

Has Globalisation Altered the Role of the State?

Written by Shona Buchanan

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SHONA BUCHANAN, NOV 24 2012

In our ever modernizing planet, globalization is compressing the world through changes in the 'spatial organisation of social relations and transactions creating transcontinental and interregional flows and networks' (Held et al 1999: 16). Hyperglobalists believe that globalization has made the state superfluous (Heywood, 2007: 103) while others believe it is 'globaloney' and has had no effect on the state's role whatsoever (Brown & Ainley, 2009: 177): the most likely option is between the two, that globalization has changed the role of the state to some extent. The original state role was created from the Westphalian Model, portraying the state as the highest power with complete sovereignty, with an internal role to provide to and govern for the people of the state and an external role as an actor in world politics; the current role of the state is different politically, socially, technologically and economically.

Globalization has changed the role of the state politically because of strengthened interstate relationships and dependence on one another. States were created to be sovereign but now, due to globalization, often give their sovereignty away to 'pooling' (Shaw, 2000: 185) in conventions, contracting, coercion and imposition (Krasner, 1995/6). This has led to increasingly similar jurisdictions across states and to power being seen as economic rather than political progress (Shaw, 2000: 186-187) because states now make political progression and regression together, causing states to become more developmental (Heywood, 2007: 100).

The state role has changed because most states now have high dependence on others. It is hard to imagine Britain governing and acting as a state independently of the USA's influence and relationship. Since the Second World War, Britain and other Western states have become 'structurally dependent, militarily and financially on the USA' (Shaw, 2000: 116). Britain, along with many other countries, relies on the US as a guiding force because although all states supposedly have sovereignty, they naturally look for authoritative power to lean on. Without a ruling global power, the US is a figure of authority to rely on that has 'generally played a leading role' (Shaw, 2000: 241) since 1945 because it has had the 'capacity, will and acceptance to provide leadership' (Brown & Ainley, 2009: 143). This has resulted in a lack of clarity by Britain and other states in acting autonomously: many of the government's decisions for the state are based on the judgements of the state's friends, allies and even enemies. Thus, the state's role has changed from being an authoritative figure to a dependent figure relying on others making decisions or making decisions based on other's beliefs. However, this could be seen as positive, as a strong state relies on strong allies.

Socially, globalization has had a problematic effect, making people and states more at risk and causing the state's role to change to encompass solving these issues and becoming a protector rather than a controller. The main example of globalization's negative state impact is the formation of terrorism. Our world's 'old wars' of armies and battles are being replaced by 'new wars' where nuclear weapons and terrorism rule (Kaldor, 1999). Terrorism is a new controlling power with its own network system, showing a decrease in the role of the state socially, as people are creating their own authorities to control their people and take over the role of the state. The new terrorist threat has caused the state to work in areas that were previously unnecessary, controlling the threat's impact. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US believed that states should become more sovereign as a result of the increasing terrorist threats to our society (US National Security Strategy, 2002). Since the Treaty of Westphalia, state sovereignty has decreased greatly, but now terrorism is possibly having a reverse effect, making our states more like they were originally rather than differing them further. This is a debatable move, as faced with an increasingly powerful network, would we not be stronger if forces were united rather than states separating and standing alone? This idea is supported in the European Security Strategy (2003: 1) released after 9/11, which says that 'no single country is able

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to tackle today's complex problems on its own', illustrating how globalization problems have decreased state power and effectiveness.

The expanding epidemic of AIDs and other deadly diseases due to amplified cross-border movement is a social problem of globalization changing the role of the state. In 1988, just seven years after AIDs was recognised, there was 150,000 cases worldwide and more than 400,000 by 1991 (Baylis & Smith, 1999: 25). Although a global issue, in which global companies, campaigns and NGOs all work to help, the state has also had an important role to play in combating further spreading of this disease by 'activating their public health systems, both individually and through regular intergovernmental consultations' (Baylis & Smith, 1999: 25). The state's role in this area should be further enhanced as a vital method to stop future spreading of AIDs through education, provided by positive relationships between developed and non-developed states.

Our progressively clever world allows barriers between states to be broken through technological globalization (Cable, 1999: 32). The media is a major factor: worldwide newspapers and television stations are now commonplace, creating the impression of the world being one state and raising awareness of events elsewhere in the world because states are no longer separated. An example of the globalizing media is BBC Worldwide, our own state's media system which has become a global organization whose mission is 'to maximise profits...by creating, acquiring, developing and exploiting media content and media brands around the world' (<http://bbcworldwide>). The state's role has changed due to the forming of an interstate shared media because it now has reduced control over the information being provided to the state's people.

The increased use of the internet is a second aspect of technological advancements affecting the state's role. People are easily contactable across the world, creating stronger relationships between states. Similar to the media, the internet makes information available to everyone so the state does not now need to transfer information to its people. The state can no longer control all in-state language and education due to the global mass media (Baylis & Smith, 1999: 21) and, as a result, the state is now not completely relied on for educating its citizens.

Finally, globalized economic changes have a substantial effect on the state's role. The global economy has been created by online banking, stock markets and, largely, global franchises. Although these franchises often are stereotypical representations of globalization easily seen around the world – with businesses such as McDonalds coating Asia and uncoiling in Africa – the global franchise system is still overrun by USA origin. In 2011, just over 15% of the Top 100 Global Franchises were businesses with an origin outside the USA and in the top 20 only one was (<http://franchisedirect>). America still overpowers all states on the global market and its state role is much stronger than the rest of the world's economically. Has this form of globalization had a positive impact on states and interstate relationships, or is it just allowing the USA to exercise more economic power over the rest of the world than previously? The global economy can be viewed positively because it has enhanced trade between states and thus the economy and interstate relations benefit. However, negatively because America is overpowering and other states cannot control their own global companies because they are not in their territories.

National economies have had a downturn due to the global economy's development and strengthening interstate relations. Brown and Ainley (2009: 180) say that 'when what was being produced was *things*, *where* they were produced was crucial and one could possibly think about a national economy' but now much of the economy is tied up in intangible assets or goods are imported, therefore not helping our own state's national economies. The state no longer controls currency because of intangible assets and importation as well as online and electronic banking and a shared currency between many states, like in much of Europe (Baylis & Smith, 1999: 21).

Globalization has changed the role of the state in many ways: politically through interdependence and independence of states, socially through the problems and threats of terrorism and deadly diseases, technologically through the media and internet and economically through the change from national to global economies. The state has moved from a controlling to a protecting role internally in facing the problems that globalization has caused, but also from an authoritative to a dependent figure externally between the sovereign state age to current unfailing interdependence. Globalization is often seen to have lowered the importance of the state, but in the end, the states that will remain the most successful in the face of globalization is those who adapt to the changes their role makes. In the words

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attributed to Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882), 'It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but rather the one most responsive to change.'

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