State Power and Contentious Politics

A Discussion of Sidney Tarrow's *War, States, and Contention: A Comparative Historical Study*

War, States, and Contention: A Comparative Historical Study. By Sidney Tarrow. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. 328p. $79.95 cloth, $27.95 paper.

Contemporary political science has generated extensive literatures on the themes of war, civil war, contentious politics, and social movements. But these literatures are often segregated in particular subfields, like International Relations and Comparative Politics, and typically speak past each other rather than to each other. Sidney Tarrow's *War, States, & Contention: A Comparative Historical Study* (Cornell 2015) offers a single, synthetic perspective on these topics. As Tarrow states, "I hope to show that the advent of war is sometimes driven by social movements; that movements often affect the conduct of war and sometimes change its directions; and that wars often trigger the rise and expansion of movements in their wake." Few topics are more important than the ones considered in this book, and so we have invited a range of political scientists, from a variety of subfield and methodological approaches, to comment on the book.

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As I write this review in the immediate aftermath of the November 13 attacks in Paris and the declaration of states of emergency in France and Belgium, Sidney Tarrow's book rings eerily pertinent. Tarrow's purpose is to examine how contentious politics intervenes in logics of war and state building. While the Islamic State (IS) is not part of the book, the shift in perspective Tarrow advances makes it possible to recast the war against IS as intricately intertwined with contentious politics, as a new moment of state-building, and of building new forms of international governance.

Tarrow starts from Charles Tilly's widely-accepted proposition that not only do states make war, but wars make states: Preparing for war led European states to organize processes of extraction, protection, production, and distribution that established them in their contemporary form. Tarrow finds this argument persuasive but insufficient and inserts another, less elaborated one of Tilly's propositions, namely that war is related to contentious politics. The book sets out to provide an understanding of the complex and sometimes contradictory effects that such politics has on state building in the context of war. It does so through a sweeping historical comparative study in two parts.

Focused on the building of new states in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the first part takes the cases of France, the United States, and Italy to illustrate how domestic contention intersects with the onset of war, how states seek to control such contention during war, and how wars influence the shape of contention in their aftermath. Contention produced the French Revolution and with it a "movement-state" that ultimately reined in contention by inventing emergency rule. A stronger state also was the outcome of the U.S. Civil War, which triggered massive infringements on civil liberties with lingering effects beyond the war. The case of Italy shows that wars can generate contention in their aftermath: Destabilization in the wake of World War I allowed Mussolini to rally insecure sectors of the population around fascism and build an authoritarian state.

The second part of the book sets its sights on the "composite conflicts" of the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, which Tarrow argues, differ from earlier wars in that they include both non-state and state actors and often employ illegal means. Moreover, in such conflicts the distinction between international and domestic is blurred and sometimes entirely

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erased. While he briefly introduces the Irish Troubles as archetypical of this type of war, his eyes are firmly trained on the United States and on the kind of state it has built through repressions of contention during the two World Wars and the Cold War, but more importantly since 9/11. While painting a bleak picture of civil liberties in the "American state of terror" (p. 168), Tarrow also highlights pushback from civil society both in the form of legal contestation and activism, including by whistleblowers like Edward Snowden "on the electronic frontier" (p. 208).

The final part of the book shifts the attention to the international level and interrogates the "dark side of liberal internationalism" (p. 217), the way in which the U.S. state of emergency has been projected into the multilateral system and, indeed, into allied states. International collaboration to fight terrorism thus has become a breeding ground for human rights violations, from extraordinary renditions to placing individuals on lists for sanctions and surveillance without transparency or recourse.

Tarrow takes on large processes and makes huge comparisons, bringing to bear a wide a range of cases. (In addition to the chapter-long case studies, the introduction touches on the Ukraine and the conclusion adds a brief consideration of post-colonial state building in Palestine/Israel, Burma, Indonesia, and Algeria). While introducing a plethora of detail, he skillfully keeps the reader trained to his main argument: paying attention to political contestation enriches our understanding of the connection between state building and war. Suffused into this argument is a passion to make visible the dangers to civil liberties that war poses. In the end, what is the role that contention plays at the intersection of state building and war?

Tarrow insists that his argument is causal (p. 5). But he does not reduce contention, war and state to variables or seek to establish general laws about directions of causality. Instead, Tarrow focuses on processes and identifies several causal mechanisms. First, drawing on work by Kim Lane Schepple, he illustrates how "emergency scripts" are triggered in wars to contain contention, including a move from executive centralization and militarization to various infringements of civil liberties that tend to linger well beyond the ends or wars. Second, he shows "ratchet effects" during and in the aftermath of war, effecting an expansion of statist powers and the migration of illiberal methods across government agencies (including upward to international organizations and downward to police forces), but also sometimes libertarian outcomes, such as the extension of suffrage. Third, borrowing from Michael Mann, he introduces the distinction between hierarchical power and infrastructural power, which allows him to show that states during war are built not simply with instruments of the state of exception, but also through the mobilization of civil society and the private sector by means of tools ranging from defense contracts to pro-war propaganda. Finally, he demonstrates how in the composite conflict with Al Quaeda "rule by law" has replaced the rule of law as different U.S. administrations have gone through pains to argue the legality of torture and other human rights violations.

The book succeeds at multiple levels: First, it identifies several causal mechanisms to explain the kinds of states that are being built at the intersection of war and contention. Second, combining insights from International Relations, comparative-historical analysis, and contentious politics, it shifts our understanding of the meaning of war today: no longer can we distinguish between inter-state, extra-state, and civil wars, but wars have become composites of contention and violence, involving states and movements, on a global scale. Finally, the book displays a virtuosity with empirical and historical evidence that brings these concepts and understandings to life.

Tarrow's approach helps us to move beyond the idea that wars with Al Quaeda and IS are exceptional. The specificity of these wars may lie in contemporary contexts of globalization and internationalization, but when approached through the lens of state building and contention, they can be understood as in line with wars historically, triggering familiar mechanisms to rein in civil society while re-making states and international governance.

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Where there's smoke there's fire. This is the essence of the argument lying at the heart of Sidney Tarrow's sweeping, bracing new manuscript. War is the fire in this analogy, and contention is the smoke—or vice versa. It is not Tarrow's purpose to show that war generates contention or that contention generates war in any unidirectional sense. It is to call our attentions to the critical historical realities that where there is war there is usually contention; that where there is contention there is very often war; and that states are usually altered in dramatic ways amid these violent interlocking processes. Most books in comparative politics draw precise causal arrows pointing from cause to outcome. *War, States, and Contention* paints more of a causal swirl. Almost everything points, at one juncture or another, to almost everything else.

This might be a drawback if everything Tarrow analyzes were not so bloody interesting. As with most works in the comparative-historical canon, the power of Tarrow's volume cannot be neatly distilled into any single causal claim, or even a particularly concise set of claims. Its glory lies in the author's historical breadth, comparative imagination, normative mission, and steadfast commitment to addressing interesting historical questions in important historical cases. For anybody who loves political history, *War, States, and Contention* is above all else a good old-fashioned riveting read. Crisscrossing both the globe and the centuries, Tarrow shows how contention fed into war and back again in settings ranging from revolutionary France to the American Civil War, and from fascist Italy to America's "War on Terror." This review cannot do justice to all of Tarrow's action-packed case-studies and novel analytical moves. What might be more fruitful is to try to tie a tighter thread around his many themes and cases than the fact that they are all somehow connected to wars, states, and contention.

Recall the smoke-and-fire metaphor that launched this review. In these conflagrations of contention and war, what exactly gets burned up? The main answer, Tarrow convincingly demonstrates, is *rights*. More than anything else, this is a book about how wars give states extraordinary latitude to restrict citizens' rights, while also providing citizens with extraordinary incentives and opportunities to fight for their rights. In this respect, Tarrow's book is not only a timely homage to his late compatriot Charles Tilly. It is also a resounding corrective. For Tilly, wars tend to expand rights by giving citizens new leverage over their rulers as indispensable warriors and taxpayers. Tarrow brilliantly exposes the flip side of this process, as wars give states the perfect pretext to trample on rights through states of emergency. Rights play such a leading role throughout Tarrow's book that *War, **Rights**, and Contention* would have been a more fitting title than *War, **States**, and Contention*. As a book about war, a book about rights, and a book about contention, it succeeds mightily.

But as a book about *states*, the contributions are less evident. In fact Tarrow's treatment of states represents something of a step in the wrong theoretical direction. Where Tarrow goes worrisomely astray is in his treatment of Michael Mann's critical notion of state infrastructural power. From Mann's initial invocation of the concept (in "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms, and Results," *European Journal of Sociology* 25:2 [November 1984]: 185–213) to his defense of it a quarter-century later in a special journal issue on infrastructural power coedited by Hillel Soifer and Matthias vom Hau (in "Infrastructural Power Revisited," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43:3 [Fall/Winter 2008]: 355–365), Mann has been admirably clear and consistent in his definition. Similarly, in the new comparative research agenda on infrastructural power that has blossomed over the past decade (beyond the aforementioned special issue see Daniel Ziblatt, *Structuring the State: The Formation of Italy and Germany and the Puzzle of Federalism*, 2008; Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, 2008; Matthew Lange, *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power*, 2009; Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*, 2010; and Soifer, *State Building in Latin America*, 2015), the definition has remained remarkably stable. Despite a different word here or alternative clause there, state infrastructural power has always and everywhere been defined as *the state's capacity to implement policy throughout its realm*. Considering how much difference of opinion surrounds core concepts such as democracy, revolution, and even the state itself, it might be no exaggeration to say that state infrastructural power represents the clearest major concept we have in comparative politics.

Tarrow's take is subtly but substantially different. Suggesting that my 2010 book defines infrastructural power "in a narrower sense" than one should (p. 262), Tarrow locates some surprising ambiguity in Mann's definition of the concept as "the power of the state to penetrate and centrally coordinate the activities of civil society through its own infrastructure" (p. 17). The key word is "its." Tarrow interprets it to mean "society's," as in, the state coordinates society through *society's* infrastructures. But in his landmark 1993 volume (*The Sources of Social Power, vol. 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*), Mann is explicit that the "its" he has in mind

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is not society's but the state's. To quote him in full: "Infrastructural power is the institutional capacity of a central state, despotic or not, to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions. This is collective power, 'power through' society, coordinating social life *through state infrastructures*" (1993, 59). This is consistent with Mann's later usage as well as that of the scholars who have followed devotedly in his footsteps. Tarrow doesn't get the wrong Mann; he gets his Mann wrong.

This is not merely splitting hairs. For Tarrow, state infrastructural power does not even require the state's institutional presence. In fact it may be most evident when the state is absent, because society is doing the state's work for it. For Tarrow, infrastructural power most fundamentally consists of a state's "ties within society" (p. 25), and not its own institutional arms. The mix-up takes its biggest toll in Tarrow's awkward formulation that the American Civil War allowed "financial capital. . ..to control the state's infrastructural power for generations to come" (p. 75). By this definition, state infrastructural power is not even power. Nor is it even state infrastructure. If a narrow segment of society is controlling the state, that is state capture. This might fairly be considered the opposite of state infrastructural power.

If Tarrow has something to offer on infrastructural power, it is a hypothesis about which kind of states can accomplish what they want: i.e. those with strong ties within society. Tarrow's claim here is plausible but familiar. It closely dovetails with Peter Evans' notions of embeddedness, state-society synergy, and shared projects (in his *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*, 1995) as well as Philip Gorski's concept of disciplinary power (in his *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe*, 2003), which drew heavily on Michel Foucault's "governmentality." Evans and Gorski are very clear that they are making a claim about where infrastructural power comes from. They do not conflate infrastructural power with the social embeddedness they hypothesize as its causal source.

Happily this allows us to end on a forward-looking note. Once this definitional confusion is resolved, Tarrow's book can be understood as an important new contribution to existing debates on how states' social ties might enhance their power. Do dense social ties improve a state's capacity to implement its policies and achieve its objectives? Tarrow, Evans, and Gorski are probably right that the very strongest states are those with robust social ties. But such ties sometimes leave states captured rather than making them capable. We cannot even ask why this is so if we treat social ties as the definition of infrastructural power instead of its possible fountainhead. Once this critical definitional repair is made, *War, States and Contention* should stand as a singular contribution to our understanding of all three concepts that constitute its lofty title.

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This quite powerful book argues that liberal democracy's evolution depends less than you probably think on regular party competition, the governance capacity of independent legislatures, and the struggle to maintain vigorous and impartial judiciaries—and rather more than you suspected on contentious, non-routine politics. Contentious politics means more than social movements, though the concept certainly includes them. The idea refers to the full range of sharp confrontations by contentious actors with authorities, both public and private. They can be violent or peaceful, short-lived or long-lived. They include sit-ins, sit-downs, emergency legal defense and mobilization, and the release by whistle blowers of secret documents. The democracy-developing (or weakening) part is this: Contentious politics forces established authorities to stand by and reaffirm liberal norms—or it entices them to violate these norms in order to strike back at contentious actors, particularly as these actors become more and more transgressive. Trangression can beget transgression. Because contention and liberal democracy are Siamese twins, liberal norms are continually violated and tested by the mainstream and the margin, for better or worse, in multiple and overlapping cycles that vary in their intensity and disturbance.

Tarrow underscores, too, that a second kind of disruption—war—also regularly tests liberal democracy. It tempts executives to forge states of exception from liberal norms. Thus, in the wake of Pearl Harbor President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the avatar of American social democracy, interned loyal Japanese-Americans residing on the Pacific coast. He did so on the grounds that they were ipso facto a fifth column despite plain evidence that they were no such thing.

Third, war often creates—and sometimes overlaps with—either domestic contention *or* the palpable prospect of *linkage* between internal and external enemies. When either (or both) of those correlates of war emerge then one can expect nominally democratic officials to improvise some variation on what Kim Lane Scheppele has called "the emergency script": executive centralization, special emergency procedures and organizations, repression, censorship and propaganda, detention regimes disconnected from the rule of law, sharply heightened secrecy, and, at the extreme, anticipatory violence against internal enemies of the regime. The consequent tensions with democratic norms can be very deep—deep enough to betoken regime collapse or change.

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But regime collapse is not inevitable. As officials fashion the emergency script during the searing intersection of war and domestic division they may also simultaneously write a "democracy script": mobilizing citizens, articulating and elaborating new democratic ideals, and extending rights to new populations. The reason for that has to do with the Janus-faced nature of the democratic state. The democratic state's officials can rapidly acquire and deploy top-down "hard power" common to all democratic states. But a democratic "infrastructure" surrounds these officials: dense webs of voluntary associations, public-private partnerships, and, not least, political parties. The leverage of these infrastructural actors may force democratic concessions, rights, and new kinds of transparency and oversight during or after the crisis.

In a brilliant series of narratives Tarrow traces several regime-testing and regime-making permutations of the emergency script. Officials invented utterly fascinating variations on it during the French Revolution, the American Civil War, Italy's entrance into World War I, France's war against Algerian nationalists, the division of American society and politics during the Vietnam War, and Great Britain's sustained engagement with the IRA in Northern Ireland.

Tarrow then shows how 9/11 unleashed the emergency script here in the United States—and further shows that *this* permutation of the script has been quite unusual, for it was legalized and constitutionalized by President Bush's lawyers (think here of John Yoo and Jay Bybee.) Indeed a capacity for fully re-activating "the 9/11 emergency script" now seems hard-wired into the American state. Parts of it (for instance asset seizure and financial system warfare) have fed into the complex webs of transnational organizations that we once called "embedded liberalism." Though the Obama Administration came to office intending to roll back the 9/11 emergency script it did not do so (or, in the case of shutting down Guantanamo, could not.) President Obama has instead carried forward pervasive internal surveillance, resisted holding the CIA fully accountable for its earlier program of torture and extraordinary renditions, and engaged in anticipatory attacks abroad through drone warfare, including an attack on an American citizen operating in Yemen who was undoubtedly loathed by every member of the attentive public. Nor has the massive outsourcing of counterterrorist programs to the private sector been reined in. The Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the CIA, the NSA, and a wide panoply of smaller bureaucracies spend much of their time letting contracts, supervising them, and assessing them.

Tarrow ends his book with quick sketches of connections between decolonization experiences and the emergency script. But I happened to read the book after the ISIS-inspired Paris attacks, and it came as a genuine

shock to realize that I perhaps held a guide to America's near-term future in my hands. After all, American interventions have helped to spawn al-Qaeda in Libya, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, and the United States is slowly engaging ISIS. In a classic geopolitical pattern we face encirclement. The international effort to defeat ISIS is mired in deep divisions and quarrels, promising a very long and uncertain war. The illiberal, electric American responses to the Paris attacks—Donald Trump's call for a Muslim registry and the rapid action by the House of Representatives and of most American governors to protest the Obama Administration's agreement to absorb all of 10,000 Syrian refugees (a number that is not much larger than the size of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania)—are nothing in comparison to what may happen if the attacks in Paris are repeated here in the United States. If you read this book—and if you worry about liberal democracy then you must—you will see how it opens the curtain on potential developments here in the United States, and on what the United States will almost certainly do again internationally, *if* there is another mass terror attack inside the United States.

What, then, of the democracy script that emerged in the wake of 9/11? Tarrow draws on the work of his Cornell colleague Chan Suh to depict the rise of the Guantanamo bar and its struggle over habeas corpus rights. He mentions, too, Sen. John McCain's opposition to torture—and a full discussion would have to include Sen. Diane Feinstein's quest, still in process as of this writing, to demonstrate the extent of CIA-managed torture and its utter futility. Tarrow also shows why surveillance begat Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, raising the possibility that more digital whistle blowing by similarly (un)attractive figures lies in our future.

But the emergency is still with us. Sen. Marco Rubio's statement in the wake of the Paris attacks—that we are living through a "clash of civilizations"—unhappily reaches for the apocalyptic bait of our enemy in Raqqa. Perhaps intuiting the whirlwind that might follow if he moved more forcefully, President Obama acts very cautiously, enraging the critics of his Middle Eastern policy.

An unsettling paraphrase of Trotsky may be this book's bottom line: You may not be interested in the emergency script but the emergency script is very interested in you. Writing the democracy script in the face of that challenge is a task that will preoccupy Americans for some time to come.

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