

The westphalian
system is a
temporary and
western
phenomenon. accept
or refute



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The westphalian system emerged from the signing of the “ Peace of Westphalia”, two peace treaties of Osnabruck and Munster, in 1648. The westphalian system refers to the modern international system of states which exist today. Although many scholars date the modern nation state from 1648 and the treaty of Westphalia, the state as it existed in the 17thc was the result of the processes that had been occurring for over 500 yrs prior to Westphalia.

From 1450-1650, the combination and interaction of political, economic, technological and religious factors brought about the shift to the modern state system. For hundreds of years before this period, Europe consisted of a complex system of feudal entities.

During the 5thc the Roman Empire disintegrated and only a very basic level of organisation remained. By the 11thc the system in place was based on feudal relationships and involved very little interaction with the rest of the world.

At the geographical and political centre of the European system was the Holy Roman Empire. Within this system, the principle of authority was hierarchical, but the ability of those at the top of the hierarchy to exercise their authority over large territories was limited.

The 15th and 16th centuries were characterised by the gradual growth of monarchical power and influence. As monarchs struggled against the feudal nobility in their efforts to expand, centralise, and consolidate their control over territory, they needed economic and military resources.

During this period manufacturing, trade and communication had become increasingly concentrated, resulting in the growth of cities and towns.

Eventually a money economy developed and replaced the system of barter that was characteristic of feudal exchange. Each town came to represent a larger regional economy and a newly found merchant class began to emerge who desired continual growth and expansion of these regional economies.

This expansion required security and order, an authority to provide for roads and communication and to further reduce the barriers to economic expansion.

European politics during this period was about nobles and princes, and if the monarchy wanted to challenge the military power of the nobility they needed to raise their own mass armies. To raise and support these armies elaborate bureaucracies evolved to extract resources in the form of taxes, and to administer military camps and hospitals. In this expansion of bureaucracy the origins of the formal administrative institutions that now characterise the modern state can be seen.

This period saw the rapid development and use of military technology that also made possible European expansion to the rest of the globe.

The continual rivalries and wars between kings and nobles pushed each to find some advantage in arms or wealth and led to rapid technological and scientific innovations. All of these factors promoted a European expansion, which in turn provided another source of wealth for the European states.

In 1918 the 30 year war began and didn't end until the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This year is usually marked as the birth of the modern state system and therefore referred to as the westphalian state system.

The westphalian state has several key principles:

1. State sovereignty and the fundamental right of political self determination.
2. The principle of non intervention of one state in the internal affairs of another.
3. Territorial boundaries: integrity and inviolability of states territory
4. Collective security of this system – balance of power

The westphalian state as recognised by the peace of Westphalia has not remained unthreatened. Globalisation and NGO's have posed huge challenges to this traditional way of viewing the state system and this essay will explore some of these challenges and.....

One of the major challenges to the westphalian state system over recent years has been the process of globalisation whereby economic, political and socio-cultural transactions are less and less constrained by national boundaries and the sovereign authority of national governments.

Two important processes are driving globalisation:

1. The continuing advancement of technology enabling the transnational movement of goods, people and ideas to become much easier.
2. National governments are less and less willing to exercise control over goods, people and ideas across their borders, therefore governments have

become more inclined to surrender some of the control over cross-border transactions they once exercised by virtue of sovereign authority.

Interdependence has been at the root of globalisation, with extensive new webs of interdependence creating a truly global system. As colonial empires dismantled and technology improved, fast changes towards globalisation occurred and interdependence rapidly increased.

Globalisation has meant that national boundaries have become less and less relevant. Many scholars feel that continuing to view the world in terms of the traditional westphalian logic is not very useful due to contemporary interdependencies. They believe that these ideas are now outdated and a new and more modern approach which is more applicable to the world today should be adopted by governments.

Globalisation is the increasing movement of goods, information and ideas across national boundaries without significant direct participation and control by high level governmental actors. This involves heavy participation by various non-state actors, in particular NGOs.

Rosenau points out that NGOs are “ changing societal norms, challenging national governments, and linking up with counterparts in powerful transnational alliances. And they are muscling their way into high politics, such as arms control, banking, and trade that were previously dominated by the state”

This view calls into question the importance of sovereignty and national boundaries.

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Each state has become so permeable and open to outside influences therefore domestic and international politics are becoming indistinguishable.

Some observers even argue that there is no neat hierarchical pattern of influence and authority therefore states are not necessarily the most powerful actors.

These actors seek autonomy of action from states; therefore interdependence generates a new set of problems and demands on those with sovereign authority.

Westphalian system is temporary as National economies are now increasingly interdependent.

1. Since ww2 international trade has consistently outpaced global production and almost all national economies have become more dependent on trade.
2. Growth in interdependence in financial flow
3. Multi-national corporations are responsible for the growth in foreign investment – global economy is therefore becoming integrated.
4. More countries are adopting free-market approaches to economic development
5. Signing of international treaties on trade, foreign investment, currency convertibility

Globalisation and the growth of transnational interactions in post the ww2 era has presented the sovereign state with new problems and challenges.

What are these challenges? Can summarise using the three elements of keohane and nyes concept of “ complex interdependence”.

In the course of the 20th century, the Westphalian state system in Europe has gone global. Nations subjected to European imperialism” or rather, in most cases, Europeanized elites within those nations” have aspired to the form of Europe’s sovereign nation-states, and have achieved it” or rather, in many cases, have haplessly inherited it from colonial masters who lost the will to govern them. Ex-colonies tended to be extremely sensitive to anything that resembled imperialism in the years immediately after independence, and many protected their economic sovereignty by pursuing autarky, though more recently this trend has reversed.

International organizations for example the UN, treaties, and economic globalization, have all begun to subtly constrain the states’ freedom of action, and therefore has eroded their jurisdiction from above. It must be pointed out here that jurisdictional boundaries make neither borders nor sovereignty. All polities are subdivided into smaller units for administrative purposes to some extent. These subdivisions imply jurisdictions with discrete boundaries. In federal systems, the subdivisions have some degree of autonomy themselves, in the sense that they have discretion in certain areas and cannot be over-ridden by the centre. Yet federal units are considered part of the federation and not separate sovereignties.

Ever since the founding of the UN there have been restrictions on states’ sovereignty from above, on their right to engage in aggression against their neighbours for example. In the course of time, countries have signed up to

more and more treaties which prevent them from, say, testing nuclear weapons, or abusing the rights of children. The UN and international treaties are notoriously weak, but they still create a conceptual puzzle: what is the difference between a “sovereign” polity which abrogates certain rights by international treaty and a federal unit which abrogates certain rights in favour of a federal government. This question is as old as the United Nations, as the name of the United Nations suggests; the UN embodies an aspiration towards some sort of world federation.

Treaties mainly formed by the west but has most effect on developing nations.

This is a shift towards a new regulatory state and fragmentation that challenges the traditional westphalian frame of sovereignty. New regulatory state is emerging in both developed and developing nations. With this fragmentation comes breakdown of traditional diplomatic domains and activities and also creation of new actors, new arenas and new fields of diplomatic activity – all of which cut across traditional notion of Westphalian sovereignty.

Shift towards fragmented state due to structural changes in global political economy. Internal sovereignty of state is being transformed by process of globalisation.

The westphalian system can be considered to be a western phenomenon due to the notion of failed states. A failed state can be defined as a state considered to have failed at some of the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government.

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The Fund for Peace (an independent US based non profit research and educational organisation), has characterised the failed state as follows:

- * loss of physical control of its territory, or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force

- * erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions

- * an inability to provide reasonable public services

- * an inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community

These failed states generally have a central government that is so weak or ineffective that it has little or no control over its territory. Public services are not adequately provided for, there is widespread corruption and criminality, there is involuntary movement of population and there is economic decline.

Since 2005 the United States think-tank, the Fund for Peace and the magazine Foreign Policy, publishes an annual index called the Failed States Index. The list only assesses sovereign states (determined by membership in the United Nations.)[3]

The index's ranks are based on twelve indicators of state vulnerability – four social, two economic and six political.

In 2009, of the worst 20 states, only Haiti could be considered to be a western state. All others belonged to the developing world.

Such states lack legitimacy and find it difficult to exercise any control or power within their own borders. They often find themselves confronted by

insurgents or rebels who are trying to overthrow them and replace the regime with a tyrannical dictatorship style of government. This may lead to neighbouring states taking advantage of the vulnerability caused by the domestic problems within a state and may therefore cause such states to collapse.

Afghanistan can be taken as an example of this, when in 2001 it was invaded by the US to remove the Taliban regime. It is accepted that military action is appropriate if a state is seen to be neglecting its citizens and their basic human rights and allowing terrorist organisations to operate within its borders. This shows that states do not have the automatic rights of sovereignty and that certain obligations to the rest of the world must be upheld in line with international law. If they are found to be in conflict with international law then the result maybe military action taken by UN member states.

In the majority of cases it is the developing countries which display the characteristics of failing states and it is the western nations that take action. This therefore supports the view that the westphalian system can be considered to be a western phenomenon as it is the western states which are able to exercise their rights of sovereignty the most.

It has been argued that although international law exists, as long as states adhere to this they will remain free from direct intervention from other states therefore their rights to sovereignty will not be compromised. Despite this it can be seen that sovereignty remains strongest in the so called super power nations.

In conclusion it can be said that the westphalian state as recognised by the peace of Westphalia has not remained unchallenged and that these challenges have shown the westphalian system to be a temporary and western phenomenon. The key principles of the westphalian nation as stated above have been threatened by globalisation in particular and this has therefore led to the

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