

Book Reviews

The Rise and Decline of the State. By Martin van Creveld. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp. 439. ISBN 0 521 65190 5.

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The state, which since the middle of the seventeenth century has been the most important and most characteristic of all modern institutions, is in decline. From Western Europe to Africa, either voluntarily or involuntarily, many existing states are either combining into larger communities or falling apart. Regardless of whether they fall apart or combine, already now many of their functions are being taken over by a variety of organizations which, whatever their precise nature is, they are not states. This is the main theme of Creveld's book.

Globally speaking, the international system is moving away from an assembly of distinct, territorial, sovereign, legally equal states toward different, more hierarchical, and in many ways more complicated structures. As far as individual states are concerned, there are good reasons to think that many of them will soon no longer be either willing or able to control and protect the political, military, economic, social, and cultural lives of their citizens to the extent that they used to.

Needless to say, these developments affect each and every individual now living on this planet. In some places they will proceed peacefully, but in others they are likely to result in—indeed are already leading to—upheavals as profound, and possibly as bloody, as those that propelled humanity out of the Middle Ages into the Modern

World. Whether the direction of change is desirable, as some hope, or undesirable, as others fear, remains to be seen.

In this volume Creveld makes an attempt to look into the future of the state by examining its past: that is, its prehistory, growth, maturation, and apotheosis, and the way in which it spread all over the world. The author divides the book into six chapters. Chapter one deals with the period when there were no states and, originally at any rate, not even government in the sense of the organized power that some men exercise over others. Chapter two covers the period from approximately 1300 to 1648 (the Treaty of Westphalia); it shows how the state emerged out of the Middle Ages by fighting, and overcoming, ecclesiastical and imperial universalism on the one hand and feudal and urban particularism on the other. Chapter three continues the story from 1648 to the French Revolution. This period led to the separation of the state from "civil society" and the creation of many of its most characteristic institutions including its bureaucracy, its statistical infrastructure, its armed forces, its police apparatus and its prisons.

The fourth chapter explains how states, having discovered the forces of nationalism as first proclaimed by writers like Moser and Herder, transformed themselves from instruments for imposing law and order into "secular gods," and how, having increased their strength out of all proportion by invading their citizens' minds and systematically picking their pockets, they used that might to fight each other (1914-45) on such a scale, and with such murderous intensity, as almost to put an end to themselves. Chapter five describes the spread of the state from its original home in Western Europe to other parts of the globe. Lastly, chapter six deals with the forces which, even now, are undermining states all over the world, and which, in all probability, will cause many of them to collapse (as in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia), give up part of their sovereignty and integrate with others (as in the case of the European Union), or decentralize and relax their hold over their citizens' lives.

As will readily be appreciated, compressing a subject such as the present one into a single volume represents a very large task, one which Creveld achieves with elegance, competence and brilliance. One of the major strengths of this book is the clarity with which Creveld conceptualizes and operationalizes his key terms. For

instance, throughout he emphatically treats “government” and “state” as two separate concepts and not as synonyms, as many writers would. This conceptual and theoretical precision leads him to view “government” as a person or group which makes peace, wages war, enacts laws, exercises justice, raises revenue and looks after internal security on behalf of society as a whole, all the while attempting to provide a focus for citizens’ loyalty and, perhaps, a modicum of welfare as well. When it comes to “state” he treats it as merely one of the forms which, historically speaking, the organization of government has assumed, and which accordingly, need not be considered eternal and self-evident any more than were previous ones.

But who would fill the void created by the retreat of the state? Creveld predicts that certain organizations will step into the shoes of the retreating state. A few of them are territorial in nature, but the majority are not. Some are regional and larger than states; others are smaller and merely local. Some are intergovernmental, others are nongovernmental. Some are primarily political in nature, others dedicated to different ends such as making money, protecting the environment, spreading some religious message, or propagating some special cause which may range from reducing pollution to animal rights.

As far as the questions of peace and war are concerned, Creveld’s conclusions are more attuned to those of the neorealists: most of the violence will almost certainly be local, sporadic, and on a rather small scale. There can be no question that the future has many conflicts such as Bosnia, Sri Lanka and Rwanda in store; not only will “terrorists” and guerrillas continue to make their presence felt in many countries, but the possibility of their resorting to chemical, biological, and even nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out. Contrary to the fears of many and the hopes of a few, Creveld argues forcefully that World War III will almost certainly not take place. In this regard it is obvious that his stance is influenced by mainstream liberal thought (more than 200 years ago in his “Perpetual Peace” Immanuel Kant predicted peace would descend as more nations subscribe to liberalism and Democracy). This bias has an obvious shortcoming: Creveld fails to take into account other competing paradigms that deal with the future of the state. For instance he discards the Marxian

Model, which, like Creveld, predicts the downfall of the state, but for completely different reasons and with completely different implications. Likewise, Creveld does not include in his analysis the Khaldunian perspective, which is also deterministic in that it viewed the ascent and collapse of states in cycles of three generations.

It is equally astonishing that Creveld's treatment of the decline of the state is devoid of any mention of the impact of globalization as a catalyst in weakening the institution of the state. Although he alludes to some of the indicators of this irresistible force, Creveld never explicitly analyzes the impact of globalization as it bulldozes its way forward. One last major omission in the study is the role of international law, particularly in the post-World War II period, in the curtailment of the authority of the state. Since the end of the Second World War, International Law has "deepened" by including new functions in its areas of competence; and it has also "broadened" by including new actors—beside the state—as new subjects with legal personalities. The cumulative effect of this development is to weaken the state.

All things considered, Creveld has produced an excellent work, a work that could be recommended with great enthusiasm to the specialist and layman alike.

The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and Interactional Relations. Edited by Kai Hafez with a forward by Muhammad Arkoun and Udo Steinbach. Translated from German by Mary Ann Kenny. Leiden: Brill, 2000. ISBN 90-04-11651-6. 246 pp + XVI.

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The relationship between Islam and the West is generally explored and written by Anglo-American intellectuals for the consumption of readers in the Muslim World and the West. Kai Hafez has compiled