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Antonio Giustozzi. The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

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Antonio Giustozzi. *The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Any serious attempt to predict the future requires both substantial knowledge of the relevant historical past and a willingness to grapple with its less pleasant aspects. Without such mindful attention, the lessons history might otherwise provide remain unappreciated or lost. Most of the more confident predictions made by world leaders, pundits, and even social scientists in the early post-Cold War period about how rapidly and comprehensively the international system would change demonstrate this fact; lessons that had been previously learned were ignored, seen then as irrelevant chapters in a tale of progress toward an ever-more peaceful and orderly world. This tendency to discount the lessons history has to offer has been particularly pronounced in US foreign policy circles, where the belief that an American colossus would stand astride the world, forcing rogues to mend their ways, dispensing order and justice, and generally exercising a permanent global hegemony has only slowly deflated as the limits of American power have become all too obvious in a succession of failed enterprises and Pyrrhic victories. Interestingly, the first stark warning of the limitations on American power in a post-Cold War world occurred in Somalia, a country so feeble that the state itself had collapsed. The activities of a collection of warlords turned a humanitarian mission authorized by the UN Security Council into a peacemaking effort and, ultimately, a humiliating strategic defeat as the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu convinced the Clinton Administration to end its proactive efforts to humble Somalia's warlords and instead bide its time until the US-led UN combat force could be withdrawn with minimal global media attention. Later, the counterinsurgency wars in Afghanistan and Iraq proved enormously costly, in every sense of the word, to the intervening powers. Moreover, such efforts dramatically illustrated that under currently prevailing political and technological conditions, even the most puissant of democratic countries has enormous difficulty dealing effectively with warlords, insurgents, and crime bosses who are indifferent to, if not bluntly contemptuous of, the laws of war. The connection between the aforementioned fiascos and the issues explored in Antonio Giustozzi's *The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power* is not an obvious one, but it is intimate.

Dr. Giustozzi, a visiting professor of war studies at King's College London, has written extensively on Afghanistan's ongoing civil war and the continuing development of Afghan politics. It is unsurprising, given this background, that he should take an interest in the "primitive accumulation" of coercive power. Primitive accumulation is a phrase generally associated with economics, particularly Marxist analysis, of the very early stage in the development of a capitalist economy, as, in Marx's vision, formerly unowned or collectively owned resources such as land are converted to private ownership. The author's borrowing is a clever one, and his book addresses an issue that has been greatly understudied by political scientists: the mechanics of how coercion is used in the formation of governments and creation of states.

The notion that violent coercion is a key, even *the* key, component in the creation of states itself certainly is not unique—indeed, it plays a key role in the standard narrative of how the modern state came into existence. The history of how European monarchs, and the kings of England and France in particular, slowly bled away the power and independence of the feudal nobility and crafted recognizably modern states is generally treated as a sort of basic template for what the modern state is and how it arises in the first place. This, in turn, is blended with the emergence of the legal concept of sovereignty and its role in the crafting of the 1648 Peace of

Westphalia, creating a cocktail that most political scientists find satisfactory: the old aristocrats are humbled by monarchs empowered by increasingly sophisticated central governments, while the trans-national Catholic Church either loses influence completely (in Protestant states) or finds its power progressively diminished over the centuries as Catholic sovereigns ever-more jealously guard their prerogatives. This is a tidy narrative; indeed, it is so neat because it glosses over innumerable historical cross-currents and complications. Two oversimplifications stand out as particularly critical. First, the enormous variation in state-building experiences is ignored; for instance, the Anglo-French experience of state-building is distinct in a variety of important ways from that of, say, Italy, which did not unify until the nineteenth century (and with the pope continuing to wield temporal authority in the Papal States until unification, no less). The “standard state-building story” is, arguably, even less applicable to modern states such as Persia and Siam. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, the distinction between supposedly modern states and those governments which were allegedly “pre-modern” often becomes less, rather than more, stark as one digs into the relevant history. Augustus Caesar administered justice, organized public welfare programs, built infrastructure, and waged wars in a matter that was not appreciably different in most respects from the manner in which Henry VIII performed these functions. Indeed, Confucius was philosophizing about the duties and character of a complex administrative state at a time when Rome was still so minor a power that if it had been snuffed out entirely, that event would have been little-noticed even in most of the Italian Peninsula.

Giustozzi clearly appreciates the complexity of historical formation, collapse, and reformation of polities—and that this progression is not inevitably a “one-way” street. Thus, he digs deeply into the historical record to understand how coercive power is accumulated, translated into power over a geographical area, and progressively expanded outward. He advances a number of interlinking hypotheses regarding how this occurs. First, he asserts “that institution-building is a key aspect of any process of taming violence” (p. 7). Second, he claims that “pre-empting hostile collective action through co-option, alliances, manipulation and intimidation is as important as the mere accumulation of means of coercion, and entire agencies of the state have been developed historically to implement this task” (p. 9). Third, Giustozzi believes that the primitive accumulation of power generally is a ruthlessly violent process, with civil conflict continuing until one faction can establish a monopoly on violence—but, notably, even that monopoly may be broken, causing the process to begin again. Fourth, he says, “Often in civil conflicts, violence is employed according to a logic and is therefore only seemingly indiscriminate. But sophisticated military political actors clearly understand what kind of violence is counter-productive,” with sophistication meaning at least some actors in a conflict comprehend this reality, even if that is not the case with all of them (p. 12). Fifth, says Giustozzi, “Policing is a specific strategy of consolidating the monopoly of violence” (p. 14). Sixth, he asserts that “the renegotiation of the terms of the political settlement, which may include changes in the command and control structure within the coercive apparatus, may weaken the ability of the ruling elite to operate in a coordinated fashion and endanger the monopoly of violence” (p. 16-17). His final, and no doubt most controversial, hypothesis “is that external intervention, even in its milder form of advice and support, is most likely to be counter-productive in achieving and maintaining the monopoly of violence” (p. 18).

Given the general thrust of his hypotheses, it is unsurprising that Giustozzi has a rather grim view of the process of state-building; he straightforwardly challenges some of the core assumptions undergirding liberal interventionism, and his critique reflects the views of a writer

who has an insightful and nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. It is striking that even most of the supposed successes of liberal interventionism are at best decidedly incomplete, according to Giustozzi. The intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, is often spoken of as a great triumph, but that “country” has developed into a protectorate of the European Union and remains hopelessly ethnically divided and guided by an EU-appointed High Representative; in a more honest era, the latter’s title would have been that of “governor-general.” If establishing feeble quasi-colonial dependencies represents success, and mighty NATO can pour hundreds of billions of dollars into Afghanistan for a dozen years and fail even to hurdle over this risibly low bar, the liberal interventionist project needs a comprehensive reconsideration. *The Art of Coercion* is an excellent starting point for that discussion, and this thoughtful book should be read with interest not just by scholars but, even more importantly, by soldiers and statesmen.

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