War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Widening the Debate

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While the debate on the role of war in state development in early modern Europe has ranged widely, the participants have not answered its most fundamental question to the satisfaction of most historians. The difficulty has been how to assess whether war was more important than other factors as a driver of state formation. In practice it is more fruitful to study the role of war within a multi-causal model, but to do this the interaction between war and other factors such as judicial, religious, ideological, and social change must be studied, preferably in detail but in comparative context.

At first sight it might be thought that the debate on the role of war in state development in early modern Europe is quite wide enough already. It crosses the disciplinary boundaries between history, sociology, and political science. It subsumes the ever more ramified debate on the ‘military revolution’ thesis first propounded by Michael Roberts in 1955 and elaborated by Geoffrey Parker in 1988.1 It has spread its influence geographically: from at least Parker’s intervention it has been tied to the origins of European global dominance, and recently attention has been focused on what eastern European developments can tell us that western European cannot, and on why China did not have the same sort of state-building military revolution as Europe.2 Discussion has drawn in the fourteenth century as the proposed site for an infantry revolution, the fifteenth century as the scene of a gunpowder revolution, the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the locus for a more convincing all-round military revolution than Roberts’s, and the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the

period when the fiscal pressures of war led rulers to develop lasting institutions in which they could negotiate effectively with their subjects to mobilize their resources.\textsuperscript{3} Those taking the long view now have to reckon with a military revolution lasting 500 years and at length changing political balances across the world.\textsuperscript{4} Any further spread might be thought to presage collapse.

Yet in the terms in which it has mostly been conducted, the debate seems incapable of answering its most important question to the satisfaction of historians. Charles Tilly’s contention that ‘War made the state, and the state made war’ throws down a gauntlet to those who would explain the development of European states primarily in other ways, whether as the outworking of the ideological inheritance of empires and churches, the result of princely provision of justice, the means for the enforcement of class interest, or a contingent and unique series of struggles for political power and good government within each polity.\textsuperscript{5} The issue is particularly pressing for the early modern period, site of the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the Renaissance, the reception of Roman law, the ‘general crisis of the seventeenth century’, the ‘transition from feudalism to capitalism’, and so on. Somehow we need to test the importance of war against that of other factors, and for various reasons the debate conducted in recent decades is not successful in doing so. It is characteristic that those seeking to summarize the findings of 50 years of contention reach such qualified conclusions as that war ‘was not the only factor leading to change, and its effects upon the growth of the state were both more complex, and more variable, than Tilly and others would allow’, that ‘it is … unclear that war led to the development of more “modern” state forms’, that ‘war was not a discrete force acting on states with a relentless modernizing pressure’, or that, while armed forces and governments grew stronger in a series of ‘mutually reinforcing processes’, this was only part of a much larger transformation of European states and societies.\textsuperscript{6}

Tilly’s dictum fitted happily with Roberts’s original contention that in the military revolution ‘the transformation in the scale of war led inevitably to an increase in the authority of the state’, leading rulers to centralize and modernize in administration, innovate in taxation,
cultivate national wealth by mercantilist economic policies, order their noble subjects in hierarchies of military and administrative service, subvert municipal liberties, and practise ‘ever-increasing interference in the lives of their subjects’. 7 Indeed, Tilly’s fellow sociologists and political scientists have by and large been more enthusiastic advocates of the military revolution than have Roberts’s fellow historians. 8 They have been happier than historians to judge states primarily by the Weberian definition of ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’, and therefore happier to assimilate external to internal coercion and happier to search for developments in the state’s powers of coercion as the benchmark of its maturity. 9 They have also tended to judge the ‘modern state’, the rise of which was to be explained, from the perspective of the mid-twentieth century, when it seemed evident that the state had achieved its maximum extent in conditions of global war, whether hot or cold. How far a perceived ‘decline of the state’ from the late twentieth century may change such perspectives, as new challenges develop to the identity and independence of the national state, will be interesting to see. 10 Already Tilly’s line charting the decline in the numbers of European states from well over 80 in 1490 to around 30 in 1890 and 25 in 1918 has deviated intriguingly towards three dozen or more states but one European Union. 11

Historians, in contrast, have often concentrated on the narrowly military inputs of Roberts’s equation, infantry fire-power and the tactics and standing forces needed to harness it, or on Parker’s major additions to them, gunned sailing ships and the expensive trace italienne fortifications capable of resisting siege artillery, rather than on the state-building outputs. And when they have pondered the latter, the result has sometimes been the trading of single case-studies to argue opposite cases: did the advent of the trace italienne lessen the viability of small states, as Siena in the 1550s would suggest, or bolster it, as has been maintained for Mantua in the 1620s? 12

Some historians, it is true, have addressed the debate in a more tangential but satisfying way by investigating the war-making capacity of individual states. Tony Thompson found anything but a straightforward link between military change and state growth in Spain in its

60 years of near-constant war on several fronts from 1560. The size and cost of the military establishment certainly increased, and the top levels of military administration expanded and became more professional. But expansion did not mean rationalization, and confusion and feuding among bureaucratic bodies and between parts of the composite Spanish monarchy dogged military undertakings. Corruption, nepotism, and resistance to close supervision were constants. The financial machinery staggered under the impossibility of meeting assignments and the mounting burden of state debt. Steadily, and against the better judgement of kings and ministers, a system of administración, or direct recruitment and control by government officials of troops, ships, and crews directly funded from central government, with accompanying state control of military industries, was driven out by one of asiento, or devolution of responsibility for military activity onto private contractors or noble landlords and other local authorities funded by private financiers with a call on future government income. Here war brought the decay of the state rather than its development, ‘the failure of centralized, absolutist government’ with ‘a major readjustment of social authority, and hence ultimately of political power within the state … to the detriment of the Crown’.13

For James Wood, sixteenth-century France likewise demonstrated at best ‘the incomplete nature of the military revolution’ in the efforts of the royal army to fight the civil wars after 1562.14 The compagnies d’ordonnance of noble gendarmerie and the royal artillery train emerge from his study as very brittle instruments of internal coercion, a significant issue since the gendarmerie has long been seen as an ‘epoch-making arrangement’, first of the standing armies that would become ‘the very backbone of the new centralised greater state’, while cannon have been seen as vital in forcing the ‘submission to the increasingly more powerful state’ of ‘local entities’.15 The French armies may have been able to fight the mighty Habsburg realms to a standstill in the wars of 1494–1559, but they were quite unable to break the determined resistance of the French Protestant minority. Troop dispositions and administrative and financial structures designed to defend the frontiers were hard to adapt against internal enemies. Armies plundered what they needed from the civilians they were meant to be protecting, and thus destroyed the tax base that was supposed to support them. In two decades of war, rapid attrition among noble commanders and gendarmes left leadership in the hands of those who had known nothing

but civil war, and the result was a decline into warlordism. Thus France passed through a ‘cycle of military insufficiency’. In its next major external test, the wars against the Habsburgs under Richelieu, as David Parrott has shown, the French military system coped by compromise, clientelism, decentralization, and desperate expedients rather than by centralization, bureaucracy, and rational planning. As an underpaid and disorderly soldiery preyed almost at will on the civilian population, the ‘notion that a more disciplined and ordered society was emerging through the demands of military expansion would have seemed a mockery to contemporary Frenchmen’.17

We might go on: Olaf van Nimwegen has recently added the Dutch army of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the prime site for the tactical innovations Roberts thought drove the military revolution, to the list of forces that limped through campaigns under-strength, under-organized, and decidedly un-modern. Like others, he has stressed that the later seventeenth century saw more impressive increases in army sizes and more convincing improvements in organization and supply than the earlier decades emphasized by Roberts, just as Jan Glete has shown that the later seventeenth century was the age of the first great permanent battle fleets. Yet this recognition is little comfort to the advocates of military revolution as an agent of modernizing political change, as it has coincided with a reassessment of later seventeenth-century ‘absolutism’ as a system of princely compromise with the social, political, economic, and dynastic interests of the – predominantly hereditary noble – elite. Such compromises, rather than bureaucratic modernization, have been used to explain the effectiveness of the armed forces of Louis XIV’s France. Even the Prussian military state, long the extreme example of planned and confrontational military-fiscal state-building, can be seen as ‘essentially contingent and consensual’, prospering by working with the grain of aristocratic ambition and the natural structures of village life. For at least one political scientist, indeed, such compromises have suggested that in early modern Europe war did not maximize the power of the state to the degree that it did in forging imperial China, but rather ‘deformed the state through self-weakening expedients’.22

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16 Wood, King’s Army, p. 306.
22 Hui, War and State Formation, pp. 48–50, 109–26, 139–42, 190–95.
A more dynamic analysis has been provided by Jan Glete in his use of Spain, Sweden, and the Dutch Republic to investigate ‘the emergence of the fiscal-military state as a complex organisation’. Drawing on ideas from economic sociology and engaging critically with both the historians of the military revolution and the sociologists of state formation, Glete has suggested that some early modern states managed to deploy resources and new technologies more effectively than their competitors, and thus to prosper in war and sell effective protection to their subjects at an acceptable price. They did so by providing for the negotiation of complex contractual relationships between rulers, subjects, bureaucrats, and armed forces and the facilitation of social entrepreneurship. His approach thus circumvents the awkward answers found by those who test early modern armies and states against absolute standards of efficiency or modernity, by asking which armies and supporting systems worked best in competition with their opponents, and why. Similar agendas, though without the same theoretical elaboration, have been pursued for mid-seventeenth-century England and for a range of Baltic states between the 1620s and the 1700s. What this approach still does not provide, however, is an investigation of how the effort to become militarily effective shaped the state overall, or a comparison of the effects of military-fiscal effort with those of other forces shaping the state, except in so far as Glete might be taken to claim that the provision of protection against violence was so much the most important motive for the creation of complex organizations for negotiating between political interests and co-ordinating men and resources that it, above all, shaped the model towards which most European states tended as they developed from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards. This analysis thus cannot engage directly, for example, with Wayne te Brake’s in some ways analogous attempt to interpret the political development of many early modern European polities in terms of patterns of political negotiation between different social groups, which concludes that the ‘relatively rare political coalitions’ on which ‘the foundations of enforceable territorial sovereignties’ rested were built more on ‘the common bond of religious ideology’ than on princely war-making.

If historians examining military developments have mostly concentrated on one country (or several for comparative purposes) and have asked what made states militarily effective, some sociologists have freely compared many polities to ask how the pressures of war led

some to develop as constitutional monarchies and others as autocracies, on the basis that ‘domestic resource mobilisation is the crucial intermediary between warfare and constitutional change’. In such an analysis, the key to differing constitutional outcomes may be sought in the degree to which the wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be fought on an occasional basis or using resources other than those of the subject population. In a more complex model, it may be sought in the interplay of the nature of the inheritance of early medieval local government in different polities, the timing of the onset of ‘sustained geopolitical competition’, and the degree of independent influence of strong representative assemblies, factors which might interact to produce not just absolutist or constitutional states but bureaucratic or patrimonial versions of each: thus Brandenburg-Prussia’s was a bureaucratic absolutism but France’s a patrimonial variety, Sweden’s a bureaucratic constitutionalism but Hungary’s a patrimonial. Such classifications are enlightening, but it is striking how far they depend on the findings of historians working on individual countries. Until about 25 years ago, France would surely have been more readily seen as a model of bureaucratic advance in the age of Richelieu, Colbert, and Louvois than as a paradigm of clientage and compromise. And such analyses assume on the basis of previous literature that military competition was the main driver of state formation, rather than demonstrating it by comparison with other factors.

There are sociologists against whom this criticism cannot be levelled. Charles Tilly and Michael Mann have developed all-embracing models positioning war at the centre of a process of state development as the product of the interaction of different fields of power and explicitly engaging with other explanations for state growth. For Tilly the fields were two: capital, incarnated in cities and markets, and coercion, incarnated in states and armies, though their relationship in any area must be seen in its geopolitical context. Such flexible models enable differences between states to be read as differences in the contribution of different factors in the model to their development. Thus for Tilly the Venetian Republic and Russia occupied opposite ends of the spectrum of European states, the first intensely rich in capital but poor in coercion, the second rich in coercion but poor in capital. In between lay rather more coercive or rather more capitalized polities – such as Brandenburg-Prussia and the Dutch Republic – and at the centre of the spectrum, forming the ideal to which subsequent...

31 Downing, Military Revolution, p. xi; Ertman, Birth of the Leviathan, pp. 1–4.
national states would aspire, powerful realms of effectively capitalized coercion such as England and France.  

For all their clarity of structure, such models present a dauntingly wide range of ways in which wars might shape the state. Tilly defined seven areas of state activity affected by war. Four are directly linked to the coercive aspects of state power: war-making (against external enemies), state-making (against internal rivals of the ruling power), protection (of the state’s clients, such as trading corporations, against their enemies), and extraction (from the subject population of the resources necessary to exercise coercion). Three are more tangentially linked to coercion: adjudication (of disputes between subjects), distribution (of goods among subjects), and production (of goods and services, initially for military purposes but later more widely). Yet it is not clear how one might prove from this model that adjudication, for example, was driven by the need to conciliate the subject population in order the better to command their resources for military purposes, unless it could be shown that in comparable polities internal judicial institutions developed faster in those more deeply engaged in external military competition. Ideas are denied any independent force in such matters by Tilly, a feature which presumably made the historian who has most closely adopted Tilly’s model for a general history of European state development, Wim Blockmans, uncomfortable, since he added cultures, incarnated in peoples, to capital-driven markets and coercive states in his analysis. Likewise Michael Mann found he needed four types of power, economic, military, political, and ideological, to construct a credible model, and his separation of political power from military suggests the difficulties with Tilly’s single sphere of coercion.

The strongest argument Tilly and Mann were able to produce for the primacy of war was fiscal. Tilly commented that budgets, taxes, and debts reflect war’s centrality. Mann bolstered his account of state development by analysis of English fiscal data from the twelfth century to the eighteenth. The approach is one they have in common with some political scientists, who have for example analysed fiscal statistics in the attempt to separate out the seven wars between 1494 and 1945 most important in shaping modern statehood. Among historians, those who have studied the fiscal institutions of early modern European states have produced a narrative of state growth not only

36 Mann, Sources, pp. 2, 10–11, 25–27.
37 Tilly, Coercion, pp. 74–75.
38 Mann, Sources, pp. 416–99.

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more consensually held than that of the military historians, but also subtly set in its social context, as the regressive or progressive impacts of different levies, the sources of government loans, and the beneficiaries of state expenditure are as susceptible to quantitative investigation as the overall burden of taxation on society. The politics of taxation, indeed, lies at the heart of James Tracy’s compelling recent account of Charles V’s efforts to mobilize his unwieldy multiple monarchy and of their effects on his various realms.

It is hard to doubt that it was military needs that drove up taxation levels and dragged competing European states at various times through the transition from a demesne state, in which the ruler’s revenues mostly came from landholdings and judicial profits, to a tax state, in which the government more or less efficiently taxed the wealth of its subjects. Both the high proportions of expenditure dedicated to war and the coincidence between lasting innovations in taxation and desperate military need amply serve to prove the case. It fits, too, with the visible connection, at least in the long run, between a state’s military effectiveness and the wealth of the economies under its control, Tilly’s interplay between ‘capital’ and ‘coercion’, William McNeill’s relationship between ‘military power and money power’, Paul Kennedy’s ‘interaction between economics and strategy’. But all this starts from the point that the state’s primary identity is as a participant in inter-state competition and that the subject’s primary relationship with the state is one of coercion and extraction, best quantified in fiscal terms. Mann, at least, recognized its Achilles heel, qualifying his endorsement of Tilly’s verdict that war was central to state growth with the recognition that reliance on such statistics underestimates the importance of the state’s judicial functions.

Judicial growth can of course be measured, in terms of both litigation and legislation. In the first half of the sixteenth century, for example, the volume of business in each of the English central courts increased dramatically, the equity courts of Chancery, Star Chamber, and Requests going from strength to strength and drawing in increasing business from geographically peripheral and administratively anomalous areas, while the older courts of King’s Bench and Common Pleas dipped but then revived forcefully. In the Netherlands the average number of surviving sentences issued by the Grote Raad at Mechelen tripled between 1500 and 1550, and it drew in increasing

43 Mann, Sources, pp. 433, 511–12.
business from the peripheral provinces; in the 1530s there were twice as many appeals from Luxembourg as there had been in the 1520s, and more than in all the years from 1471 to 1520 combined.45 Henry VII’s parliaments passed 192 statutes in a reign of 24 years, whereas the last seven years of Henry VIII’s reign alone produced 230.46 Philip II issued on average 64 ordinances a year where Charles V had issued 37.47 But sociologists seem not to want to set such statistics against those of taxation and army growth, and historians seem rarely to have found a framework in which both types of growth can be measured alongside one another. It is characteristic that Alan Harding, arguing that lawyers and the ‘public culture based on the administration of justice’ they created were more important in state-building than soldiers or tax officials, engaged with arguments for the importance of war by mere negation. The state, he concluded, was ‘not fundamentally a concentration of power hardened in war with other powers, but a country’s internal peace and order understood as a microcosm of an ordered universe’.48

Others, to be fair, have subsumed war into their models, while dismissing its primary importance. Joseph Strayer, keen to argue that ‘the process of state-building’ was driven on by internal judicial, administrative, and ideological developments and was usually ‘checked, or even set back’ by war, admitted that wars did consolidate state territories.49 Martin van Creveld, placing his stress on the evolution and institutional incarnation of the idea of the modern sovereign state, saw the increased coercive, extractive, and bureaucratic powers of states from the seventeenth century as the symptoms rather than the causes of state growth.50 Perry Anderson, having characterized the absolutist state as ‘a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination’, argued that such states were in practice designed for war because fighting for territory was ‘possibly the most rational and rapid single mode of expansion of surplus extraction available for any given ruling class under feudalism’.51 Even Michel Foucault, though his vision of power was so all-pervasive that it is difficult to separate out the state, let alone the effect of its wars, from his model, saw military institutions and practices – the barracks as a disciplinary enclosure, musket

50 Van Creveld, Rise and Decline, pp. 52–58, 127–84.
drill as the social construction of ‘docile bodies’ – as symptomatic of wider changes. Yet none of these approaches has done much to convince those who place their primary emphasis on war.

An opportunity for historians to consider these different models of state formation alongside each other and to weigh up the relative importance of different factors in state formation might have been provided by the European Science Foundation project on ‘The Origins of the Modern State in Europe, 13th–18th Centuries’. The project has resulted in the publication of seven volumes addressing different themes in state development, each rich in argument and detail across an impressive geographical and chronological range. But the contributors to different volumes were (understandably, given the scale of the enterprise) left free to publish mutually incompatible arguments or, conversely, to neglect the areas of possible interaction between their respective themes. The team investigating ‘war and competition between states’ focused, with a few exceptions, either on the ideology and practice of war and diplomacy or on the military institutions of individual countries, rather than on the wider social and political context of war and its impact on state development. Their editor suggested that ‘the problem of war should be present – emphatically, ubiquitously present – within each of the six other themes in this series on the origins of the modern state’, but his colleagues producing the other volumes evidently did not agree, and the impact of war can be hard to locate in the series except in its fiscal component. Martial themes intruded, as popular religious fervour supported messianic crusading princes, soldiers and taxes provoked communal resistance movements, invasions disrupted the normal relations of local elites and central government, or rivalry between units of ‘socio-political concentration’ promoted ‘the birth of absolutism’ and ‘the process of individualization’. But other contributors flatly contradicted Philippe Contamine’s assertion that ‘war was the most powerful element in the development of states, or rather of “the state”’. Judicial centralization rather than military mobilization, for example, was argued to be ‘the main force behind … the formation of the

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53 Tilly, *Coercion*, p. 36; Mann, *Sources*, p. 511.
Netherlandish state’ in the Burgundian-Habsburg period, bringing with it princely sovereignty, new forms of citizenship, bureaucratization evident in central and provincial councils, and a centralization of power measurable in the flow of lawsuits.58

In practice those historians who have come closest to evaluating the respective importance of war and other factors in a controlled way are either those arguing over the centrality of war to particular political systems, or those analysing the relationship between individual provinces and the larger polities of which they formed part. As an example of the former we might take the debate over the thesis that later medieval England faced the choice between development as a ‘law state’ or as a ‘war state’, and that the political compromises necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the ‘war state’ inhibited and indeed counteracted the development of the ‘law state’, a debate in which the most convincing answer is that rather than being opposites, law and war interacted in a process of ‘the growth of a complex political society’.59

Provincial studies are able to illustrate in a more textured way the impact of different forces and their outworking through complex political and social negotiation. For the early sixteenth century we might compare David Potter’s study of Picardy, James Tracy’s of Holland, and Tim Thornton’s of Cheshire.60 Potter’s was essentially a study of the interaction of war and politics, though it allowed for the impact of ideological, judicial, economic, social, and religious change. Tracy’s and Thornton’s books separated more explicitly the judicial, religious, and economic aspects of negotiation between centre and locality from the military and fiscal. None provided unequivocal comfort for the advocates of war-driven state formation. While war served to knit Picardy tightly into the French state through intertwining networks of military command, fiscal extraction, merchant contracting, noble service, and court patronage, it blighted the local economy, broke down systems of supply and administration, and pushed state finances to the point of collapse in the 1550s, generating political tensions that would feed into civil war. In Holland, political consolidation under the pressures of military, political, economic, and religious change was more effective at the provincial than at the national level, preparing the ground for the successful revolt of the 1570s. Cheshire saw some increase in the powers of central government to legislate, do justice,

regulate religious life, tax, and raise men, but war, like other forces, promoted the adaptation rather than the elimination of provincial autonomy. Another discouragement to the model-builders is that the answers to general questions suggested by these studies are heavily dependent on the social, political, and strategic circumstances of each particular province at the particular time studied.

Equally suggestive of the possibilities of studying the impact of war in a more rounded way is Michael Mallett and John Hale’s study of the Venetian experience. Venice moved from a military establishment geared for expansion in the fifteenth century to one combining standing forces, short-term mercenaries, militias, fortifications, artillery, and regulation by civilian bureaucrats in a strong defensive system in the sixteenth. Each element of this system related in different ways to the structures of government and society in the complex Venetian dominions. Noble heavy cavalrymen were recruited from the aristocracies of subject towns, and retained mercenary captains were granted rural fiefs in Venice’s hinterland. The ready arming of mainland peasant militiamen symbolized Venice’s trust in its subjects, as did the republic’s preparedness to fortify subject cities without building garrisoned citadels which could be used to hold down the citizens. Venetian nobles on their way to higher administrative, judicial, and diplomatic posts acted as paymasters, supply officers, and inspectors of fortifications. In all this Mallett and Hale detected no great leaps forward in bureaucratic structures or fiscal-military strength, but their work suggests how a study that related the impact of war on all these groups to the impact of other types of social and political change might provide a clearer picture of war’s function in the development of the state.

Such a study is what we envisaged when we set out on a research project to evaluate the relative importance of war as a driver for state formation in England and the Netherlands between 1477 and 1559. We succeeded – to what degree the readers of the resulting book must judge – in describing from detailed archival evidence the impact of war on power relations of many kinds involving towns, nobles, and subjects in general in the two polities. We detected some of the ways in which war indeed built the state, increasing princely intervention in towns, integratingnobles as provincial governors and campaign generals, intensifying the mutual obligations of prince and people, and so on. We examined the relationships between rulers and nobles, town elites,


62 The project was kindly funded from 1999 to 2002 by the Arts and Humanities Research Board. The results of our research as they illuminate the ways in which the two polities were articulated for war and the effects of war on their political structures are presented in S. Gunn, D. Grummitt and H. Cools, *War, State and Society in England and the Netherlands, 1477–1559* (Oxford, 2007).
mercenary contractors, and component parts in multiple monarchies that enabled the deployment of much larger armies and navies in the 1540s and 1550s than in fifteenth-century campaigns, and the construction of the first wave of gunpowder-proof fortifications in northwestern Europe. We suggested that comparison between England and the Netherlands and between different towns and noble families within each polity brought out the different balances between war and other factors at different times and in different places. Thus religious policy was apparently more important than war in shaping the state’s powers over individuals in England and the reverse was the case in the Netherlands; thus harvest failure and export difficulties did more than war to stimulate government intervention in the economy in England and the reverse was the case in the Netherlands; thus war was more important in the relations between central government and towns on the coasts of England than inland. But to have researched the effects of changes in litigation, in princely policy towards the church, in responses to the social problems caused by population growth, in the same detail across the same period and the same range of case studies, would have been beyond our capacities. It may perhaps be that a better-designed collaborative project could achieve such a wide comparative view; it is more likely that at least a series of studies asking roughly similar questions might enable the construction of a clearer picture of the relative importance of different forces at different times.

For we share the conviction of Wolfgang Reinhard that the search for monocausal explanations for state growth is a forlorn one, that the ‘dilemma’ of ‘the abundance of theories’ about ‘the process of state formation’ ‘can be solved by the simple means of an eclectic synthesis’.63 If the procedure is simple, the synthesis need not be. Indeed, Reinhard’s own is not, giving war an important but not unique role in a multi-layered exploration of the developing state as an enterprise led in their own interests, but under various ideological, economic, and geopolitical stimuli, by its power elites, an approach that dovetails well, as we have seen, with recent trends in the analysis of the ‘absolutist’ regimes supposedly born of the military revolution.64 It can thus leave room for the greater or lesser importance of different factors at different times, in different places and acting on different parts of society. In effect this approach also characterizes the most ambitious recent attempt to characterize the early modern English state, that by Michael Braddick. Braddick analyses English state formation along four axes: the fiscal-military state, vastly strengthened during and after the crises of the mid-seventeenth century, is shown to have developed

at a different speed and under different stimuli from the patriarchal, confessional, and dynastic aspects of statehood.\textsuperscript{65} Such flexibility allows for the possibility that states viewed from the localities and in their full social depth at times of comparatively low fiscal-military pressure but comparatively high religious and economic strain and judicial ambition – the English state from 1550 to 1640, for example – might show considerable intensification of activity with barely any contribution from the pressures of war.\textsuperscript{66}

Such an approach frees the historian not only to conduct the sort of detailed research assessing the role of war that we have ventured for England and the Netherlands, but also to ask other significant questions often unaddressed in the present literature. If agency is to be restored to historical actors and the context in which their decisions were taken is to be understood, there is a need for studies of their thought-world that set war in context.\textsuperscript{67} Studies of strategic decision-making such as Geoffrey Parker’s of Philip II are a good antidote to ideas of rational military state-building from above, but ideally there is a need to understand what Philip thought about his duties to do justice, to preserve the church, to care for the poor, and so on, and how those fitted with his thought on war.\textsuperscript{68} The nature of the sources, of course, makes such study difficult, but somehow historians have to be able to see the whole exercise of governing from above and the possibilities for the communication of, and identification with, rulers’ views among their subjects. This must be done without falling into the sort of speculative overgeneralization that befell the efforts of a previous generation to identify the spread of neo-Stoic self-discipline and social discipline or civilizingcourtly self-control among rulers, noblemen, and army recruits alike.\textsuperscript{69} Imaginative use of source material other than state papers – maps are a good example – should help in the task.\textsuperscript{70}

Flexibility should also make it possible to focus on the interaction between forces too often analysed as competitors in the contest to explain state formation. Military policy and religious policy, for example, seem to have worked against each other in the Habsburg Netherlands, as German Protestant mercenaries worshipped freely in services attended by Netherlanders who could be burned for holding what the troops’ chaplains taught. In England war and religious

\textsuperscript{66} S. Hindle, \textit{The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640} (Basingstoke, 2000).
\textsuperscript{68} G. Parker, \textit{The Grand Strategy of Philip II} (New Haven, CT, 1998).
\textsuperscript{70} D. Buisseret, ed., \textit{Monarchs, Ministers and Maps: The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe} (Chicago, IL, 1992).
change were more capable of reinforcing each other, as soldiers of the Calais garrison were sworn to defend Henry VIII’s authority against papal usurpation as well as French attack. In both polities the co-operation of town authorities was important to central government in organizing for war, but in the Netherlands intrusive heresy investigations served to alienate urban elites, while their English equivalents were entrusted with the implementation of religious change and empowered by the confiscation of ecclesiastical property.\(^{71}\)

Other varieties of change interacted with war in similarly complex but significant ways. Developments in military technology and organization and court-based political centralization combined to promote noble commanders who were more generals leading expert clienteles than warlords drawing on their landed influence to lead local society to war. Military need and the vision of a united sovereign state came together in the Habsburgs’ bans on their subjects serving other rulers in war, since ‘subjects are obliged to serve and stand by their own natural prince and fatherland before all other lords’, and in the Tudors’ increasing use of the militia service obligation of all able-bodied males to recruit field armies.\(^{72}\) Military strength and economic health came together in the English government’s concern to reverse the growth of pasture farming at the expense of arable, which seemed to bring not only high bread prices but also the substitution of feeble shepherds for manly ploughmen in the national armed forces. Military efficiency and the urge for moral discipline came together in Charles V’s concern that his soldiers’ ‘infamous, indecent and abominable’ swearing was imitated by ‘young people and children’ to the great scandal of their parents, or in English towns’ prosecutions of unruly young men for not doing their archery practice.\(^{73}\)

Perhaps the most fruitful field of investigation is the complex interplay between war and justice. While war might disrupt the operations of justice, the creation or reconstruction of judicial institutions might be justified by the need to sort out the divisions and confusions bred by years of war, and cases might be drawn into superior jurisdictions precisely because of the impracticality of litigation in war-torn areas.\(^{74}\)


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The different effects of war on litigation in different polities are suggested by a comparison of the Grote Raad at Mechelen and the Court of Chancery at Westminster. In the decades after 1477, when the power of Burgundian-Habsburg central jurisdiction was in retreat, war-related litigation was an important factor in stimulating the survival and recovery of the Grote Raad. Some years 17 or 18% of its cases arose from problems connected with war, and the average for the years 1477–99 was 10%. As recovery took hold and the total volume of litigation increased, so the proportion derived from war declined. Yet it still remained far above the proportion of war-related cases represented among surviving bills to Chancery in an England longer centralized and less afflicted by war, which ran at below half of 1% in sampled periods between the 1470s and 1550s.

There are many other ways in which the development of the judicial and military functions of the state might be related to one another. The same rhetoric of princely sovereignty ran through assertions of judicial supremacy and legal uniformity and demands for wartime taxes and military service. War bred theft, vagrancy, poaching, and other offences, and actually inhibited the state’s achievement of the Weberian monopoly of violence because of the need to encourage the ownership of weapons for local defence; yet wartime conditions encouraged the assertion of extreme investigatory and coercive powers against individuals such as vagrant ex-soldiers. At regional level, bodies such as the Council of Holland or the Council of the North might exercise both judicial functions and those related to military co-ordination, just as town councils did. The judicial functions attributed to noblemen exercising military command seem to have served as some compensation for the undermining of nobles’ independent local jurisdiction by centralizing princely courts of law. On the other hand, failure to exercise convincing military leadership of the regional community might weaken the power of noble houses to settle disputes by good lordship and arbitration. Local tribunals might assert themselves against central power by trying miscreant soldiers for their offences against the civilian population. Such interactions can be profitably studied from archival records and reflected upon with wider questions in mind about the impact of war on government and society. Indeed they must be, if historians are to make progress in setting the impact of war in its proper contexts.

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75 Figures are calculated from Smidt and Strubbe, Chronologische lijsten, I–V. For the overall trend see op. cit., VI, p. viii.
76 Figures are calculated from List of Early Chancery Proceedings Preserved in the Public Record Office, vols 2, 6, 10, Public Record Office Lists and Indexes, 16, 48, 55 (1903–36).
78 Gunn et al., War, State and Society, pp. 44, 109–11, 162–63, 201–03, 274.
79 For an attempt at synthesis along these lines, see S.J. Gunn, ‘War and the Emergence of the State: Western Europe, 1350–1600’, forthcoming in D. Trim and F. Tallett, eds, European Warfare, 1350–1750 (Cambridge, in press).
It is doubtless optimistic to suggest that the debate on war and state formation in early modern Europe might be so reorientated as to enable all participants to contribute on mutually agreed terms and with mutually acceptable classes of argument and evidence. Sociologists will continue to debate primarily with sociologists, historians with historians. Both groups may continue to disagree among themselves about the most important characteristics of the ‘modern state’ whose origins they are seeking. The ‘parachutists’, to use Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s distinction, will continue to search for workable models and convincingly wide-ranging explanations of long-term change, the ‘truffle-hunters’ to search for enlightening sources and convincingly complex evocations of past reality. But if the models can be built to incorporate more of the source-based arguments about different drivers of state growth and the archive-based studies can ask more of the questions about the relative importance of different factors in political change suggested by the models, then both should benefit, and we should all stand more chance of deciding whether, when, how, and how uniquely war made the state. If in one sense that constitutes widening the debate, then perhaps the debate does need widening.

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