The Anachronism of Bellicist State-Building

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Keywords: European Union, state-formation, bellicist state-building theory, comparative integration.

Even Eurosceptics bent on 'taking back control' from Brussels generally concede that the European Union (EU) is a far cry from a centralized Weberian state. Integration has stopped (for now at least) somewhere between a heavily institutionalized international organization and an "exceptionally weak federation" (Moravcsik 2001), leaving the EU with mighty regulatory powers, but pocket-sized administrative apparatus and coercive capacity. The reason, argue Daniel Kelemen and Kathleen McNamara in a fascinating recent article ("State-building and the EU: Markets, War and Europe's Uneven Political Development", 2022), is that post-war Europe has lacked an essential ingredient of state-building: an existential security threat. Referencing state-building in early modern Europe, America, and Africa, they argue that security threats have historically led to swift and decisive consolidation of central authority (p.971) whereas purely market-driven centralization—as in the EU—has resulted in gradual and incomplete state-building.

Kelemen and McNamara reject teleological determinism: The EU isn't *destined* to become a centralized state. Rather, their aim is to explain why state-building in post-war Europe has so far been "unusually uneven and unstable" (p.965). Nevertheless, repeated reference to the EU's institutional architecture as "incomplete", "unstable" and "crisis-prone" (p.966) together with the suggestion that one may take "consolation" from the fact that many past state-building processes have been slow and meandering (p.983), suggest that Kelemen and McNamara (hereafter 'K&M') view the Weberian state as a natural and desirable end-point for Europe, raising the question: What will it take to get there?

Given K&M's strong emphasis on security threats as a supreme state-builder, we may wonder whether a belligerent Russia, a rising China, and growing doubts about the United States' (US) commitment to NATO could be the catalyst for a pan-European superstate? K&M understandably decline to speculate about this (or about the effect of other hypothetical threats to Europe), focusing

instead on the causal processes that have led to the status quo. But if they are right that an absence of existential threat has produced a weak and imbalanced institutional architecture in the EU (in contrast to the more decisive state-building processes that historically have emerged from the crucible of war) then it must also be true, by the same token, that a serious military threat would increase the prospects of more complete European state-building. So, would it?

I argue that a security threat to the EU is unlikely to promote European state-building, not because such a threat is inconceivable, but because bellicist state-building is anachronistic. Ironically, while advocating a comparative historical perspective, K&M's account is in one sense oddly 'ahistorical', failing to consider the particular world-historical time at which the EU was born. The EU emerged at a time when (a) existing European nation-states were relatively solidly consolidated and (b) the territorial state is becoming increasingly immaterial as a guarantor of physical security for its citizens. Previous state-building, by creating strong individual state capacities both financially and militarily, makes further state-building in response to security threats at once more politically costly and less necessary. Meanwhile, in a globalized world, providing for citizens' security and welfare demands global alliance-building more than coercive taxation to build large standing armies. These facts both explain why the EU has so far failed to develop full state powers and also imply that the emergence of an external threat is unlikely to kick-start the process. Indeed, across the globe, the only new states to have emerged in recent times have been forged—neither through conquest nor through states uniting against external threats—but due to existing nation-states or empires falling apart. The age of bellicist state-formation is over.

The good news is that—by historical standards—the EU appears to be tackling crises reasonably well with limited 'core state powers.' This suggest a second anachronism at the heart of traditional state-building approaches: not only is bellicist state-building passé but the Weberian state may itself be outdated, giving way to a post-modern or a 'regulatory' state (Caporaso 1996). If conceived as a regulatory state, the EU's lack of taxing spending powers is not due to its

'incomplete and unstable design' but rather appears to be a relatively stable response to the constraints of its environment.

The Irrelevance of 'Blood & Iron'

K&M argue that two macro-historical political logics have been crucial to the emergence of new states: the bellicist quest for security against military threats, and the pursuit of market integration for economic gain. Either process facilitates state-building on its own. However, historically, political projects centralizing power have been most expeditious and complete when *both* logics have been present (p.964). When only a market-building logic has obtained—as in the EU—state-building has been incremental and partial, producing crisis-prone institutions (p.965).

The notion that "war-deprived states tend to lack institutional strength" has been invoked to explain weak state-formation in Latin America (Centeno 2002:11) and Africa (Herbst 1990). But is a model of state-building based on the experience of early modern Europe a good template for understanding processes of polity-formation during the 20th and 21st centuries?

I am doubtful. In fact, even the historical record of bellicist state-building is, I think, less clear than K&M suggest. A basic version of conventional bellicist state-building theory goes something like this: Historically, war-making has required powerholders to extract greater resources from the populations they controlled, and to raise capital through borrowing. Wars therefore created strong incentives for elites to centralize powers to tax and borrow. Meanwhile, improvements in military technology, along with the increasing sophistication of central bureaucracies tuned for war-making, expanded the size of territory over which rulers could profitably govern. Thus war-making, extraction, and political centralization worked in tandem to promote the consolidation of large, territorially integrated, and politically centralized states, whereas smaller, fragmented polities became less viable (Tilly 1985, 1990; Acharya & Lee 2018).

Conventional bellicist state-building theory has many detractors. Contrasting the tenet that changes in military technology promoted large, centralized states at the expense of smaller, fragmented

polities, Abramson (2017) finds that the period 1500-1800 (often seen as the golden age of bellicist state-building due to improvements of artillery and growing economies of large standing armies) was one in which small political communities not only persisted but remained the typical form of political organization. Others have criticised bellicist accounts ala' Otto Hintze and Charles Tilly for being theoretically underdeveloped, overly Euro-centric, and unable to account for crucial geographical and historical variation: war makes states in some instances but unmakes them in others (Leander 2004; Taylor & Botea 2008).

There are further problems with a bellicist approach. Along with traditional theories of federalism (Forsyth, 1981; Riker, 1964; Wheare, 1947), K&M emphasise *exogenous* threat as a political unifier. Historically, they argue, successful state-formation has depended on a perception of an existential security threat which central rulers could invoke to override objections from citizens and local powerholders to centralization (p.968). Yet in Europe and elsewhere state-building has often been 'imposed' from the outside rather than embraced by local populations as a necessary means to boost collective defence. As Tilly (1985, p.184) concedes, from 1648 onwards, peace-making coalitions often played a far greater role in state-building than preparing for or fighting wars: "From 1648…at the ends of wars, all effective European states coalesced temporarily to bargain over the boundaries and rulers of the recent belligerents." State-building in these cases was often animated more by a desire to halt incessant wars between small sovereign polities than by a perceived need to defend against foreign threats (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2008). To illustrate, the German Bund, agreed by the major European powers at the 1815 Congress of Vienna, combined thirty-eight independent German states plus Austria into a loose confederation with the dual aim of strengthening German states against Russian and French revanchism and preventing Prussia from gaining dominance within Germany (Forsyth, 1981, p.160). When the American Constitution was adopted to strengthen the federal union, it was mainly to prevent future intra-American conflict, not to guard against dangers from abroad (Deudney, 2007; McNamara & Musgrave, 2020). War may have played a role in making these states, but not through the processes suggested by standard bellicist theory.

A central claim by Kelemen and McNamara is that security threats promote swift and decisive state-formation whereas market-driven integration tends to be incremental and incomplete (p.965): "When security threats loom, power has often been centralized and consolidated swiftly, through executive fiat" (p.969; also Tilly 1985). Yet historically, this has far from always been the case. As McNamara and Musgrave (2020, p.179) note, in the United States "factors like external threat did not automatically entail the creation of a strong common identity and polity, as traditional bellicist arguments about state formation claim…After all, the actual war for independence from Britain led to the adoption of the weak Articles of Confederation, not a unified state." Despite the threat from France, the German Bundesakt of 1815 established an extremely weak confederation that left political authority mainly in the hands of individual states. A Federal Diet was convened at Frankfurt-am-Main but was given no executive machinery or judiciary to implement its decrees, and no means of collecting revenue (Forsyth, 1981, p.48-50). The Wiener Schlußakte of 1820 established a small federal army comprised of contingents from member states, but still the Bund exercised weak central control over military affairs as individual states ignored its decrees (ibid. p.49).

War *did* eventually lead to the swift unification of Germany. In June 1866 Prussia withdrew from the German Bund and declared war—first on Austria, next on Saxony, Hanover, and Hesse-Cassel before proceeding to annex Nassau, Schleswig-Holstein and Frankfurt-am-Main and forcing them all into a loose 'North German Confederation' under Prussian leadership. In 1871 the creation of the German Reich was completed when five South German states joined the nascent confederation amidst the Franco-Prussian war. K&M would likely argue this vindicates their account. Yet, Bismarck's particular 'blood and iron' approach to unifying Germany owed less to external threat than to internal violence. Thus, if there is a direct lesson here, it is not that post-war Europe is institutionally fragmented because it has lacked a significant exogenous threat, but rather that Germany failed to complete what Prussia started (and Napoleon previously attempted) by uniting Europe through force during World War II.

In sum, conventional bellicist theories are not a reliable guide to explaining historical processes of state-formation. I argue in the following sections that they are even less suitable for understanding the

EU's evolution today due to both changing technologies and, crucially, the prior consolidation of nation-states.

The Problem of Technology

Theories of state-building seek to understand changes in political orders as consequences of economic and technological change (March & Olson, 1998). A bellicist logic suggests that growing economies of scale in the production of coercive force in Europe between 1500 and 1900 facilitated state-building by prompting ruling elites to centralize taxing and spending powers to fund wars. By the 20th century, however, the relationship between warfighting and state-building is less obvious. Modern states generally do not need to send tax collectors door-to-door to extract payment for protection from reluctant customers. For example, treaties exist between many states which afford information exchange in banking and tax-matters, meaning governments can often extract revenue from subjects independently of controlling the physical space in which they reside (Archarya & Lee, 2018). The borrowing power of the modern state also far surpasses that of its historical predecessors. Should European states be inclined to respond collectively to a threat, the institutional machinery for raising money internally and through borrowing on international markets is already in place.

Military technologies have also changed dramatically since the 'golden era' of European state-formation. Then, improvements in technology were critical in allowing rulers to expand their territories, and controlling large territories was in turn critical to raising sufficient revenue to defend state sovereignty. Today, modern military technologies like long-range missiles, remotely operated drones, air-to-air fuelled fighter jets, and—above all—nuclear weapons, mean that powerholders can project coercive force across the globe without needing to annex territory. Although the production of violence still enjoys significant economies-of-scale (and is facilitated by foreign military bases and control of raw materials), the ability to project force internationally is increasingly divorced from direct physical and political control over territory—and even from GDP as North Korea's nuclear weapons program testifies. Hence, rather than coercive force being tightly defined by territorial boundaries,

from the perspective of revenue collection and war-making, the modern state system represents a hybrid allocation of authority over spatial and nonspatial boundaries (Archarya & Lee, 2018).

Kelemen and McNamara would hardly disagree. Their chief claim is that the inter-continental reach of military power has allowed post-war Europe to lean on the 'American Pacifier'—free-riding on the protection of a geographically distant superpower, rather than taxing and spending at home. But where K&M identify NATO as crucial to nullifying the security impetus for European state-building, I suggest that broader trends are dulling the causal push from war. Whereas, historically, military alliances were often highly unreliable, from the mid-20th century—again largely thanks to improved technology—alliances became more institutionalized and durable, and thus more credible. Even the meagre CFSP, built entirely on inter-governmental (rather than supranational) control, is a far step above the loose promises among 17th, 18th and 19th century fiefdoms, kingdoms, and republics to come to one another's aid militarily. Advanced military technology and institutionalized global security cooperation mean that states that have come into being since the turn of the 19th century have often acquired their military organization from outside—from other states, from alliances, and from international organizations (Tilly, 1985; Jackson, 1990; Hoffmann, 1966 p.907). To the extent states continue to exchange military materials and expertise in return for trade or alliance, external threats are therefore unlikely to prove essential in furthering state-building—in Europe or elsewhere. From a technological viewpoint, the age of bellicist state-building is over.

The Problem of the Nation-State

Besides the lessened stimulus from military threats, another obstacle to pan-European state-building is the prevalence of already strongly consolidated polities which make further state-building through either conquest or voluntary merger increasingly costly. Consolidated polities with strongly demarcated borders lead to intensified communication, national laws and institutions, strong cultural and linguistic ties, and, in recent centuries, national systems of communication, education, and welfare—all of which facilitates interaction 'internally' while raising barriers to interaction with 'outsiders' (Bartolini, 2005; Marks, 2012, p.6). As Marks (2012) observes, historically, this meant that

the emergence and consolidation of European nation-states drastically raised the cost of empire. The nation state, he notes, "is the most difficult material for empire yet invented". The Napoleonic and Nazi empires sought scale through conquest but were unable to annex, subjugate and exploit the resources of the national communities they conquered (opcit). Hoffmann (1966) made the similar observation that "integration is likely to be more successful when the voyagers' baggage is light" than when the state apparatus has already developed over decades and centuries. "Is it an accident, he asked, if the only successful example of voluntary unification in the modern world is that of the U.S.—the fusion of units that had been colonies, not states, and in which neither the machinery of the state nor traditions of foreign policy had had time to develop?"

There is a second sense in which the nation state acts as a barrier to further state-building. The stronger the political, fiscal, and administrative capacities of the individual 'units' to be combined into a new polity, the greater the benefits from voluntary cooperation through which the centre can draw on the strong capacities of the sub-units without having to subjugate them to central control. This argument aligns with Genschel's (this issue) claim that Kelemen and McNamara "overlook a key difference between bellicist state-building in early modern Europe and bellicist integration in the contemporary EU: the high level of sub-central state capacity". As he notes, a high level of national state capacity lessens the comparative advantage of political centralization because it leaves fewer issues on which the EU can outperform its member states. Should a security threat endanger EU members *collectively,* it would be more expedient to coordinate national fiscal and military power than to delegate power to Brussels. This is what we saw during the Kosovo crisis and, more recently, in reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. EU member states, each with their separate interests and long-established foreign policies, have long refused to relinquish control over national defence spending or military strategy to Brussels (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2014, 2021). Given established alliance structures which allow them to pool resources when presented with a uniform external threat, they do not need to. Admittedly, alliances suffer from collective action problems which may reduce their effectiveness as tools for pursuing joint military goals. But in the face of the kinds of existential threats which K&M cite as drivers of state-building, such collective-action problems are likely to be much reduced. In sum,

previous state-building, by creating strong individual state capacities, makes further state-building in reaction to security threats at once more politically costly and less necessary.

An Ever-Stronger Law-State?

Kelemen and McNamara might concede that incentives for bellicist state-building are waning (with or without NATO) and reiterate that this explains the EU's centralization deficit. But state-building theory holds further insights and solaces, they argue. Viewing the EU through a state-building lens may not inspire confidence in the integration project, but it does offer certain consolations" (p.983). Specifically, those favouring a stronger EU may take comfort from the fact that many historical state-building processes have been slow and meandering: "Historically, many states started out as 'law states', pursuing incremental state-building through judicial institutions. Although these states only achieved more permanent, mature coercive apparatuses after preparing for and waging wars (p.965) they nevertheless grew more centralized over time. Ultimately, much historical state-building has amounted to a "slow boring of hard boards" (p.983).

K&M see further consolation in the fact that "dysfunctional, crisis-ridden political development is not unique to the EU" (p.966). Even long-established federal systems have seen the pendulum swing back with states sometimes regaining influence over core state powers. Still, "the long-term, cumulative effect of these ebbs and flows in 'coming-together federalisms' has been a considerable centralization of power" (Keleman, 2014, p. 227; K&M p.982). Centralization always wins out in the end because the weak and fragmented institutions arising from lowest-common-denominator bargains among independent states trigger crises which prompt states to delegate more powers to central authorities. In this way, the EU—like many other 'coming-together polities'—has tended to "fail forward" (Jones, Keleman & Meunier, 2016).

But should we assume that, presented with internal or external crises, the EU will continue to edge gradually towards a centralized Weberian state? If it does, it will be bucking the current historical trend. Since the closing decades of the 20th century, many states have been disintegrating rather than integrating. Disintegration has been driven both by developing countries' central governments

breaking down (Jackson, 1990) and, more importantly, by deliberate political *decentralization* (Marin & Mayntz, 1991). The past 50 years have seen a surge in the power of regional and local governments across the world, as local authorities increasingly feature independent elected assemblies, executive bodies, and administrations, and control their own sources of revenue from taxes and fees, giving them significant political autonomy (Hooghe *et al.*, 2016; OECD, 2019). For example, regional governments have been created across Central and Eastern European countries, the Nordic countries, France, and Italy. Spain and Belgium have been transformed from unitary states to quasi-federations. The UK—formerly a highly centralized state—has devolved considerable power to regional governments. Regionalisation is occurring at an even faster pace in Asia and America (Hooghe *et al.*, 2016; OECD 2019). In some cases, decentralization has been a counter-reaction to previous strong centralisation or even authoritarianism (Hooghe *et al.*, 2016). In other cases, decentralization aims to curb public spending, ensure more accountable and transparent public governance, lower corruption, and strengthen political participation (OECD, 2019).

These developments should prompt us to ask whether political centralization remains the dominant trend in an increasingly globalized world. A bellicist logic might suggest that the absence of existential threats is what drives the decentralization of previously unitary states. But there are other, better explanations. At least since the 1990s, scholars have debated the emergence of a 'post-Westphalian' order in which monocentric, hierarchical, and unitary states give rise to more fluid orders (March & Olson, 1998). Some have identified new information technologies as drivers of decentralization. Others have pointed to sub-state regions as the optimal unit for organizing human activity in an increasingly borderless world (Ohmae, 1993). Still others have emphasized the growing authority of private and transnational actors that compete with IOs and national governments to supply governance (Cerny, 1995; Strange, 1996). Seen in this light, perhaps the EU is not so much a latecomer to an international order of territorial nation-states, as a frontrunner or posterchild for a post-modern order in which governance is increasingly fractured, decentred, and often lacks clear spatial authority structures (Caporaso, 1996). There is thus a second, more radical, way in which bellicist state-building is anachronistic: the centralized Weberian state itself may be outdated.

Dysfunctional Compared to What?

Where does this leave the Eu and the relevance of state-building theory? While counselling patience, K&M clearly portray further centralization of core state powers as vital for the EU. The EU is now at a crossroad, they warn (p.984). "The Union has moved far along the path of institutional development with its focus on building a law-state, but it is unclear whether it can sustain this path without [] the coercive apparatus associated with the Weberian state". Indeed, the Union's uneven and unstable institutional architecture has generated "a series of political crises with grave economic and human costs" (p.964). This brings me to my last question: Is the EU really that dysfunctional?

To illustrate the costs of the EU's incomplete and "ultimately deeply problematic" institutional development (p.973) K&M compare Schengen and the EMU to the more complete institutions in earlier cases of state-building. The tragedies around the European refugee crisis arose from the uneven development of the EU's migration and asylum regime, which lacked centralized enforcement, they argue (p.964). When the US federal government expanded its capacity to control migration, it repeatedly invoked concerns about national security, they note (p.979). Yet, historically, the US has not always handled immigration well. Art.1 of the American Constitution empowers Congress to define rules on naturalization. In 1790, Congress passed the first naturalization law which limited citizenship to immigrants who were "free white persons…of good character." However, there was no real attempt to enforce federal immigration laws. During much of the 19th Century, America's borders were largely unguarded (Andreas, 2003). This remained true even after the Mexican war of 1846-48.

Immigration remained minimally regulated until the 20th century when the 'Great Wave' (during which nearly 24 million immigrants arrived in the US between 1890-1920) prompted the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924. Citing threats to national security, the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 banned immigration from Asia and introduced national quotas for immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere. Yet despite such federal legislation, enforcement of border control remained feeble (Andreas, 2003). Federal policing was mainly driven by local concerns, while external border controls focused mainly on collecting customs revenue (ibid.)

Even today, it is not always evident that the centralized US immigration system outperforms the EU. Illegal immigrants made up 3.3-4% of the US population in the first decades of the 21st century, despite the US being among the most open developed countries for legal migration.[1] By comparison, unauthorized immigrants accounted for less than 1% of Europe's total population in 2017.[2] During the European 'immigration crisis', the number of irregular migrants arriving in the EU reached more than one million in 2014-15, overwhelming the EU system to the extent that some states reintroduced national border controls,[3] and unleashing a humanitarian crisis. By comparison, during the fiscal year 2014, 68,445 family units sought to illegally cross the US-Mexico border, and about as many unaccompanied children attempted the journey—a 77 percent increase over the previous year. This overwhelmed the systems in place to deal with migrant children to the point where the US Border Patrol separated families and kept children in temporary facilities on military bases, unleashing a humanitarian crisis on both sides of the border.[4]

What about the Euro-crisis? According to Kelemen and McNamara, the Eurozone crisis was caused by "a stunted economic governance architecture featuring a single currency without a common fiscal policy" (p.964). Few would argue that the EU absorbed the crisis well. However, in *Europe's Orphan*, Sandbu (2015) challenges the prevailing view that the crisis confirmed monetary union can only work with fiscal and political union. The sovereign debt crisis of 2010 was less a result of the European Monetary Union's (EMU) 'stunted architecture' and more the fault of bad macroeconomic policies that were wholly avoidable—in particular, strong aversion by major policymakers towards debt restructuring, he argues. As such, the eurozone's troubles amounted to a regulatory failure more than an institutional design failure. While others may be less prepared to 'exonerate' the EMU, many have noted that the EU responded to the crisis by developing considerable 'quasi-fiscal powers.' During the crisis, the European Central Bank (ECB) engaged in long-term refinancing by providing some 3 trillion

[1] https://www.factcheck.org/2018/06/illegal-immigration-statistics/
[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/11/13/europes-unauthorized-immigrant-population-peaks-in-2016-then-levels-off/
[3] https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/crime-areas/facilitation-of-illegal-immigration
[4] https://www.vox.com/2014/10/10/18088638/child-migrant-crisis-unaccompanied-alien-children-rio-grande-valley-obama-immigration.

Euros to banks at 1 percent interest over 3-years—what Schelke (2014) describes as "fiscal policy by default". Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2014, 2018) similarly demonstrate that the EU has quietly diversified its functions to include 'core state powers' in the areas of stabilization and fiscal policy (see also Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 326; Caporaso *et al*., 2015).

We should not be surprised at this supple response. Scholars depicting the EU as a 'regulatory state' (Majone, 1994) have long argued that the use of soft law which relies on national processes to achieve Community objectives allows the EU to govern in ways that far exceed mere regulation (Caporaso 1996). Partly, the EU *appears* to lack central governance capacity because—in line with the argument of the previous section—it can harness and shape the resources and administrative structures of its member states to carry out its policies (Majone, 1994, p.8; Genschel and Jachenfuchs, 2014; Caporaso et al., 2015). As a result, Kelemen (2014, p.220) notes, whilst it lacks independent power to tax and spend, the EU is more active than the contemporary US or Swiss federal governments in regulating the rate and shape of the taxes of its member states and in shaping their fiscal policies through EU regulations and ECJ rulings. If conceiving of the EU as a regulatory state, we may conclude that its lack of taxing and spending powers is not due to being at an 'incomplete' stage of development (Caporaso, 1996, p.41), but rather is a stable relatively equilibrium, attuned to its environment.

What Can State-Building Theory Teach Us?

Keleman and MacNamara set out to spark debate about the merits of viwing the EU through the lens of state-building and in this they clearly succeed. Their elegant article offers abundant food for thought—about what is similar and what is different from past experience. At the heart of this debate is a familiar question, namely, what is the EU a case of? A nascent, but woefully incomplete state? An unusually weak (con)federation? Or a novel kind of polity—regulatory and/or post-modern? Scholars have long sought to gain comparative analytical leverage by comparing the EU to historical projects of integration and polity-formation (*inter alia,* Bartolini, 2005; Caporaso, 1996; Deutsch *et al.,* 1957; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2008; Mattli, 1999; Marks, 2012). Such historical comparisons are certainly

welcome, but attention to the unique circumstances of the 21st century means some lessons will not translate readily.

I have argued this is true of bellicist state-building. War is clearly not obsolete in 21st century Europe, as the tragic events in Ukraine demonstrate. However, war no longer plays the same role in state-building as it did in centuries past. Today war is more often a breaker than a maker of states, as the Yugoslav wars demonstrated. Whilst war may strengthen political consolidation through a 'rally around the flag' effect, cross-border military conflicts can also undermine national cohesion by isolating and impoverishing border regions, inflaming class or ethnic tensions, or emboldening secessionist movements as seen in some recent Eurasian conflicts. At the time of writing, the jury is out on whether waging an aggressive war will ultimately strengthen or weaken the Russian government's hold on power.

If war and security threats are neither necessary, nor sufficient—or even conducive—to effective centralization of political power, what can we learn from traditional state-building theories? A lot, I believe, which is why Kelemen and McNamara's article is profoundly welcome.

One important lesson is that the EU is not uniquely dysfunctional by historical standards. There is certainly room for improvement (as in most political systems) but compared to other historical and contemporary 'coming-together' polities, the EU deals with crises relatively well—despite having limited core state powers.

Another lesson—and one which K&M highlight—is that there are many routes to building effective governance systems. All political systems, certainly democratically organized ones, require solidarity among citizens and among separate state units to achieve capacity to cope with asymmetric shocks. In the EU, a major stumbling block to effective crisis-management has been a lack of solidarity required to agree on redistributive transfers from richer to poorer member-states, or from unscathed to crisis-stricken countries (Marks, 2012; Sangiovanni, 2013). Historically, argue K&M, the surest and most direct way of building the solidarity necessary for large-scale public goods provision is through war. But a second lesson from the history of state-building is that solidarity among previously disparate communities doesn't have to come from facing down a common enemy. In the US case, internal

consolidation and polity-building was often stimulated by growing solidarity among the American population which emerged in response to events other than war. For example, during the 20th Century, the US Government developed a growing role in disaster relief through federal responses to flooding, fires, drought, and earthquakes (Kirkegaard, 2018). Before 1900 there were only fifty instances of federal funds being granted to help individual states cope with natural disasters (ibid.) However, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake which killed 3,000 people and left 400,000 homeless, ushered in a new era of federal disaster relief. Congress appropriated an unprecedented $2.5 million for the relief effort, and President Roosevelt rallied Americans to donate more than $7 million to the newly created American Red Cross (ibid). Later disasters like the 1927 Mississippi River floods further strengthened the role of federal government as Congress adopted $300 million for flood control measures in 1928 "inevitably turning Washington into a regionally redistributive funding agent" (Kirkegaard 2018). These examples suggests that challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and other 'natural' catastrophes may help foster solidarity among European populaces and thereby increase the EU's ability to supply public goods at scale.

Ultimately, the long-term historical perspective advocated by K&M is especially powerful in that it illustrates that the nation-state order has never been static `(March & Olson 1998). Krasner (1993:261) may have been right when observing that "the clearest storyline of the last thousand years is the extruding out of universal alternatives to the sovereign state." But it would be hasty to assume this means the present and future will bring more of the same. While this does not imply the irrelevance of traditional state-building theory it does indicate its limitations.

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