

War and the Nation-Building of Arab States in the Middle East

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Abstract

This paper adopts Charles Tilley's "War-Driven Model" to discuss the state-building of Arab countries in the Middle East. This paper discusses the two aspects of national capacity and national identity in state construction, and argues that due to the special geopolitics of Middle East Arab countries, countries in the region cannot improve their national capacity in war, including financial absorption capacity and social control capacity; on the one hand, war and domestic ethnic conflict have fallen into a vicious circle of mutual cause and effect. Therefore, this paper argues that war has a more negative effect on the current construction of Arab states.

Keywords

War, Arab States, Nation-Building

1. Introduction

Chaos and strife in the Middle East have a long history. The region is located in the "five seas and three continents", has the world's largest oil reserves, and is also a multi-ethnic and multi-religious region. In the history, conflicts and wars of ethnic, religious and national interests have broken out in this region. In addition, due to its special geographical location and rich oil and mineral resources, the region has been influenced and intervened by world powers. The special geopolitical environment has profoundly affected Arab countries in the Middle East. The five "Middle East Wars" known to the world since modern times, the Gulf War in 1991, the Iraq War in 2003, the "Arab Spring" in 2010, etc., the wars in this region have lasted for a long time and have high intensity, which has a great impact on the Middle East. The country has far-reaching influence. Due to the long-term turmoil in the region, a large number of refugees have been gen-

erated, and after each conflict and war, the resulting refugee problem is difficult to solve effectively. Intuitively, the national capacity of Arab countries cannot solve such problems. So what impact did the conflicts and wars in the Middle East have on the state-building of Arab countries?

2. Theory of War and State Construction

Building (state-building) was proposed by Charles Tilly in 1970, and usually refers to the process by which the political elite of a state establishes, consolidates and reconstructs the state apparatus or organization, state capacity, and political legitimacy, including the process of territorial control. Control, the loyalty of the population, the autonomy of the institution. In Tilly's theoretical system, "the core theory of state power" and "the core theory of state capacity" are its theoretical pillars. There have been many discussions on state construction since it was put forward, but in general it mainly includes "the construction of the state apparatus and the construction of the state (nation), and the construction process of these two aspects is usually a two-way interactive relationship" (Jones et al., 2008).

2.1. War Shapes a Country

In the practice of world politics in state-building, Marina Ottaway argues that "successful state-building is often a product of domestic politics" (Ottaway, 2002). But in explaining the paradigm of state construction, "war and conflict explanations are more adopted" (Lu & Gu, 2022). Charles Tilly proposed the "war-driven model" in this regard. There are two other paradigms for explaining state construction: one is functionalism, which focuses on the satisfaction of the public; the other is elite conflict, which starts with the conflict between elites and between elites and the masses.

Charles Tilly's "War-Driven Model" is roughly "wars shape nations, nations wage wars". In explaining the formation of modern European states, Tilly believes that in the initial stage of the formation of nation-states, due to external threats or internal challenges, the rulers will expand their armaments, but maintaining huge armaments requires a lot of resources, which have to be obtained from society. The bureaucracy that generates taxes, manages them, etc., from which the apparatus of the state arises (Tilly, 2009). It can be found from this passage that the formation of the state apparatus is mainly due to the close connection between the state and society. In this regard, Michel Barnett also pointed out that "the essence of state construction is the adjustment of the relationship between state and society" (Barnett, 1993: p. 10), and the driving force of the adjustment is the threat of war. At the same time, Barnett also pointed out that in this process, the state will inevitably encounter social resistance when it extends its power to the society, which promotes the state to establish new bureaucracies or improve bureaucracies in order to better obtain resources from the society and Maintaining social order further promotes state construction.

All in all, in the initial and consolidating stages of state construction under the “war-driven model”, the emergence of the state apparatus is caused and promoted by the threat of war. In this process, the state enhances its state capacity by strengthening its control over society, and finally completes the state construct.

2.2. War Weakens the Country

Regarding Charles Tilly’s “war-driven model”, some scholars believe that “war will weaken state construction” (Barnett, 1993: p. 10), that is, the appearance of war will lead to a reduction in the state’s control over society. This view holds that the government is forced to negotiate with the society in response to the war. The result of the bargaining is that the government makes concessions to the society, reduces the scope of state power, and expands the relative power of the society, which in turn affects the construction of the state. Some scholars have added a limited scope to this view, arguing that only developed capitalist countries can lead to this “weakening effect”, that is, developed capitalist countries do not hold political power and capital at the same time, and society is controlled by capital (Lu & Gu, 2022). In other words, only “post-colonial countries and less developed countries may have ‘war shaped countries’”, (Fritz & Menocal, 2007) and such countries are not developed capitalist countries.

In discussing the impact of war on state construction, Charles Tilly discusses more about the state’s capture of resources in society during the war, the formation of state organizations and the development of state capabilities during the war, and the continuation of these into the postwar period. But the question that has to be faced is, what will happen if the war is lost? Take Europe, which was initially studied by Charles Tilly, as an example. Before the emergence of nation-states, the wars in Europe were mostly wars between royal families and religious wars. When a royal family fails during a war, the outcome is often the occupation of territory or the annexation of the country. The same is true for religious wars. The direct consequence is that the original state organization of the failed country is destroyed, and every aspect of the country is controlled by the victorious country. Therefore, it is difficult to build a country. Finish. In modern and contemporary world politics, international wars often no longer seek to acquire territory, and a defeated country can retain most of its original territory, but “after a country has experienced war failure, the collective confidence within the country and the authority of the government are greatly affected. In order to restore the original prestige, leaders or governments often vent their emotions to the people of their own society (Fritz & Menocal, 2007)”. The people of this country are also difficult to have a sense of national pride, and the degree of cooperation with the government has therefore declined.

Thus, for wars that weaken state-building, advanced capitalist countries are stronger because of wars because their societies are strong; failures become unacceptable for postcolonial and underdeveloped countries. National construction mainly includes the construction of national capacity and national identity. In

empirical research, later scholars usually convert this national capacity into financial absorption capacity; national (national) identity is converted into national identity. In terms of the construction of the state by war, it is manifested that the state is threatened by the outside and absorbs resources from the society. In this process, the state and its establishment and the emergence of national consciousness, the state is constructed accordingly. In the process of nation building, the government needs to consider the outcome of the war, and it is easy to lose national identity if the war fails.

3. The Middle East Arab Countries War Analysis

3.1. Changes in the Geopolitical Pattern in the Middle East Lead to Political Conflicts

The geopolitical structure of the Middle East determines that the region is the focus of great power games and state construction. Geopolitical theories are all based on safeguarding national interests as the starting point and goal (Fritz & Menocal, 2007). "State relations in the Middle East are conflicted" (Barnhart, 2020). "The root cause of the conflict in the Middle East is the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, which has led to changes in the geopolitics of the Middle East, and the Arabs regard the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire as a opportunity for national liberation, but the result of this process was a great power 'mandate'" (Zhou & Chen, 2007). England and France were the main great powers of this period. Under the mandate of Britain and France, Arab countries have no independent sovereignty. The borders of Arab countries are divided according to the wishes of Britain and France, and there is a lack of consideration for the history, religion, culture, etc., involved. Since mandate rule is essentially colonial rule, Britain and France have no motivation to solve the modern problems, national and religious problems that exist in it. This sets the stage for conflict.

In modern times, Arab states have opposed Western hegemony, despite adopting Western political, economic and cultural values. After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, some countries have been trying to "unify" the Arab world, which is a demand that exists in the Arab world. However, from a geopolitical point of view, this appeal is more a matter of dominance by a certain country rather than a question of the attribution of public opinion, which will inevitably lead to conflicts and games among major powers in the Middle East. In the practice of unifying or dominating the Arab world, there are mainly Nasser in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya and Saddam in Iraq, all of which have failed. Therefore, the contradiction between regional power game and unified demands will exist for a long time.

3.2. The Political Game of the Interests of Major Powers in the World Leads to Conflicts

As the world's energy base, the Middle East is distributed with the core interests of Western countries. Among them, the United States links the US dollar to oil,

which determines that the United States must maintain its influence in the Middle East, which is the core national interest of the United States. Regarding the US interference, some scholars believe that “the US will not and will not let go of the Middle East, and the internal conflicts in the Middle East will be difficult to resolve itself, and it will not be able to resolve the issues of territory, water resources, ethnicity, religion, and Palestine and Israel. Symmetrical warfare will perpetuate the conflicting political order in the Middle East” (Feng, 2005).

After the United States shifted its strategic focus to the “Asia-Pacific region”, Russia and France took the opportunity to expand their influence in the Middle East, leading to long-term turmoil in the Middle East and the activities of Islamic extremist forces. As the center of the world, the Middle East continues to receive the attention and interference of major powers, so it is difficult to end the conflict; and the turbulent geopolitics caused by the conflict provides opportunities for major powers to intervene.

3.3. Religious Conflict in the Middle East Is the Root Cause of Conflict Culture

Islamic civilization is the cultural background of Middle Eastern countries, and Middle Eastern countries show strong Islamic cultural characteristics in national construction, social affairs, and foreign affairs. But at the same time, the Islamic movement or political Islam began to revive. In the view of many scholars, “Islam is in an uncertain state in the process of democratization in the Middle East, and the integration system of politics and religion in the Middle East will inevitably suppress democratization. process” (Wang, 2008). Whether it is political Islam or fundamentalist Islam, the stability of the Middle East is always unstable, and terrorist acts may be carried out at any time out of hatred for other countries.

4. War and the National Capacity Building of Arab Countries

4.1. War and Financial Extraction Capacity

As mentioned above, in the aspect of state construction, scholars often convert state capacity into state financial absorption capacity. Before the discovery of oil, the Middle East was generally dominated by agriculture. After the discovery of huge amounts of oil, the oil-producing countries in the Middle East began to promote the modernization process and development of the country through the profits obtained by exporting oil. This involves a time node. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was in 1922, mainly due to the defeat in World War I; and the discovery of oil resources in the Middle East was first in Iran in 1908, followed by Iraq in 1927, and discovered in 1930. Oil was discovered in other Arab countries one after another.

It is extremely expensive to spend a lot of time and energy from the agricultural society to draw a small amount of social resources to enrich the finances. On the contrary, a large amount of fiscal revenue can be obtained by simply ex-

porting oil. For a rationally chosen government, the result is naturally that exporting oil will make money faster. Therefore, under the “war-driven model”, when the oil giants in the Middle East face external threats, they are not eager to grab resources from society, because oil earns enough foreign exchange, and the national government does not have enough motivation to integrate society. In addition, the Middle East was under the British mandate after the First World War, so it was greatly influenced by the British polity at the level of modern state construction. However, due to the national conditions of the Middle East, a limited democratic system with authoritarianism was implemented. When the Middle East countries are both authoritarian and oil-producing countries, the government does not have enough incentives to ask for resources from the society. After all, compared with exporting oil, the input-output ratio of obtaining financial resources from the society is really low. In such a situation, the predictable result is that the country does not have enough motivation to obtain resources from the society regardless of the war or not. One predictable result is the separation of the national government and the society, and the government will not have enough experience to govern society. It should be noted that although oil exports are also a country’s financial capacity income, the oil fields of most countries in the world are owned by the state or big capitalists, and it is difficult for ordinary social fields to access the ownership of oil and gas resources, and the same is true for Middle Eastern countries.

4.2. War and State and Social Control Capability

In addition, regarding the war in Arab countries, the Arab countries have been interfered by the British since the founding of the country, and the entire Arab world lacks conflicts and wars that are independent of the world. Under the huge national power gap between Arab countries and world powers, the war in the Arab world will inevitably be subject to the intervention of world powers such as the United Kingdom. That is to say, during the war, Arab countries do not rely entirely on “national strength” to fight wars, and usually ask for help from external forces to achieve the victory of the war, and these external forces are often stronger than the participating parties, so they can directly affect the war. For example, the “Hashiqiao family, the Ibn family, and the Saudi family”, if they do not have the support of foreign powers, they will not be able to obtain a stable regime, so they will establish strategic alliances with Britain or France. The result of this is often that these upper-level establishments obtain incomplete state power. It is also extremely unfavorable for the cultivation of national capacity.

In the book “The Death of Aid”, Danbisa Moyo believes that in the development of Africa, due to the dominance and condescension of Western countries’ aid policies to Africa, this is not only ineffective for promoting Africa’s development and improving African people’s livelihood. It also traps Africa in the trap of relying on foreign aid (Zhu, 2008). Similarly, the Arab countries in the

Middle East have also fallen into such a trap: because of their own tribal status, the Arab countries in the Middle East have sought the support of other countries in order to obtain national political power, and the world powers have been able to morally interfere in the Arab world; in the Arab world, due to the interference of major powers in the world, the political game of the major powers has made the situation more complicated and the conflict aggravated. Each tribe further seeks help from external forces, thus forming a cycle. Such a trap of relying on foreign aid can show that in the case of conflicts and wars, the foreign aid introduced far exceeds its own strength, and the result is “introduction of wolves into the house”; in the case of Middle East Arab countries responding to domestic and foreign wars, the result of choosing external aid is national capability. Not getting exercise and development, or even being “stifled” by aid.

5. War and the National Identity of Arab Countries in the Middle East

5.1. War and Tribal Group Structure

Corresponding to the agricultural-dominated society in the Middle East Arab countries when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, the tribal social structure widely existed in the Middle East Arab countries. These “extensive existence of tribal societies does not indicate the coherence of Arab society, on the contrary it is indeed an obstacle to tribal integration” (Wang, 2015). Corresponding to tribal society is tribal culture and values. “Tribal society is supported by blood relationship, and the core principle of society is ‘balanced opposition’, which on the one hand allows it to be independent from the state’s violent machine, on the other hand, it implies endless conflicts.” (The Death of Aid, 2006) Within the Arab countries, for the sake of security and survival, each tribe forms and maintains a state of balance with the hostile forces among each other, so as to maintain the development of the tribe. Since the tribal society is linked by blood relationship, the issue of state construction involves the identification of the tribal organization and the identification of the state organization.

In addition, the Middle East countries also include multi-ethnic groups and religious groups, which constitute the diverse social and tribal structure of the Middle East countries. As far as ethnic groups are concerned, Arab countries include not only the main ethnic Arabs, but also Persians, Turks, Kurds, etc., while religious groups include Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, among which there are differences and differences within each sect. Historical grudges. For the construction of a modern nation-state, the demands and pressures of different ethnic groups in the country have to be considered, which corresponds to the differences in the attitudes of ethnic groups towards national identity. When the ethnic group in the majority holds the state power, it is inevitable to face the problem of policy formulation. Once the policy is inappropriate and unfavorable to the minority group, the minority group will have a reactionary force on the construction of the state. It has evolved from ethnic conflict to tribal conflict. At

the same time, in practical experience, tribal conflict is often mixed with religious conflict and national conflict. In this case, both parties to the conflict often seek external forces to protect themselves, and this aspect has been discussed above. Therefore, under the tribal structure, wars often fail to arouse broad national identity, and even wars are caused by conflicts between tribes and states. Before this conflict can be completely resolved, it is impossible to realize the national identity aspect of state construction.

5.2. War and Religious Pluralism

In a multi-religious and ethnic state, in order to seek national identity, the state often needs an ideological identity that transcends religion and ethnicity. Here, Arab countries adopt secular Arabism to build a state and build consensus. But it is undeniable that, despite the ideology that goes beyond religion and ethnicity, religion and ethnicity still play a role or even a leading role in the specific political life of a country. Once a political and economic crisis occurs in a country, the problem of religion and ethnicity often breaks out first. Historical experience shows that when international relations in the Middle East are in a state of relaxation, religious conflicts and ethnic conflicts within countries will also be eased. Correspondingly, international conflicts and domestic conflicts are linked to each other. Therefore, for countries in the Middle East, in terms of state construction and identity, religious and national stability must require the balance and stability of the international and domestic parts. Any imbalance will cause fluctuations on the other side, thereby intensifying the intensity of the conflict (Wang, 2006).

Although many wars in the Middle East are caused by ethnic groups and religions, and the emergence of wars has not resolved disputes, but has intensified domestic political distrust, the wars still have an impact on the promotion of religious identity. As mentioned earlier, the current countries in the Arab region have a unified demand to oppose the power of Western powers. This is manifested in the “Arab-Israeli conflict”. Israel, as a non-Arab country, forcibly occupied the territories of the Arab world with the support of major powers. As some scholars have said, the essence of the “Arab-Israeli conflict” is the conflict between the Arab world and the United States. The Arab world seems so consistent in opposing Western powers, but it often seeks assistance from major powers during the war, which appears contradictory and divided.

6. Conclusion

Charles Tilly’s “war-driven model” is a classic paradigm for the study of state-building, and this paper also adopts this paradigm to explain. Although the article shows that war does not effectively construct Arab states, this is by no means a refutation of Tilly’s model. As some scholars have pointed out, war is often affected by many other factors in shaping the state. In the Middle East Arab countries, due to their unique geopolitics, the whole process of the war is

basically multi-party participation, rather than a simple confrontation relationship between the government subject and the government subject. In this case, the war is more about Arab state construction showing negative effects. In the few cases, when there is a clear enemy, that is, when the major powers are clearly in the war, the Arab countries can realize a short-term united front only after they feel the geopolitical threat. Stop, although the hot war on the bright side will always come to an end, but in the long run, the previous wars in the Middle East are more like a protracted conflict and a small battle in the war. Therefore, for the war to shape the country, the war in the Middle East countries has not ended, but what is shown in this war is that the effect of war on the construction of the country is not obvious.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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