4. Is the state entering a period of decline?

The state, as a political entity, has existed since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, where European powers first agreed to respect each other's sovereignty and that each state had the ultimate authority of their own given territory. This entity is the building block of international relations, and the state is still the most important authority to consider when discussing the discipline. In the last few centuries, and particularly in the last hundred years, globalisation has meant that the concept of supranationalism has become increasingly more influential, and the notion that the state is supreme is in doubt. This essay will discuss ways in which states have lost their power to other organisations, as well as showing counter-examples, where states are just as important as they ever were whilst involved in supranational organisations.

In Europe, the birthplace of the state, perhaps the strongest example of its decline is to be found in the European Union. The organisation was created in the wake of the deadliest conflict in human history, World War II, to promote co-operation between states that were recent enemies, and the EU has since evolved into the first truly powerful supranational organisation. All twenty-seven EU countries must comply with certain pan-European laws that are decided upon by the organisation's various bodies. The EU has the world's only transnational parliament, elected by the people of the individual member states – and also has one of the largest common markets in the world, as well as a single currency, the Euro. The EU has been successful in its aims, with no major land conflict between European powers since World War II, which resulted in the EU winning the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, and wide support in states where "the EU is perceived to improve the economic situation for nations and individuals" (Rohrschneider, 2002, p464).

However, the EU also provides a good example of how states still hold more power than supranational organisations do. Several of its institutions are made up of representatives of each state, such as the European Commission, European Council and the Court of Justice. This means that each individual state wields power in these institutions, rather than the institution itself. In the Council of the European Union, qualified majority voting is used to make decisions which require 50% of the member states, 74% of votes (as each state receives a different number of votes depending on its population) and a number of states which have a total population of over 311 million to approve of a decision. The change to this voting system, introduced by the Treaty of Nice in 2003, has meant that "member-state influence is no longer felt simply in the more intergovernmental fields of foreign policy and justice and home affairs." (Janning, 2005, p822).

Not all states are subject to all European Union laws, however, and not all states participate in the organisation to the full extent that they could, maintaining some sovereignty. The notable example of this is the United Kingdom, who do not use the European single currency and receive a significant rebate, negotiated by former

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, on their contributions to the EU. Another oft-cited organisation that is said to diminish state power is the United Nations, although in fact it's central document, the Charter of the United Nations, seeks to "support the principle of state sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Axtmann, 2004, p262). Both of these examples show that the state does maintain some sovereignty despite being a member of these supranational/transnational bodies. It is hard to argue that the state has maintained its full sovereignty though, as some transfer of power has definitely taken place to create organisations such as the EU and UN.

Global governance and policy making is increasingly important to the world with transnational threats, such as global warming, terrorism and nuclear proliferation, requiring transnational solutions. Measures such as the Kyoto Protocol, designed to reduce carbon emissions to help curb global warming, and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons were drafted to provide worldwide protection from these dangers. The United Nations is particularly important in the creation of such treaties, with perhaps its most influential being the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, described by Pope John Paul II as "one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time" (Pope John Paul II, 1995, Section 2). The UN enforces its law through its International Criminal Court. These measures are good examples of an increasing desire, even from states, to forfeit some sovereignty to provide effective transnational solutions to difficult issues.

International governance, at the moment, has a flaw in its theory, however. This flaw is that these international agreements need to be ratified by individual states, allowing the states to opt-out, giving them the power to act unilaterally. The NPT treaty did not "prevent Iraq, a signatory, from embarking on their own (nuclear) programme" (MccGwire, 1994, p220); and as we are seeing currently in North Korea, multiple UN sanctions have not deterred the state from conducting three nuclear weapons tests and threatening further action.

States still largely control their economies, and are responsible for their successes and failures, but even this facet of the state is vanishing to an extent. Organisations such as the IMF and World Bank have been formed to provide a safety net for states that are failing financially and are in need of capital. These organisations often give out loans as financial aid, meaning that states receiving aid are responsible for paying the loans back, often with interest. But a common occurrence is that these loans are not paid back, and this shows that in this new global world, states are funding each other more than ever. In 2005, the G8 forgave a large portion of debt owed to it by the Third World in an attempt to appease the growing "Make Poverty History" movement; with the move's effects being hotly debated (Franklin, 2008, p421). Very recently, the economic crash of 2008 has seen many European economies struggle, requiring the EU to bail out many of its member states (to stop the collapse of its single currency) such as Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus and, perhaps most famously, Greece. Globalisation has created world markets that are far more

interlinked, and as such, the economies of different states are becoming increasingly integrated.

Multinational corporations are perhaps the most threatening type of organisation to state rule. They operate in many countries, but can be based in any they wish, and subsequently adhere to the laws of the countries they wish. "The MNE's ability to operate as a world-wide system combined with the limited view and scope of authority of any national government creates asymmetries of both information and jurisdiction." (Kobrin, 2001, p7) This has led to several high-profile cases, where companies such as Starbucks have avoided paying millions of pounds in taxes. The state's ability to control companies in its territory is severely limited in this case.

In a more extreme sense, the growth of multinational terrorism has shown that states cannot deal with the threat alone. To combat Al-Qaeda, after their attack on the USA on the 11th of September 2001, the USA required the assistance of the UK and many other nations to invade Afghanistan in an effort to oust the country's Al-Qaeda supporting government. Furthermore, the USA and allies fought Al-Qaeda insurgents in Iraq after their 2003 invasion of that country, in an attempt to further quash the organisation. Although multinational efforts have seen Al-Qaeda's strength diminished, it still exists as a major threat (Bergen, 2008, p15), particularly in failed states in the Arabian Peninsula (specifically Yemen) and North Africa. The very nature of terrorism means that eradicating it, either through unilateral or multilateral means, is extremely difficult.

Globalisation's impact on the functions of states is clear, as it has diminished their power to a degree. However, it should be noted that the very same globalisation has made the "concept of sovereignty… a cornerstone of the global interstate system after the Second World War" (Axtmann, 2004, p262). Without the expansion of the state system as happened with decolonisation and the collapse of empires following World War II, and the fall of communism in the 80s and 90s, globalisation itself would not have happened. States are the architects of globalisation, and have kept their power because of this, it is argued.

One of the state's main function is the defence of its' people, "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1919, p1), but recent years have seen the rise of private military companies, more commonly known as PMCs, which provide military support in addition to, or in place of, state militaries. They have been used most prominently in the previously mentioned Iraq War, with up to 100,000 private troops being used by the US (Merle, 2006, p1). Non-governmental organisations are now also using PMCs to protect their workers as they carry out aid missions in dangerous places such as North Africa. The power of these companies, in future, could cause a major threat to the defence policies of states.

It can definitely be said that the state is in decline from its position as the sole unit of analysis within international relations, with globalisation and resulting supranationalism being its main threat. However, even with growing transnational decision-making, the role of the state is still crucial to the world we live in. States will continue to be the most important entity in international relations and global decision making for some time to come; especially if their current role in participating in organisations such as the EU and UN are maintained.

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