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The Post-Hobbesian State, Sovereignty and Development

The political and legal literature is replete with the categories of failed, fragile and vulnerable states, and indicators that map the world on gradations of instability and fragility. The countries that rank high in these indicators are considered to be the losers of the state-centric world ordering. And the identification of these failures leads to renewed calls of strengthening the state entities, reassertions of sovereignty, reclaiming the territories and (re)construction of the Leviathan. These calls for a return of the Leviathan are not implicit in political and legal discourses, but rather are backed by explicit calls for an omnipotent state – a state that would resolve the contradictions of the civil society, the clash between public and private interests, and provide peace in the eternally violent state of nature. This paper challenges this understanding and the emphasis on such ‘perverse states’ as a panacea for all evils. It argues that some of the contradictions that lead to the increased political turmoil, a rise in militancy and extremism, lack of social development, economic crises, insecurity and corruption are not symbolic of the state of nature, but an outcome of the nature of the state in these jurisdictions. It is not the absence of state sovereignty that leads to these contradictions, but the logic that guides this ‘social contract’. Borrowing empirical evidence from Pakistan, as a representative case study of some post-colonial societies, the paper will outline the notion of the post-Hobbesian state where the state of nature and state failure are necessary outcomes of the experiment that focussed on the creation of sovereignty.