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Review of Sidney Tarrow's *War, States, & Contention*

Sidney Tarrow. 2015. *War, States, & Contention: A Comparative Historical Study*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 314 pages, ISBN 978-0-8014-7962-5 Paper (\$27.95).

In his new book, *War, States, and Contention: A Comparative Historical Study*, Sidney Tarrow attempts to bring together two major bodies of literature in political sociology that have a strong affinity and yet rarely speak to each other. The first, the scholarship on the relationship between war-making and state-making, has explored the ways in which preparation for war, both in terms of securing increasingly large material resources and in terms of acquiring, training, and fielding armies, modernized the state and transformed the relationship between states and their subjects. The second, the scholarship on contentious politics, is what Tarrow himself is most well-known for and, as Tarrow suggests in the opening pages of his book, can add much needed nuance to the prevailing war- and state-making narrative, which sees a general expansion of the needs of waging war as resulting in an expansion of state institutions and, critically, an expansion of citizenship rights to the state's potential conscripts. Wars not only serve as sources of contention, they also alter the politics of contention by elevating the power and status of some social groups while diminishing those of others. The new tools and capacities that states develop to wage war against their external enemies can also be turned inward, to repress demanding publics and roll back hard earned citizenship rights.

The main body of the text is organized into two parts. In part one, Tarrow explores the complex relationships between war, contention and state-making in the emergence of modern states through an examination of three historical cases: France during the 1789 revolution, the United States during the Civil War, and Italy during World War I. The history of revolutionary and republican France is a history rife with contradictions: the liberal idealism embodied in the



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Declaration of Rights of Man contrasted with the repressive rule of the Committee for Public Safety and the violence of the Terror. Whereas many scholars attribute this to the pressures of external warfare, Tarrow reminds us that the arc of the revolution can only be understood as being bent by the dual, interrelated pressures of external conflict and internal contention. External war had prompted the creation of the citizen army and, with it, an expanded notion of republican citizenship. Yet, as the revolutionary state was besieged by persistent armed conflict it used the state of war to rollback many of the rights and protections ostensibly inherent to the French citizen as a means of dealing with domestic contention, some of which was of a standard, counter-revolutionary flavor, but much of which—such as that over issues of taxation, conscription, and the price of food—was driven by war.

The case of the U.S. Civil War offers a different perspective on the dynamics between war and contention. Tarrow begins the chapter with a discussion of the abolitionist movement and the way in which it was slowly, often reluctantly, incorporated into the platform of the Republican Party under Lincoln. While a hedged support for emancipation was necessary for Lincoln to forge the political coalition that he needed, once war broke out with the seceding states he was forced to grapple with the fact that this was still very much a contentious issue within the North. On the one hand, Tarrow notes, Lincoln's own generals wanted the president to come out strongly for emancipation as a means of weakening the southern economy and their capacity to wage war; on the other hand, efforts to build an effective army through new taxes and mass conscription faced strong opposition from northerners, many of whom were recent immigrants not so willing to give their money or their lives to a cause that they did not support.

In both the French Revolution and the U.S. Civil War, the rollback of civil liberties under wartime declarations of emergency was, for the most part, short lived. In Italy during World War I we see a different outcome, one where the politics of wartime contention results in the decimation of the political center and the consolidation of fascist extremism. The reason, Tarrow argues, is that World War I transformed domestic politics by giving conservative forces a means of turning back an increasingly dominant center-left. Using the wartime emergency, the conservative Salandra government took control of the press, by-passed the legislature, and deployed the military to wrest control of industry from the hands of the socialist trade unions. It was military control of the factories in particular that drove the turn to fascism. As the war went badly, and social tensions heightened, workers became increasingly militant in the face of state repression, and conservative groups increasingly turned to fascism as the way to deal with a combative working class. By war's end, the political center had been eviscerated and Mussolini rose to power riding the wave of political backlash against the far left.

Taken together, each of these three cases highlights the importance of contentious politics to the causes, conduct and consequences of war-making. Though he selects his cases with an eye

towards maximizing the variation in the relationships between state-building, war-making and political contention, there are some common threads running through each of these historical chapters. The first is that states tended to follow an “emergency script” (a concept that Tarrow borrows from Kim Lane Scheppele), a sequence of moves whereby states centralize their power, quiet dissent by removing protections around speech, and engage in anticipatory violence against their opponents. The second is the use of Michael Mann’s distinction between hierarchical and infrastructural power as a way of explaining variation in the causes, and consequences, of the state’s response to contention during wartime. By returning to these concepts, Tarrow both adds to the analytical ‘punch’ of his cross national comparison and provides a bridge between the first and second parts of the book.

In part II, Tarrow abruptly changes course, taking us out of the history of early modern states and into the present and the ongoing U.S. War on Terror. For Tarrow, the fact that the U.S. has been at war for so long without producing sustained or significant contention presents a bit of a puzzle, particularly when cast against the history of modern state formation. The answer that Tarrow develops over several chapters is that this distinctly “American Way of War” is the product of two historical processes. The first is contextual: globalization and internationalization have not completely undermined national states, but they have, Tarrow argues, made nation states more “porous.” The landscape of warfare since the end of World War II has seen a decline in inter-state wars, and the rise of wars between transnational social movements and states. The U.S. War on Terror, focused (at the time of Tarrow’s writing) on the struggle against Al Qaeda, falls into this category.

The second process is the development of the U.S. national security state. This idea is not new, but Tarrow puts a distinct spin on it by tracing its origins to the U.S. state’s response to the antiwar movements during World War I. Whereas in earlier periods states would have relied on their hierarchical power to repress these movements, President Woodrow Wilson instead launched a massive public relations campaign to stoke patriotic fervor, which was used to bolster support for the repressive Espionage and Sedition Acts that essentially removed freedoms of speech and assembly. By the end of the Korean War, militarism had become fully embedded within the state, which continued to rely on the tools of persuasion and propaganda to maintain a permanent state of emergency during the Cold War. Rather than emerging episodically to quiet dissent, the state’s hierarchical power could be used to repress the potential for dissent (though its limits were exposed by the Vietnam War).

Comparing this postwar national security state to the national security state that has, since 2001, taken up the global War on Terror, Tarrow sees a decided spread, and transformation in the U.S. state’s infrastructural power. For one, the effort to shape public opinion that we saw during World War I was expanded dramatically as the Bush administration sought to manage the media.

We also see the creation of a new emergency script under the language of “homeland security” which both provides a narrative for rationalizing state repression of civil liberties and a further centralization of state power through the creation of a new agency of the same name. Finally, we see the expanded use of legal arguments to support state repression. As Tarrow notes, this is not rule *of* law, but rather rule *by* law whereby the state does not simply ignore legal restraints on its power (as it did in Vietnam), but rather legitimizes its activities through convoluted legal discourse. One of the most interesting insights to come out of this discussion is Tarrow’s claim that, while on the one hand the spread of state infrastructural power has largely quashed traditional forms of political contention against the War, the expansion of the state has also opened up spaces for new forms of contention against its activities. For example, rule by law opens space for civil libertarians to engage directly with the state’s legal rationalizations for war; the revelations of Edward Snowden shows that as the state expands, it loses its ability to strictly control who is inside, and who can use its own tools against it.

If it isn’t already obvious, Tarrow is trying to do a lot in a book that comes in at right around three hundred pages. *War, States, and Contention* ranges widely across time and place in an effort to weave together two major bodies of scholarship while, at the same time, trying to address the changing nature of states, and the changing nature of warfare itself from the early modern era when the nation state system was still solidifying, to the present era shaped by forces of internationalization. Given the ambition of the effort it is perhaps not surprising that the book feels a bit loose, particularly in its second part where it can be hard to follow the main analytical thread as Tarrow’s attention is drawn to particular moments and developments in the hundred-year history of the U.S. national security state that, while often sources of illuminating insights, do not always neatly tie back to the core questions that animate the book.

Readers looking for carefully crafted comparisons and counterfactuals exploring how, and under what conditions, different forms of political contention shape and are shaped by the state and its war-making efforts will not find them here, as that does not seem to have been Tarrow’s goal with this book. Instead, Tarrow wants to show the prospects and possibilities for new lines of research that bring together an analysis of social movements, understood through the lens of contentious politics, and an analysis of state structures and state institutions during historically-pivotal moments of war making. In addition, rather than just leaving us with some general appreciation of the fact that “contention matters,” Tarrow also sets out a few guideposts that help to frame this research agenda: the distinction between hierarchical and infrastructural power and a reminder that states are not static entities, but change over time and, in the process, change their war-making practices. This book is meant to inspire a new way of looking at well-trod themes and questions, and while readers will likely come away a bit frustrated by some of the gaps in the

narrative, it will be a frustration that fuels a desire to ask new questions, conduct fresh research, and breathe new life into critically important questions.

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