ratner (1992, 3) argued that '[a]s those states descend into violence and anarchy – imperiling their own citizens and threatening their neighbors through refugee flows, political instability, and random warfare – it is becoming clear that something must be done.' Since traditional ways of promoting economic and political development had failed, the international community was now faced with the task of creating an altogether new political environment for states riven by war, yet it was prevented to take constructive action by the 'extreme view that all the internal affairs of a state is beyond the scrutiny of the international community' (*ibid.* 9). Thus, in response to what was perceived as widespread state failure in the postcolonial world, the international community should adopt a stance of conservatorship, ranging from governance assistance to more intrusive forms such as the delegation of governmental authority to the United Nations, which amounted to subject failed states to trusteeship. The basic idea underwriting this proposal -- that failed states had to relinquish some of their external sovereignty in order to be saved from themselves -- would continue to

resonate with academics and policymakers in the coming decade (see Keohane 2003; Krasner 2004).

A more permissive attitude to military intervention began to emerge among international lawyers and policymakers during the same period. As summarized by one leading expert on humanitarian interventions, '[m]ilitary interventions in the name of humanity must be understood in the normative context in which they occur. The post-cold war normative context gives purpose and meaning to actions that were politically inconceivable not long ago' (Seybolt 2008, 7). Part of this normative context was provided by those who attempted to redefine the concept of sovereignty to entail the responsibility of states to protect their citizens from severe suffering, while arguing that the right to self-determination and non-intervention was contingent on their ability to fulfill these obligations (see Tesón 1988; Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1996; Wheeler 2000). Should states fail to fulfill their responsibilities, and should the international community have exhausted all other options to assist the target state, military intervention should be considered legitimate to the extent that it could be expected to succeed in alleviating human suffering. According to the doctrine that marked the culmination of these scattered efforts, states have a responsibility to protect their populations from atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In the event that states should fail to meet their obligations, the international community has a duty to assist them in a variety of ways. Should such assistance fail, the international community has a right to intervene, and with military means if absolutely necessary (see Evans and Sahnoun 2002; Evans 2006; Bellamy 2008).

As Orford (2011, 120) has argued, 'by focusing upon the de facto authority, the responsibility to protect concept implicitly asserts not only that an international community exists, but that

its authority to govern is, at least in situations of civil war and oppression, superior to that of the state.' Yet it was obvious to some that while interventions undertaken in the name of this doctrine did not offer long-term solutions to violent conflicts, they must be understood as 'an exercise in clearing away an obstacle so that a new political and social edifice can be built' (Seybolt 2008, 276). Whereas humanitarian interventions could be expected to solve the most acute problems caused by the failure of states to protect their own populations from suffering, they were not designed to handle the underlying causes of state failure that permitted humanitarian disasters to take place. To do this required failed states to be rebuilt more or less from scratch, as reflected in strategies of state-building and nation-building that subsequently emerged in response to the events of 9/11. As Rotberg (2002, 83) now pointed out, '[b]ecause failed states are hospitable to and harbor non-state actors – warlords and terrorists – understanding the dynamics of nation-state failure is central to the war against terrorism.' Thus the grounds on which intervention in failed states could be justified had changed almost overnight to include the imperative of combatting terrorism, all while the notion of democratic peace had evolved from a relatively innocent academic exercise into a full-blown justification for intervening in non-democratic states in the hope of creating the preconditions for international peace (Ish-Shalom 2013).

This is the moment when the productive view of war reappears with full force and starts to inform both academic and political discourse. Since a distinguishing mark of a failed state is the lack of effective control over its own territory and population, the paramount task is to restore state strength by means of strategic interventions in the domestic structures of such states (Fukuyama 2004a; Fukuyama 2004b). What was subject to disagreement among state-builders, however, was the means most appropriate to this end. While some scholars and policymakers had been deterred by previous failures to achieve political order by military

means and now placed their bet on softer measures, those who were disappointed by previous attempts to democratize and liberalize failed states argued that the creation of political order requires the prior establishment of a monopoly of violence by outside actors (see Paris 2004). From this it was a short step to argue that if it takes military muscle to restore order in states beset by discord, the more discord the bigger the muscle needs to be. In the many templates for nation-building that soon were available off the shelf from different think tanks, military intervention was regarded as the best available instrument to create order out of the chaos of rivaling warlords and terrorist groups now thought to be the defining characteristic of failed states (see Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

A perhaps somewhat extreme example is a widely circulated report with the revealing title *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*, from which we learn that nation-building 'involves the use of armed force as part of a broader effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors' (Dobbins et al. 2007, xvii). Yet such attempts at transformation must be encompassing in order to stand a chance of success. The measures the authors recommend largely fall under the heading of 'deconstruction, under which the intervening authorities first dismantle an existing state apparatus and then build a new one, in the process consciously disempowering some element of society and empowering others' (*ibid.*, xx). The primary objective of this enterprise is 'to make violent societies peaceful, not to make poor ones prosperous, or authoritarian ones democratic. Economic development and political reform are important instruments for effecting this transformation, but will not themselves ensure it' (*ibid.*, xxiii). Rather, what is more important to the success of such missions is the provision of security: 'That security is sometimes imperiled by contending armies and is always

threatened by criminals, gangs, and violence-prone political groups. International military forces are best suited for dealing with the first sort of threat, police with the rest' (*ibid.*, xxvi).

This does not imply that democracy was regarded as unimportant, only that it presupposes prior pacification in order to get off the ground, since '[o]nly when a modicum of security has been restored do prospects for democracy and sustained economic growth brighten' (Dobbins et al. 2007, xxxvii). Hence '[s]ocieties emerging from conflict may be able to wait for democracy, but they need a government immediately to provide law enforcement, education, and public health care' (*ibid.*, 135). So although the authors professed to believe in a light version of the democratic peace thesis, they were quick to caution their readers that 'newly emerging democracies, on the other hand, are often prone to external aggression and internal conflict' (*ibid.*, 190). The same goes for governmental institutions, the rule of law and civil society in conflicted societies: '[w]hile there should be as much continuity as possible with preexisting constitutional traditions, many conflicts are partly caused by the weakness or failure of the preceding institutional arrangements. Sometimes, significant innovation in institutional design is needed' (*ibid.*, 198).

Several things are striking about this report. First, nation-building presupposes an underlying claim to boundless sovereignty or empire that is taken for granted and hence left unwarranted. The resort to military force for the purpose of nation-building is never justified other than with loose references to the by now uncontroversial moral imperatives of protecting human rights and alleviating human suffering. While the authors argue that 'Western governments thus increasingly accept that nation-building has become an inescapable responsibility' and maintain that the practical responsibility for carrying such missions out must be divided roughly equally between actors with sufficient military capability (NATO) on the one hand,

and those able to provide the civilian components required for success (UN) on the other, no sustained attempt is being made to justify the claims to political authority implicit in the idea of nation-building beyond a broad reference to a Western responsibility to create order where there is chaos and suffering. Second, and consequently, there is no mention of the fact that military interventions might compromise the territorial integrity and legal personality of the targeted states. Whereas previous interventions focused on restoring a modicum of domestic order while at least aspiring to preserve the territorial integrity and legal standing of targeted states, nation-building presupposes that since these dimensions of statehood have already been compromised by ongoing turmoil, military intervention does not require any justification beyond that provided by the *de facto* chaos and suffering present on the ground. In this we hear a distant echo from those writers of the early-modern period who justified the use of force with reference to the disorder that otherwise would ensue and possibly spread to other countries if left unchecked. Third, there is a new insistence that public security has to be provided by an intervening military force before that security can be translated into the many blessings of a stable political order. Not only does this assume that an effective monopoly of violence is a necessary requirement of such an order, but that the absence of political order is the default condition of targeted states which they cannot hope to escape by themselves. Echoing early-modern sentiments about non-European peoples, their violent dispositions must be tempered with recourse to its more productive and civilizing forms.

IV. Conclusion

From the above analysis it is tempting to conclude that the belief that the modern international system is in the process of fracturing is little but a convenient justification for those imperial and global wars we have witnessed during the past decades. But although these wars indicate

a willingness to project military power across vast distances, and in defiance of older norms of non-intervention and territorial integrity, they aim at *conserving* the international system rather than replacing it with anything resembling a world empire. Yet even if waged with the explicit aim of protecting the international system from fracturing and disintegration, the fact that these wars reflect renewed confidence in the productive force of war is bound inspire both resistance and mimicry by those who perceive this as illegitimate hegemonic aspirations on behalf of Western powers. This is likely to lead to a reversal through which the destructive potentials of war are reactivated on revisionist grounds. So once out of the bottle, the productive view of war is highly contagious, and therefore also likely to become a potent catalyst of fracturing and disintegration in its own right if not subjected to moral and legal restraints of a new and better kind than those existing normative frameworks have been able to offer.

Unfortunately, however, we seem not very well equipped to provide any such normative foundations. Since many critical theorists take violence to be constitutive or transformative of political order, they invite a short circuit between their starting points and the very object of their critique. This is no more evident than in the recent re-appropriation of the works of Carl Schmitt by critical international theorists (see Teschke 2011). Following his lead, a popular way of criticizing humanitarian interventions is to point out that any appeal to humanity is but a fig leaf intended to conceal the real and cynical political aspirations on behalf of the intervening powers (see Zolo 2002). Another way of delegitimizing the imperial aspirations of the West is by rejecting ’every resurrection of eschatological desire, and to affirm conflict as the necessary and salutary basis of political life’ (Rasch 2004, 3). A more sophisticated approach is to suggest that it is ‘not sufficient to claim that globalization causes war and other violent conflict but rather that war itself is a form of interconnection’ (Barkawi 2006, 92). A

critical and postcolonial understanding of war must therefore recognize that 'war is transformative of world politics and of the people and places it reaches out and touches' (*ibid*., 167). Finally, I have already noted how Jabri invokes violence as a constitutive force. But unlike other critical theorists, she makes an effort to engage contemporary practices of war from a critical cosmopolitan perspective. Since all universalistic claims are likely to be hotly contested, cosmopolitanism must incorporate this antagonism into its very core. One cannot assume that a genuine world community is in existence or even that it is an attainable goal, but must instead assume 'an understanding of universality that is always in question, a universality that does not subsume conflict, but rather recognises the ever present condition of struggle and confrontation against all totalising practices, including those that seek cultural exclusion and domination' (Jabri 2007, 185).

To my mind, conclusions like these are but evidence of the contagiousness of the productive view of war, since if we believe that the sociopolitical world is war all the way down, then the only remaining option seems to be to go to war against war, thus perpetuating the very predicament that our criticism promises to escape. A more fruitful line of inquiry – one that I have attempted to pursue in this article – would be to historicize the productive view of war in the hope of lessening its grip on our political imagination and increasing the scope of human responsibility in relation to its contemporary manifestations. Doing this means not only urging restraint on the use of force in world politics, but also and perhaps more importantly, abandoning the deeply entrenched notion that political order is possible and legitimate only as a consequence of the successful use of force against those who otherwise would pose a threat to that order. To my mind, if we want a less violent world, this assumption must abandoned and replaced by conceptions of political order that are firmly based on notions of consent and cooperation rather than on a logic of coercion and subjugation.

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