

## FOURTEEN

# WAR NO LONGER MAKES STATES

The United Nations Headquarters is located on the former site of a slaughterhouse. The eighteen-acre complex on the East River of Manhattan is dominated by a thirty-seven-floor glass and steel tower with a modern, international aesthetic, meant to reflect a sense of “newness” and an optimistic vision of the world’s nations working together as one. The lightness of this utopian structure is offset by the opaque heft of the concrete General Assembly building. The contrast between the buildings betrays the warring designs of the two architects for the site, selected by an architectural committee that, in typical U.N. fashion, was unable to choose between them.

Entering the complex is like entering another world. As visitors file past a phalanx of flags of all the member nations,<sup>1</sup> they may not realize that they are leaving the United States and passing into international territory, where U.S. officials have no special powers. As the U.N.’s own website puts it, “No federal, state or local officer or official of the United States, whether administrative, judicial, military or police, may enter UN Headquarters, except with the consent of and under conditions agreed to by the Secretary-General of the Organization.”<sup>2</sup> The U.N. even has its own police, firefighters, and post office.

The highlight of a visit to the United Nations complex is the General Assembly hall. The enormous chamber has none of the colonial charm of the halls of the United States Congress. The General Assembly is a futuristic space that bears a strong resemblance to the Galactic Senate from *Star Wars*. Onstage in the front of the hall sits a large dais and, behind the dais, an

immense brightly lit gold-leafed background bearing the United Nations insignia—a map of the world centered on the North Pole, surrounded by a wreath of olive leaves.

When the United Nations building was being designed, the architects debated how many seats to include in the General Assembly meeting hall. Oscar Schachter, one of the senior legal counselors at the U.N. Headquarters and leading international law scholar, advised them to include room for an additional twenty members beyond the current fifty-one. That seemed like more than enough.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the United Nations has 193 members—almost four times the number at the time of its founding and three times as many as Schachter predicted. Nearly all the seats once dedicated to the audience are now taken by the new states. The latest renovation in 2014 made additional room so as to accommodate 204 members.<sup>4</sup>

Schachter could be forgiven for his mistake. At the time the architects consulted him, the number of states in the world was just over sixty, and the number had remained steady for decades, with only a gradual increase during the preceding century. That the number of members of the United Nations would go much above seventy, even if every state in the world were admitted, seemed implausible.

Unfortunately for Schachter, and the architects who relied on his advice, the past was not prologue. For the international order was undergoing a revolution. At the end of the 1940s, the number of states was already at seventy-five. By 1960, it hit 107. The explosion in the number of states can be seen in [Figure 3](#). Because nearly the entire earth's mass was controlled by states in 1945, the increase in the number of states after this date came from the division of existing states. As the number of states climbed, the average size of states fell.

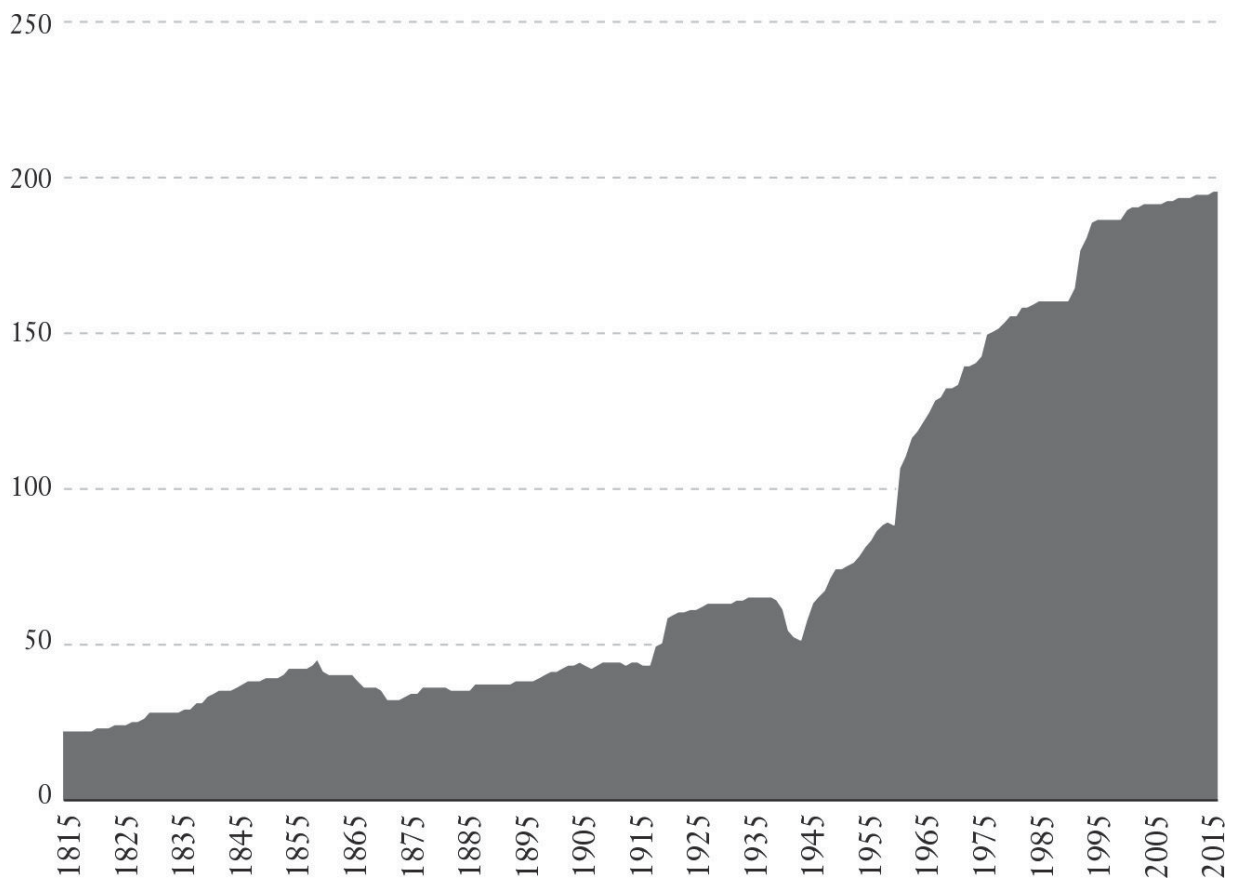


Figure 3: Number of States in the World<sup>5</sup>

How and why did the number of countries in the world grow so rapidly in the span of seventy years? Why did states begin to fracture in the 1940s? The answer, again, starts with the outlawry of war. To see why, we have to return to the dawn of the Old World Order—with the rise of the modern state.

## WHEN WAR MADE STATES AND VICE VERSA

The modern state is a recent invention.<sup>6</sup> As late as the sixteenth century, there were few, if any, entities that would be recognizable as states. There were myriad principalities, bishoprics, free cities, and urban leagues. And, of course, there were empires, which exercised loose control over vast territories. But these entities did not meet the minimal definition of a state offered by Max Weber, a foundational theorist of the state: “a human

community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s, Charles Tilly offered a simple but powerful explanation for why states emerged: “War made states, and vice versa.”<sup>8</sup> Beginning in the seventeenth century, Tilly argued, states began to exercise a monopoly on violence—making it “criminal, unpopular, and impractical for most of their citizens to bear arms.”<sup>9</sup> This centralization of the legitimate use of force in the state had the effect, Tilly argued, of creating durable state structures: To wage war, one needed an army. And to raise and maintain an army, one needed arms, munitions, transportation, roads, barracks, supply depots, and a system of military recruitment and training.

Above all, to run a military, monarchs needed money—lots of it. Military innovation in premodern Europe, particularly the development of gunpowder weapons and mass armies, made war expensive. Only entities with significant capital and a sizable population could afford to wage war effectively. “From the late seventeenth century onward,” Tilly argued, “budgets, debts, and taxes arose to the rhythm of war.”<sup>10</sup> No one designed the principal components of states. Instead, they formed “more or less as inadvertent by-products of efforts to carry out more immediate tasks, especially the creation and support of armed force.”<sup>11</sup>

One need not accept all elements of Tilly’s argument to find his central insight—that war helped propel the creation of the modern state and state structures—persuasive. War required both men and money and monarchs needed compliant populations to get both.<sup>12</sup> Tilly rightly noted that no monarch could “make war without securing the acquiescence of nearly all of his subject population, and the active cooperation of at least a crucial few.”<sup>13</sup> The need for a supportive, or at least acquiescent, population was, indeed, one of the reasons that sovereigns crafted beautifully written war manifestos to win the hearts and minds of the population—a population that had to pay taxes to finance the army and supply their sons, husbands, and fathers to fight. The sovereign needed, moreover, to build effective state institutions that could keep the war machine going. Even if the population supported the sovereign’s plans, men and material had to be organized effectively to win wars.

A sovereign who did this job poorly would be vulnerable. In a world where states could wage war and seize territory even over a small grievance, a sovereign that did not have a well-functioning military would not stay a

sovereign for long. As states came into contact with one another, successful states were more likely to win more territory, growing larger in the process, while weaker states shrank and even disappeared altogether in a kind of Darwinian survival of the fittest.

But it was not only war that led to consolidation of territory into larger political units. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the emergence of global markets coincided with the rise of the powerful and influential economic theory of mercantilism. According to mercantilist thought, which held sway in much of Western Europe, economic growth was a zero-sum game.<sup>14</sup> As Voltaire put it: “It is clear that one country can only gain if another country loses.”<sup>15</sup>

The government’s charge, then, was to manage the economy to augment state power at the expense of rivals. The only way to assure free and open trade with a territory was to control it. Mercantilist states—including most of the leading European powers—adopted economic policies aimed at producing a positive balance of trade through high tariffs and quotas. To export more than the country imported would, mercantilist leaders thought, lead to an accumulation of currency and precious metals and, hence, power.

Sovereign policies designed to keep money, precious metals, and raw materials within their control drove states to conquer territories nearby and—increasingly—overseas. Africa and the Americas were newly accessible to Europeans thanks to technological advances in navigation, shipping technology, and mapping. Those lands were often controlled by tribes or other entities that European powers did not consider to be sovereign states. The formal requirements of war were therefore frequently discarded and the land treated as *terra nullius*—no man’s land, with no just cause for war required.

The colonies served as sources of raw materials and markets for finished goods. Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and—above all—the United Kingdom fanned out across the globe, seeking to establish colonial footholds as far and wide as possible. Mercantilism encouraged states to make war to expand territorial control and market size, while war, by expanding the markets under unified sovereign control, helped sustain mercantilism. These forces fed each other, encouraging greater amalgamation of territory under sovereign control.

And, indeed, beginning in the sixteenth century, states began to consolidate into fewer, larger entities. At the close of the fifteenth century,

in Europe there were somewhere on the order of “200 states, would-be states, statelets, and statelike organizations.”<sup>16</sup> By the early 1900s, competition and consolidation had cut that number down to roughly twenty. The rest of the world experienced a similar dynamic. States became bigger and less numerous over the course of the eighteenth century as control over territory consolidated in the hands of those most successful at conquest.<sup>17</sup> All that would soon change.

## WAR NO LONGER MAKES STATES

The change in the legal rules operated like a sudden shock to the system. The Old World Order had rewarded states capable of seizing and holding territory. The New World Order removed these powerful pressures and replaced them with a different logic of international competition. Like an environmental disaster that wipes out all the predators in the ecosystem, the outlawry of war fundamentally altered the balance of power in the world. And by transforming that balance of power, it also *transformed states themselves*.<sup>18</sup>

With the outlawry of war, the forces that favored larger states and empires were undermined and even reversed. States no longer had to be big simply to survive. The threat of conquest—and the pressure it placed on states to grow so they could field larger and better-equipped militaries—receded. The prohibition on war and territorial conquest, backed by the promise of nonrecognition and even possible Security Council action to reverse illegal seizures, meant that vulnerable states could nonetheless thrive.<sup>19</sup> The meek, once under constant threat, were now able to hold their ground.

Colonies, too, were also immune from new conquest. In the Old World Order, if a colony managed to gain independence from its imperial overlord, it exposed itself to takeover by another power. Some vulnerable territories acquiesced in the establishment of protectorates that would permit them some measure of self-governance for this reason. In a world where conquest was common, a colonial “protectorate” offered the subjugated state security against would-be conquerors. During the scramble for Africa, for instance, local leaders frequently agreed to the creation of protectorates as a defensive move to prevent more aggressive assertions of authority. With the outlawry



of war, however, colonies no longer had to worry that they would be reconquered if they became independent. In a world where aggressive war was illegal, protectorates offered little that an independent state could not obtain on its own.

## FREE TRADE UNLEASHED

By the time war was outlawed, mercantilist thought, which favored exports over imports and encouraged states to accumulate vast territory, had long been discredited. In his 1776 classic work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith demonstrated that specialization in production allows for economies of scale, improving efficiency and growth.<sup>20</sup> In 1817, David Ricardo showed that countries could gain from trade even if one was more efficient at producing *all* traded goods—what mattered was their *comparative* advantage.<sup>21</sup>

These revolutionary ideas swept the Western world. And yet growth in global trade was sluggish. From the end of the eighteenth century, when Adam Smith first launched his famous critique of mercantilism, until the early twentieth, global trade rose from just under 10 percent of global GDP to just over 20 percent.<sup>22</sup>

This tepid response is puzzling. If states were aware that they could do better by trading, why didn't they? One explanation is domestic politics: Powerful industries within the state typically want protection from outside competition and are often able to exert pressure on political leaders to enact protectionist policies. But another explanation for why states traded so little—even once they realized it was economically beneficial—is that they feared their trading partners.

Gains from trade, after all, are almost never equal. Both sides gain, but one side usually gets more than the other. Whether England or Portugal does relatively better when they trade cloth and wine depends on a wide array of factors, including the gains from specialization, the responsiveness (what economists call “elasticity”) of demand and supply, exchange rates, transportation costs, competition for labor, the terms of trade, and the level and amount of the increase in productive efficiency. Thus even though both states generally benefit from increased trade (that is, both enjoy “absolute” gains), those benefits are never identical—“relative” gains will vary. Portugal

and England will be reluctant to trade, because each is afraid of making the other relatively better off and placing itself in a disadvantageous position if they go to war.

This insight—that states care more about relative than absolute gains—is a central tenet of one of the most influential theories of international relations known as Realism.<sup>23</sup> Realists argue that states must constantly be on guard against relative losses of power. States therefore cannot engage in true cooperation of any kind, for cooperation will yield uneven gains, leaving one partner relatively worse off. And since war and trade are more likely to take place between neighboring countries,<sup>24</sup> states have a distinct disincentive to trade.

Realism's chief critics have argued that Realists have the priority backward: States privilege absolute, not relative, gains.<sup>25</sup> They maintain that even in an anarchic system, certain forms of cooperation are possible. To support their claim, these critics point to the array of international institutions that emerged after the Second World War. The European Union, NATO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and a host of other complex organizations demonstrate that—contrary to Realist expectations—cooperation among states is not only possible, but real.

But Realism's critics have always had a hard time explaining *why* relative gains don't matter as much as absolute gains.<sup>25</sup> And they have had an even harder time explaining why international cooperation has been so much more robust in recent decades than it was for the three centuries previous. The answer—and the reason why Realists are largely right about prior centuries but wrong about the present era—is that war has been outlawed. The claim that states prioritize relative gains was a pretty good description of the world when Might was Right, but it is a pretty bad description of our current world, in which it is not. In a world without war, states are no longer fixated on getting ahead of the competition. They can focus on whether they are better off with trade than without it, and in most cases they are better off with it.

The sum of world exports and imports as a share of world GDP rose from a low of 10 percent at the close of the Second World War to roughly 60 percent today.<sup>26</sup> The change in the law was not the only reason global free trade boomed at this moment. Improved financial and transportation technology also played an important role, as did the declining dependence of



governments on tariffs for revenue. But many of these forces had long been building. The outlawry of war in 1928—and the broader legal transformation that it unleashed—made it safer to trade. With conquest no longer a threat, states did not have to fear that their trading partners would turn on them and go to war.

## COOPERATION INSTEAD OF CONQUEST

The rise of free trade meant that states no longer needed to control territory to access markets. States that once maintained enormous empires to extract resources through privileged trading relationships could now gain the benefits of trade without the costs of controlling far-flung territories. Yes, they would have to share the market with others, but others would also have to share with them.<sup>27</sup> Raw commodities, once obtained by colonization and extraction, now could be acquired through simple exchange.

Trade was not the only area in which states could gain the advantages of size through cooperation. International organizations focusing on a wide range of activities emerged in the postwar era. These include the World Bank, founded in 1944 to provide loans to developing countries; the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance formed in 1949 encompassing twenty-eight member states including the United States and much of Western Europe; and the World Health Organization, founded in 1948 to direct and coordinate a global array of public health programs. But they also include smaller, less well-known institutions such as the International Coffee Organization, which provides assistance to coffee growers around the world; the International Olive Oil Council, which does much the same for olive oil producers; and the International Whaling Commission, which was founded to “provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.”<sup>28</sup>

By offering a way to cooperate with each other, these international organizations allow states to reap many of the benefits of being big, even if they themselves are quite small—not only in trade but on other dimensions. Through this growing array of international institutions, states could gain access to resources that once came only with territorial control. Bigger used

to be better. Now many of the benefits of being large could be obtained through cooperation with other states instead.

In the Old World Order, only large, expanding states thrived. In the New World Order, states became freer to choose the size that fit their national aspirations. They could choose to be small without jeopardizing their existence or their ability to gain from larger cooperative ventures.

What they could not always choose, however, was which populations remained part of their national political community. For the last great change brought about by the outlawry of war was growing demands of people within states for states of their own. With conquest an ever-present danger (or, for those doing the conquest, a tempting opportunity), the Old World Order had created powerful centripetal forces. The New World Order replaced them with centrifugal forces, and none pulled harder than the pressure for decolonization unleashed by conquest's collapse.

## MERDEKA

The Atlantic Charter, issued by Roosevelt and Churchill as a statement of principles for which their countries would fight, promised to “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.”<sup>29</sup> Along with the prohibition on territorial aggrandizement through force and support for free trade, the commitment to self-determination was reaffirmed in the Declaration of the United Nations and in the United Nations Charter itself, which included among the new organization's three purposes “the development of friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle for equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”<sup>30</sup>

When the Second World War came to a close, the tension between the rhetoric of self-determination and the reality of colonization became difficult to maintain. An account by a member of the British 23rd Indian Division—known as “The Fighting Cock” for the insignia on the uniforms of the men within it—shows how the colonized turned the colonizers' ideals against them. During the war, the Japanese had seized control of Indonesia from the Dutch. When the Japanese surrendered in early September 1945, the Fighting Cock went to Java to accept a transfer of authority to Allied forces. In Singapore, en route to Java, an advance party met a “cheerful Dutchman

who assumed that he and his countrymen were coming back to the peaceful reoccupation of their Empire.”<sup>31</sup> But the Indonesians had a different idea. To greet the returning imperialists, they covered carriages and vehicles with graffiti declaring: “Atlantic Charter means freedom from Dutch Imperialism.” “Indonesia for Indonesians.” And, simply, “*Merdeka*”—Freedom.<sup>32</sup> The armed resistance did not abate until the United Nations recognized the country’s independence in 1949.

Indonesia was not alone. With the war won, it was difficult to square the ideals for which the Allies had fought with the realities of empire. In a world where slavery was illegal and both individual and national self-determination were increasingly recognized as basic human rights, it was morally untenable for states to possess and rule over colonies. People in colonized states had their own national identities—and they demanded the same rights to rule themselves claimed by their rulers. These impulses to self-determination were in many cases reinforced by the Soviet Union and United States, which offered support for nationalist movements in Greece, Vietnam, Iran, Indonesia, Algeria, Lebanon, Congo, Cuba, Colombia, Thailand, Yemen, Ethiopia, Peru, and Afghanistan, as the superpowers competed with each other for influence.<sup>33</sup>

The desire for self-determination was not new, of course. People have yearned to govern themselves for far longer than war has been outlawed. But the rise of self-determination as a principle uniting the Allies against the Axis meant empires were all but impossible to sustain once the war was won. Equally important—and far less recognized—the major features of the global system that had once made it dangerous or impracticable to act on the desire for self-governance had been eliminated. The outlawry of war, the end of conquest, and the rise of global free trade meant that smaller entities could now not only survive but thrive. Self-determination was not only morally required in the New World Order, but it was practically realistic as well.

## A WORLD TRANSFORMED

And so, after 1945, the number of states exploded. Two key forms of state birth—decolonization and the fracturing of larger states into smaller ones—led to the rapid increase in United Nations members that so defied the initial

expectations of those who built the General Assembly Hall. The 1940s through the 1970s witnessed the largest wave of decolonization the world had ever seen. The British Empire collapsed and with it huge swaths of the world became independent, including Transjordan (now Jordan), India, Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Eritrea, parts of Egypt, Sudan, the Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia), Ghana, Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia, Zambia, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, and Swaziland. France, too, released its grip over Syria, Laos, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Cambodia, Vietnam, Guinea, Dahomey (now Benin), Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso), Cameroon, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, the Mali Federation (present-day Mali and Senegal), Mauritania, Niger, Togo, the Central African Republic, and Madagascar. Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United States relinquished their smaller holdings. Between 1945 and 1960, three dozen new states in Asia and Africa achieved independence.

New states also emerged through fracturing of larger geographically contiguous states into smaller ones—a trend that gained momentum just as the wave of decolonization began to dissipate. In 1958, Egypt and Syria created the United Arab Republic, which split again in 1961. In 1965, Singapore was established as a sovereign state independent of Malaysia. Bangladesh split from Pakistan in 1971, which itself had split from India in 1947. In the 1990s, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia all disintegrated, producing tens of smaller sub-states.

Yemen divided in two and then reunited again (and is presently in danger of dividing once again). Eritrea broke from Ethiopia, also in the early 1990s. And most recent of all, in 2011, Sudan split into Sudan and South Sudan.

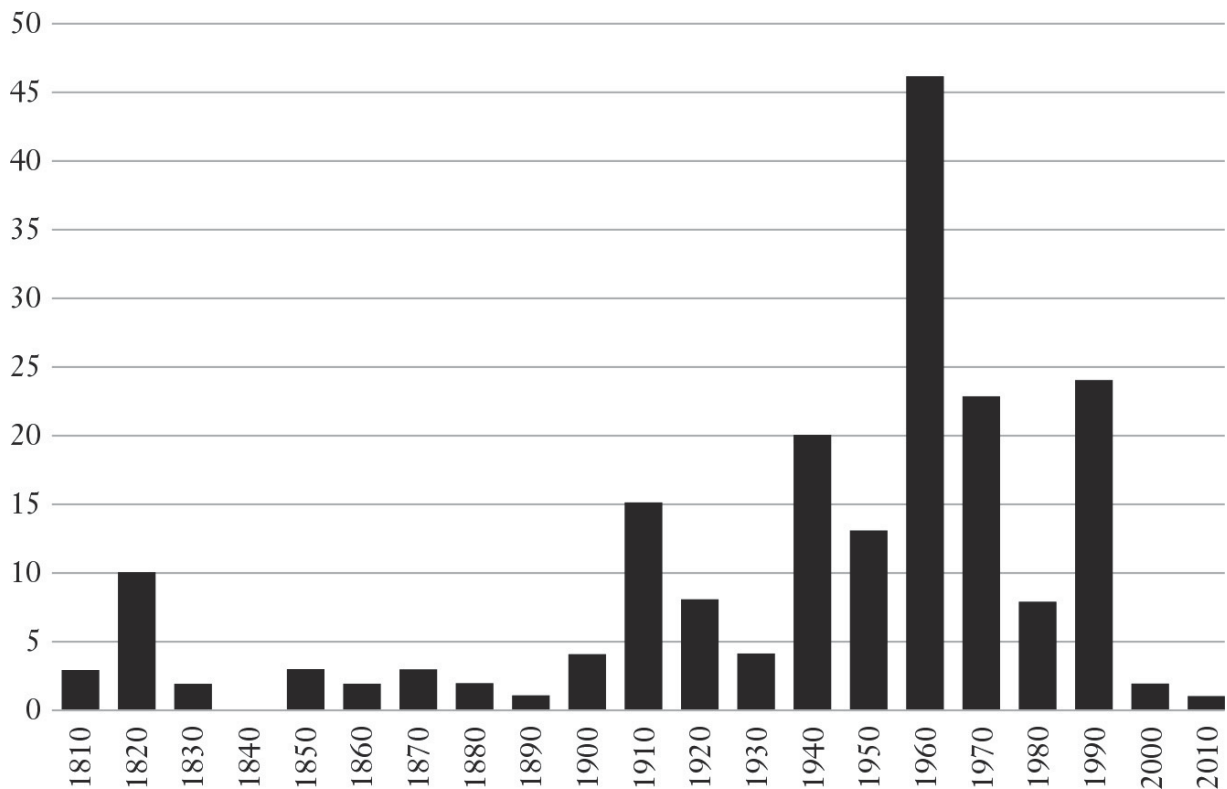


Figure 4: Independences Per Decade<sup>34</sup>

Drawing again on the Correlates of War database employed in the last chapter, it is possible to map the number of “independences” that occurred each decade. Here “independence” does not necessarily mean colonial independence. Instead, it refers to the process by which territory that had been part of one state broke away and became its own free-standing state—for example, when South Sudan became a state separate from Sudan. As Figure 4 shows, although there had been state births all through the 1800s and early 1900s, the number of “independences” jumped in the 1940s and stayed high throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century, falling off only in the beginning of the twenty-first.

To see where all these new states came from, we mapped the transformation in states’ reach and character over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by looking at the control of territory. Because there is no existing database that accurately records the size of states over this period, we combined the “Correlates of War” territorial transfer dataset with the World Bank’s data on the present-day size of states. We worked backward, applying the gains and losses of territory year by year to estimate the size of each country at any point in time. For example, the

present-day size of the United Kingdom is 243,930 square kilometers. Working backward, we added 1,084 square kilometers in 1997, which corresponds to the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong from the U.K. to China. The U.K. then remains at 245,014 square kilometers from 1997 until 1984, the year in which Brunei gained independence, when we added 5,270 square kilometers to the U.K. total, and so on all the way back to 1816. At that time, the U.K. and its empire was a staggering 21,384,864 square kilometers, more than two times the size of present-day China and eighty-eight times the U.K.'s present size.

We then started moving forward in time. Looking at the ten largest states in 1816 and the territories they controlled—the United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, China, France, Spain, Russia/USSR, Turkey/Ottoman Empire, Belgium, and the United Kingdom—we traced their development through the present. All territorial transfers to states that became independent after 1816 are included in the graph as “independences.” Meanwhile, all other territory—territory held by states that existed in 1816 but that were not among the ten largest, territory held by states that came into existence after 1816 through forced dissolution (as distinct from independence), and territory that was not in the state system in 1816 but later was incorporated into it—is in the “other” category.<sup>35</sup>

The picture that emerges in [Figure 5](#) is striking: Only one of the ten largest states in 1816—China—is roughly as big today as it was then. The Ottoman Empire (today Turkey) gradually lost territory before collapsing at the close of the First World War. Portugal, once a great empire, shriveled with the loss of the colony of Brazil in the 1830s. Spain, too, collapsed in size when it lost control of its American territories. Russia/USSR held steady until it contracted with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. The United States started small but ballooned through a variety of significant acquisitions, the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican-American War, and the purchase of Alaska chief among them. Perhaps most remarkable, the United Kingdom and France grew over the course of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. They then began to shrink, with the rapid decolonization that began with the release of Canada and Australia by the U.K. in 1931 and accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. Belgium and the Netherlands lost territory at the same time, also due to decolonization.



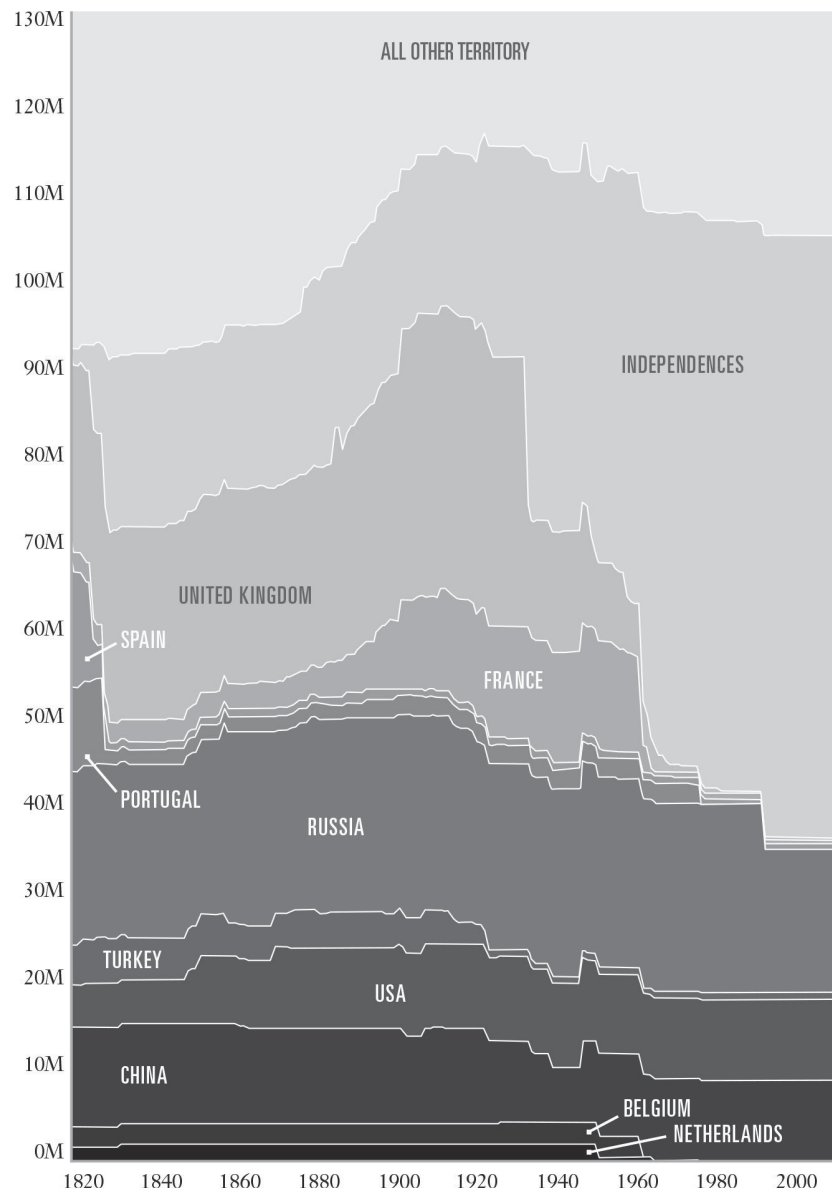


Figure 5: Share of Territory Controlled by States (in Square Kilometers)

As the biggest states shrank, the newest proliferated. Indeed, what is perhaps most remarkable in the figure is the growing swaths of territory created by the fracturing of the Great Powers. By 2014, states that became independent after 1816 covered more than half of the world.

The outlawry of war brought an end to the pressures that once produced bigger and stronger states. Instead, it allowed smaller and weaker states to survive and even thrive. With the end of conquest, states no longer faced the constant threat of attack, and those too small or ineffective to defend themselves could expect, if not success, at least survival. In many ways, this

was—and is—an overwhelmingly positive change. But it has not been without its costs.