

Africa and the Middle East: Recolonisation and the Crisis of the Nation State

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When colonialist forces created states in their own images, they re-founded institutions that organise social structures in line with their strategies. When, after decolonisation, many of these states in Africa and the Middle East weakened under military or neoliberal assaults, they were dubbed ill-governed or 'overdeveloped.' The 'or' between military and neoliberal is inclusive. The neoliberal bent is imposed by shifting national class structures to accept the imperialist terms of surrender via neoliberal policies by power structures, foremost in which, is actual or potential military power. As for overdeveloped, it is said that ex-colonies borrowed over-fitted systems of government and administration from their Western patrons. More recently, many of these ex-colonies have failed and many others teeter on the brink of failure. [Libya](#), Yemen and Syria can now be added to Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq. However, these failures are not a onetime occurrence after which states resurrect in better shape or form. They have become states that exist in a continual condition of violence and collapse.

After the destruction of their indigenous industry and national means for the reproduction of life, they are relegated to a condition of insecurity, dependency and the export of raw material. Imperialist forces ensure that rent from resources are devolved in ways that entrench divisions across social groups that, in turn, vie for raw material or geopolitical rents. In this new breed of states, the state is neither an institution of all institutions nor an institution in itself. It just administers rent redistribution and protects vital raw material sources. Iraq recently, for instance, [bought drones](#) to protect its pipelines when [more than one million](#) of its orphaned children are stranded in the street of Baghdad and daily car bombs wreak havoc and destruction across its landscape.

This new breed of state is neither sovereign, in the sense it cannot provide national, communal or individual security, nor does it exercise autonomy over policy. It is simply there to ensure continued divisions so as not to facilitative the aspirations of working people irrespective of sex, colour, gender, sect etc., in a more resistant stance to imperialism. As models engineered in response to the crisis of capital, they are instruments of working class differentiation and control. And, the possibility exists that there could be more of these states now. What occurred in Iraq and Libya can engulf all of Africa. In the post-Soviet era, the old form of the sovereign and nationally industrialising state no longer tallies with present-day imperialist ambitions. In an [organically set mode of capital accumulation](#), when some states break the mould of underdevelopment, others will pay a heavy price of underdevelopment.

At its peak in the eighteenth century, the state was ideally conceptualised. The nation state

was 'the realisation of the spirit' or 'the actuality of the ethical idea (Hegel).' It was also '[a]n autonomous state, one in which the authority of its laws is in the will of the people in that state (Kant).' By the time class divisions deepened in the nineteenth century, the state became 'the institution of organised violence which is used by the ruling class to maintain the conditions of its rule (Marx) or, putatively, 'the organisation that monopolises legitimate violence over a given territory (Weber).' In our age of colonialist intervention couched under humanitarianism, the state became a social club modelled upon the fagging system of English public schools. Late in the twentieth century, the concept of the state had to annul the concept of class altogether from the definition of state. The state became an association of persons, living in a determinate part of the earth's surface, legally organised and personified, and associated for their own government. This new breed of state, however, fits none of the above definitions. It is a differentiated and degenerative form of even the nation state defined as a social club. Individuals in these on-the-brink states have no one government that they can call their own.

Ideally, for Hegel to have reached his definition of the state as the actualisation of ethics, he followed the contradictory path of the development of the spirit over time as it oscillated between the in-itself mode to the for-itself mode embracing larger and more inclusive forms of social organisations. In the despotic Orient, he thought one was not free but all are free. In the slave age, some were free. In the Prussian state, one and all were free. In this modern form of 'on-the-brink state', however, neither one nor all can be said to be free.

Materially, from its very birth, the nation state was a constituent of capital and armed with a welfare task, principally, the function of reproducing, by more or less coercive and ideological means, a malleable and acquiescent working class. The state became the mediation of the dominant class in the political process. But in this new breed of state, social disarticulation is profound on the material level, resulting from wealth discrepancies and the fragmentation of the social order. On the level of consciousness manifest in the schism separating social consciousness from social being, it is even more profound. What I mean by the latter is that although workers would stand to benefit from collaboration and unionism, they adopt reconstructed identities bolstered by tainted rents that would drive them apart. Thus, as ballot box elections bereft of social and economic rights are organised, the citizen would not be voting in a state encompassing the whole of the national territory, for that state does not exist.

What exists is the social group, the sect and/or ethnicity for which the personal vote is quasi mandatory because it handles the disbursement of rents and, hence, livelihood. In no minor measure, the crisis of alternative social ideology contributes to this fragmentation. This new breed of state, furthermore, is no longer the institution by which the comprador class organises and maintains a dependent mode of integration with global capital; for a comprador class to exist, it must be set against the 'other' or the national bourgeoisie. Here, there is no national bourgeoisie to speak of. In Iraq, for example, two opposing militias guarding two different pipelines are said to shoot at each other when luring tankers to their delivery points. This is a stage in development where militias pitted against each other with the premeditated support of various US military bases come to represent a large part of the form of social organisation that make up the state.

On the development side, it goes without saying that this new breed of state not only engenders reverse development, it also debilitates man. Shorter life expectancy, [higher infant mortality](#) and illiteracy abound. Equally important, fragmented, insecure and de-developing states fall prey to drone politics and diplomacy. Their de-development drastically

shifts the balance of forces in favour of imperial powers. There will of course be the isolated anti-imperialist violent incident, but it is no more than [the sting of a wasp in the armour of the charging knight](#) of empire. Capital wins when it controls and under-develops raw material exporting states as was the case in Iraq. Militarism and the encroachment side of accumulation can be said to have flourished so far, further leveraging a market expansion side of accumulation beset by the crisis of financialisation. But development is not only [combined and uneven](#), it is also organically tied together. This means that the rate at which capital metabolises man and nature will also rise in inverse proportion to the crisis of capital under financialisation.

The growth process in middle income countries achieved so far as a concession related to shifting balance of forces with imperialism, will imply more dislocation wrought upon the poorer class countries. Many more countries are poised to undergo this metamorphosis to a state, which is the form of social organisation of militias plus American drones/military bases. Iran is one possible target, which would expand the car bomb corridors from the Fertile Crescent to Afghanistan. Capital successfully tested these new forms of social organisation in the periphery. At the expense of the working class, it has been nicely drawing the rewards of Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq for more than two decades. However, much like it tested [other disasters](#) before in the colonies and then applied them at home, in the defunctness of present day social ideology replete with Eurocentricity, capital might just as well bring these experiments closer to home.

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