
Book One

I What is Reason of State

Reason of state is knowledge of the means suitable to found, conserve, and expand dominion. It is true that speaking absolutely, it encompasses all three of the above; nevertheless it appears that taken more strictly it designates conservation more than the other two, and of the other two more expansion than foundation. The reason is that reason of state presupposes a prince and a state which are not at all presupposed by foundation and only in part by expansion; rather they are preceded by them as is clear.¹ But the art of founding and expanding is the same because he who expands wisely has to establish a foundation to which he adds and where he establishes a foothold.²

¹ This sentence is unclear. They, that is, the prince and the state, are preceded by them, that is, by foundation and expansion.

² In *RS* 1596 Botero added at the start “A state is a firm rule over people.” The addition reads in Italian: “Stato e un dominio fermo sopra popoli.” I am grateful to Professor A. Enzo Baldini of the University of Turin for clarifying this for me. In it there seems to be an echo of the opening lines of *The Prince*: “Tutti li stati, tutti e’ dominii che hanno avuto et hanno imperio sopra li uomini, sono stati e sono o republiche o principati.” In *RS* 1596 he also reformulated and expanded the last four lines thus: “The reason is that reason of state presupposes the prince and the state (the former as the artificer, the latter as the material), which are not presupposed at all by foundation and in part by expansion; rather they are preceded by them. But the art of founding and expanding is the same because the principles and the means are of the same nature. And even if all that which is brought about by the above-mentioned causes is said to be brought about by reason of state, nevertheless this is said more of those things that cannot be reduced to ordinary and common reason.” This final clause was probably also added in response to critics who contended that this was the normal understanding of reason of state. See, for example, Scipione Ammirato, *Discorso sopra C. Tacito* (Florence, 1594), book 12, chap. 1 (pp. 228–42). See *BD*, 67, n. 1 and 68, n. 3.

Of Subjects

2 Division of Dominions

Dominions are of many types: ancient, new, poor, rich, and of other similar qualities, but coming more to our point, we say that some dominions possess superior power, others do not, some are natural, others acquired. We call natural those of which we are masters by the will of the subjects, either expressly as happens in the election of the king of Poland, or tacitly as is the case with legitimate succession in a state, and the succession is either clearly lawful or doubtful. By acquired we mean those that are obtained by purchase or the equivalent or by arms; by arms they are acquired either by sheer force or by agreement; agreement is either at the discretion of the conqueror or by treaty.³ Furthermore, some dominions are small, others large, some middle-sized, and of these some are not absolutely such but in comparison to and with respect to those bordering them; so that a small dominion is such that it cannot exist by itself but needs the protection and support of another, as is the case with the Republic of Ragusa or Lucca; middle-sized is that which has the forces and sufficient authority to maintain itself without needing the support of another, as is the case with the dominion of the Venetian lords, the kingdom of Bohemia, the duchy of Milan, and the county of Flanders. We call those states large which have a notable advantage over their neighbors, such as the Turkish Empire and the Catholic King. Beyond this, some dominions are unified, others are not. We call those unified whose members are continuous and who touch one another, we call those dispersed whose members do not form a continuous body and are not of one piece as was the empire of the Genoese when they governed Famagusta⁴ and the Ptolemais,⁵ Faglie Vecchie,⁶ Pera,⁷ and Caffa,⁸ or of the Portuguese with their states in Ethiopia, Arabia, India, and Brazil, and that of the Catholic King.

3 Of Subjects

The subjects, without which dominion cannot exist, are by nature settled or transient, peaceful or warlike, dedicated to trade or to the military, of

³ The following is added in *RS* 1590 and later editions: "And their state is so much the worse as the resistance to the acquisition was greater."

⁴ On the island of Cyprus.

⁵ The town of St.-Jean-d'Acre, now Acre on the Israeli coast.

⁶ Not known.

⁷ A Genoese colony opposite Constantinople, today Galata.

⁸ A Genoese colony in the Crimea, today Theodosie.

Of the Causes of the Ruin of States

our faith or of some other sect; and if of another sect, completely infidel, or Jewish or schismatics or heretics; and if heretics, Lutheran, Calvinists, or of some other form of impiety.⁹ In addition, they are all subjects of one type with the same law and form of subjection, or with different ones, as the Aragonese and the Castilians in Spain, the Burgundians and the Bretons in France.

4 Of the Causes of the Ruin of States

Works of nature fail through two types of causes, some intrinsic, some extrinsic; intrinsic I call excess and corruption of its early qualities, extrinsic fire, sword, and other forms of violence. In the very same way states are ruined by internal or external causes; internal are the incapacity of the prince, either because he is a child, because he is inept, because he is impious, or because he has lost his reputation which can happen in many ways. States are also ruined intrinsically by cruelty and licentiousness toward subjects which sullies the reputation of noble and generous men; this it was that chased from Rome the king and the Decemvirs, brought the Moors into Spain, and forced the departure of the French from Sicily. Dionysius the Elder,¹⁰ having learned that his son had carried on with the wife of an honored citizen, reproved him harshly, demanding to know whether he had ever seen him do such a thing. And because the youth responded, “If you did not do it, it was because you were not the son of a king.” “Nor will you be father of a king,” he replied, “unless you change your ways.” It is often disputed whether more states come to ruin because of the licentiousness of princes or because of their cruelty. To resolve this is not difficult. Cruelty gives birth to hatred and fear of him who uses it. Licentiousness generates hatred and contempt, so that cruelty leads to hatred which makes for opposition and to fear which makes for support – weak support however, because it lasts only a short time, whereas licentiousness does not in any way generate support but only hatred and contempt. Beyond this, cruelty weakens or kills the one subject to it, which licentiousness does not do. Other intrinsic causes of the ruin of states are envy, rivalry, discord, ambition among the nobles, frivolousness, instability and the furor of the multitude, the

⁹ Added here in *RS* 1590 and subsequently: “And they ought to be held for more evil to the degree that they are of a more distant sect and further from the truth.”

¹⁰ Tyrant of Syracuse, 405–367 BCE.

Which is the Greater Work, to Expand or Conserve?

inclination of the barons and the people for a different government.¹¹ External causes are the deceptions and power of enemies. So the Romans destroyed the Macedonians, the barbarians Roman grandeur. But which causes are more destructive? Without a doubt, the internal; rarely does it happen that external forces ruin a state which internal causes have not first corrupted.

From these two types of simple cause arises another which one can call mixed, when subjects consort with the enemy and so betray their country or their prince.

5 Which is the Greater Work, to Expand or to Conserve a State

Without a doubt the greater work is to conserve; human affairs proceed as it were naturally, now declining now growing after the manner of the moon to which they are subject, so that to hold them in place and, when they are growing, to sustain them in such a way that they neither fail nor crash is an enterprise of singular and nearly superhuman achievement. In making acquisitions opportunity plays a great part as does the disorder of enemies and the work of others, but the retention of what has been acquired is the fruit of an excellent *virtù*. One acquires by force but preserves with wisdom; force is found with many, wisdom with few. Moreover, whoever acquires and expands his dominion worries only about the external causes of the collapse of states whereas he who conserves has to deal with the internal and the external. The Lacedaemonians, wishing to demonstrate that it was a greater thing to conserve one's own than to acquire another's, punished those who had lost not their sword but their shield, and the Romans called Fabius Maximus "the shield" and M. Marcellus "the sword of the Republic," and there is no doubt that they made more of Fabius than Marcellus. Aristotle was also of the same opinion when in his *Politics* he wrote that the principal task of the legislator is not to constitute nor fashion a city but to see to it that it can maintain itself secure for a long time.¹² And Theopompus, king of

¹¹ The following is added in *RS* 1590 and subsequently: "Ambitious princes with little sense often ruin their own states by scattering their own forces, desirous of encompassing more than they can control; one can see this in the ventures of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians and especially in Demetrius, king of Macedonia [r. 294–288 BCE] and Pyrrhus, king of Epirus [r. 295–272 BCE]."

¹² Aristotle, *Politics*. This is a free interpretation of the *Politics* which does not seem to be found in any particular passage (*BD*, 72, n. 5).

Which States are More Lasting

Sparta,¹³ having added to the royal office the senate or council of ephors, responded to his wife who accused him of having weakened his rule that “it would be greater the more stable and firm that it was.” But how does it come about (someone will ask) that those who acquire are considered greater than those who conserve? Because the results of him who increases his rule are more evident and more popular, make for a greater din and excitement, have more visibility and novelty of which people are beyond measure fond and desirous, so that it happens that military enterprises produce more delight and amazement than the arts of conservation and peace which, inasmuch as they have less turmoil and novelty, require more judgment and sense from him who maintains them. And so if rivers of great length are more noble than torrents, nevertheless many more people stop to admire a dangerous torrent than a tranquil river, so he is more admired who acquires than he who conserves.

6 Which States are More Lasting, the Large, the Small, or the Middle-Sized

It is certain that the middle-sized states are more apt to survive because the small due to their weakness are more easily exposed to the forces and affronts of the large states which, as birds of prey feed on the small and as the big fish on the small ones, devour them, and rise through their ruin. So Rome expanded through the destruction of neighboring cities, and Philip of Macedon through the oppression of the Greek republics. Large states stir up jealousy and suspicion in their neighbors which often leads them to ally, and many united accomplish what one cannot do. But there are also many more subject to the internal causes of ruin, because with size riches increase and with them vices, luxury, arrogance, licentiousness, avarice the root of all evil,¹⁴ and the kingdoms which frugality has led to the heights fail because of their opulence. Besides this, size brings with it confidence in one’s own forces, and confidence leads to negligence, leisure, disdain for subjects and for enemies, so that such states often survive more through their reputation based on past events than through present courage and principles. And as alchemy seems to the eye to produce gold but the gold loses its value at a closer look, so such states enjoy a great reputation but have little substance, similar to some high and great trees that are hollow and rotten and to some men

¹³ From the late eighth to the early seventh century BCE. ¹⁴ 1 Timothy 6:10.

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with large bodies but little spirit, as experience makes evident. Sparta, so long as it remained within the borders prescribed by Lycurgus, flourished beyond all the other Greek cities in substance and in reputation. But when it expanded its imperium and subjugated the cities of Greece and the kingdoms of Asia, it then declined in such a way that the city, which before Agesilaus¹⁵ had never seen the smoke nor even the forces of the enemy, after defeating the Athenians and despoiling Asia saw its citizens flee before the Thebans, a vile people and of no account, and hasten back to their own delightful environs and commit every crime under their own walls. The Romans after conquering the Carthaginians remained in fear of the Numantines for fourteen years. After conquering so many kings and subjugating so many provinces to their rule, they were torn to pieces by Viriatus in Spain¹⁶ and by the banished Sertorius¹⁷ in Lusitania, and by Spartacus in Italy; and they were besieged from every side and starved out by pirates.

Courage opens the way through difficulties to greatness but, once arrived there, it is immediately smothered by riches, weakened by culinary delights, deadened by sensual pleasures. It holds up through the wildest tempests and most dangerous storms on the high seas but it perishes and suffers shipwreck in port. Benevolent thoughts, high-minded intentions, honorable enterprises cease and in their place ascend pride, arrogance, ambition, the avarice of magistrates, and the insolence of the mob. No longer do captains find favor but buffoons, not soldiers but charlatans, not the truth but flattery. No longer is virtue esteemed but riches, not justice but bribes. Simplicity yields to deceit and goodness to malice, so that as the state grows the foundations of its strength are undermined, and as iron generates rust which eats it away and ripe fruit of itself produces worms which spoil it, so great states produce certain vices which little by little or sometimes at one stroke lay them low or give them as prey to their enemies. So much suffices for great states.

The middle-sized states are the most lasting because neither by great weakness are they vulnerable to violence nor by their great size are they exposed to the envy of others, and because their riches and power are moderate, their passions are also less vehement and ambition does not receive the same encouragement, nor does licentiousness find such stimuli as in the great states. The suspicion of neighbors holds them in check,

¹⁵ Agesilaus II was king of Sparta from roughly 400 to 360 BCE.

¹⁶ A rebel in Spain, 149–141 BCE.

¹⁷ Sertorius, a Roman general during the civil wars, 121–72 BCE.

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and if tempers fly and stir up trouble, they also quiet down and are easily calmed. Rome exemplifies this. There so long as it was a middle-sized state, few revolts lasted and at the sound of foreign wars they grew quiet and in every way subsided without bloodshed, but after the greatness of their empire opened the field for ambition and factions took root while enemies were lacking, and the wars and spoils of Numidia and the Cimbrians¹⁸ fell to Marius, of Greece and Mithridates to Sulla, of Spain and Asia to Pompey, and of Gaul to Caesar, and they acquired a following and reputation and the means to maintain it, then war was no longer conducted with stools and chairs as in past rebellions but with fire and sword, and the struggles and wars ended only with the defeat of the contrary factions and of the Empire itself. So we see that some middle-sized powers have endured much longer than the largest ones. This is the case of Sparta and Carthage, and above all of Venice whose mid-sized dominion has been more stable and steady than any other. But even if middling size is more suitable for the endurance of a state than expansion, mid-sized states nevertheless do not long endure because princes are not satisfied and want to advance from a mid-sized to a great and even to the greatest state. So surpassing the limits of mid-size they expand beyond secure boundaries, as happened with the Venetians who wanting to encompass so much more than a mid-size state required, in the campaign against Pisa took on a huge debt without turning a profit¹⁹ and in the league against Ludovico Sforza²⁰ came close to causing their own ruin. But should a prince realize the limits of a mid-sized state and be satisfied with them, his rule should long endure.

7 Whether United States or Dispersed Ones are More Lasting²¹

Dispersed states are separated into territories either in such a way that the territories are unable to assist one another because between them

¹⁸ The Cimbrians were a Germanic tribe that migrated from the Jutland Peninsula and fought the Romans from 113 to 101 BCE.

¹⁹ From 1496 to 1499, Venice took Pisa under its protection against Florence.

²⁰ At the end of 1498 Venice allied with the king of France against Ludovico il Moro, duke of Milan, until the duke fell from power in 1500.

²¹ This is the title of the chapter as given by Botero. But one also might entitle it “Whether compact or composite states are more lasting.” On the concept of the “composite state,” see J.H. Elliott, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies,” *Past and Present*, 137 (1992): 47–71, and the ensuing literature.

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there lie powerful principalities either hostile or unreliable, or in such a way that they can assist one another and this in three ways: with the aid of funds, but this can be of great difficulty; through an understanding with the princes through whose lands it is necessary to pass; or, easily, through naval forces if all the territories of the state have a sea coast. Furthermore, the territories of a dispersed state are either so weak that they cannot maintain themselves nor defend themselves against their neighbors, or so great and powerful that they are superior or equal to their neighbors.

Now I would say that a great empire is without doubt more secure from the assaults and invasion of an enemy because it is large and united, and the union means greater vigor and force. But on the other hand it is more subject to the internal causes of ruin because size leads to confidence, confidence to carelessness, and carelessness to contempt and loss of reputation and authority. Power brings forth riches which are the mother of all pleasures, and pleasures the mother of every vice. And this is the reason that states fall from the summit: with their increase in power courage grows less and with great wealth virtue declines. The Roman Empire was at its peak under Caesar Augustus. Pleasures and licentiousness began to overwhelm virtue under Tiberius, and successively then under Caligula and the others. Vespasian reversed this trend somewhat with his courage, but Domitian worsened the situation with his vices. Matters returned to their pristine state with the goodness of Trajan and some few emperors who followed but after that they successively went hurling downward precipitously until they ended in ruin, and if sometimes they were assisted and kept standing, this happened not because of Roman valor but because of foreign emperors and captains. These emperors were Trajan who was Spanish, Antoninus Pius French, Septimus Severus African, Alexander Mamaean,²² Claudius Dardanian, Aurelian of Moesia, Probus from Sirmium, Diocletian Dalmatian, Galerius Decian, Constans, who was the father of the great Constantine, Dardanian, Theodosius who can be said to have restored the Empire, Spanish. The same can be said of those captains who demonstrated some merit: Stilico, Ullin, and Aetius were Vandals, Castinus Scythian, Boniface Thracian, Ricimer, who defeated Beorgor King of the Alans, a Goth.²³

²² Changed to “Syrian” in later editions. This is probably an allusion to Alexander Severus, emperor from 222–235 CE, who was born in Caesarea of Lebanon (*BD*, 77, n. 1).

²³ These were all generals of the late Roman Empire.

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So we see that Roman virtue, enfeebled and corrupted in such a way by pleasure, was not able to stand on its own feet or keep its head up without foreign assistance. And because their own interests and particular designs dictated the aid of the barbarians, and it often came with treason and betrayal, the Empire finally collapsed. An empire that does not possess internal strength cannot long survive in face of the plots and assaults of its enemies. So Spain, generally corrupt, fell to the power of the Moors within thirty months, and the Empire in Constantinople was subjugated by the Turks in a few years. Besides this, if in a united state there arises discord among the barons or an uprising among the people, or dissoluteness among the one and the other, it easily spreads like the plague or some other contagious disease to the healthy parts because of their nearness. And if the prince is given over to laziness and is inept, the compact state will more easily become demoralized and infected than the disunited one, and consequently it will become weaker in the face of its enemies.

On the other hand, the dispersed state is weaker against foreigners than the united one, because the disunity alone weakens it, and if its parts are so weak that each of itself is helpless against the attacks of its neighbors, or they are divided in such a way that one cannot come to the aid of another, a state so created will not long endure. But if the parts are able to aid one another and each is large and strong enough that it does not fear invasion, such a state ought not be considered less stable than a united one, because, first of all, if the parts are able to reciprocally assist one another, one cannot say that they are in fact dispersed, and even if the dispersed state is by its nature weaker than a united one, it yet has many advantages, first of all because it cannot be attacked all at once. And this so much the less the further one part is from another because one prince alone will not be able to do this and many together will unite only with difficulty. So it follows that when a state is attacked in one part, the others that remain undisturbed will always be able to come to the aid of the one that has been attacked, as we see in the way that Portugal has so often aided its state in the Indies. Moreover, the dissension of the barons and the insurrections of the people are not as widespread because the factions in one place do not predominate in the other, and the families, the friendships, the loyalties, and the networks do not extend so far, and it is easy for the prince with the loyal part to punish the rebels, and similarly other forms of corruption do not spread so far nor so rapidly through a dispersed state as through a united one, nor with such force,

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because the lack of unity interrupts the course of disorders and the distance among locations reduces the speed of their spread, and time always favors a legitimate prince and justice, and because it rarely happens that external causes bring about the ruin of a state which has not first become internally corrupt. *Nulla enim quamvis minima natio potest ab adversari perdelere, nisi propriis simulatibus se iosa consumperit* (For not even the least element can be destroyed by enemies unless it has first been undermined by its own enmities) says Vegetius.²⁴

I do not consider less secure nor enduring dispersed states under the following two conditions that unite them, in this case the kingdom of Spain. First of all, the states that belong to this crown have sufficient forces that they are not alarmed by every movement of arms by their neighbors, as is attested by Milan and Flanders, which have been threatened so many times in vain by the French, and so also Naples and Sicily. Furthermore, even if the parts are distant from one another, one ought not in fact to consider them dispersed because, beyond the fact that the funds of which that crown has an abundance are available to all, they are united by the sea. There is no state that is so far that it cannot provide assistance, apart from Flanders due to the opposition of England, and the Catalans, the Biscayans, the Galicians, and the Portuguese so excel as mariners that one can truly say that they are masters of seamanship. Now the naval forces that these peoples have at hand create an imperium that otherwise seems disunited with its parts cut off from one another. But it ought to be considered united and as it were continuous, so much the more now that Portugal is united with Castile. These two nations, the former extending from the west toward the east and the latter toward the west, meet in the Philippine Islands and throughout such a grand tour touch upon islands, kingdoms, and ports at their command because they belong to their empire or to friendly princes, clients, or allies.

8 On the Ways to Conserve [a State]

The conservation of a state consists in the peace and quiet of the subjects, and this is of two types, as it is also in the case of a disturbance or a war; a disturbance arises either from your own [subjects] or from foreigners. Disturbances from your own subjects arise in two ways; either they fight among one another, and this we call civil war, or they fight against the

²⁴ Cf. *Concerning Military Matters (De re militari)*, 3, 10.