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Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the Study of Militaries, States, and Politics

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War-Making in the New Millennium

The post–Cold War era ushered in a new wave of optimism about an end to world wars and a possible reduction in global-scale violence. As the new millennium loomed large, heightened expectations about world peace and global political stability captured the imagination of those who scarcely a decade earlier concerned themselves primarily with war-making among superpowers and their satellites. Shifting rhetorics and rising expectations were further fueled by the so-called third wave of democracy that continued materializing in the post-1989 world. As democratization and globalization reached ever further corners of the globe, long-standing claims of political scientists that democracies do not fight each other took on greater significance. For many security analysts, new forms of regional and international economic cooperation between countries committed to a common project of liberalization also promised to reduce the likelihood of widespread global conflict.

But now, from the vantage point of a new millennium, and in a post-9/11 world, initial optimism seems muted. Few would counsel that the threat of armed conflict is on the wane, at least insofar as violence and armed coercion still continue as facts of life. Even as a tentative peace settles in among previously contending geopolitical superpowers struggling over spheres of influence, those countries and regions that lay in the interstices of this larger power structure – and whose fates not that long ago seemed overdetermined by the economic or political competition between Cold War antagonists – are beginning to implode with greater frequency. This is especially the case in countries where liberalization of the economy has proceeded more rapidly than the expansion of citizenship rights and the consolidation of newly democratic institutions. In those places with particularly vulnerable political and economic conditions, the strong arm of the state is directed inwardly as much as outwardly, as is increasingly evident

in Central and East Europe, Latin America, Africa, Central and East Asia, and the Middle East. In many of these locations, specialized paramilitary forces and police now replace the national military on the front lines of violent conflict, while citizens arm themselves both offensively and defensively as vigilante groups, militias, terrorists, and even mafia organizations seeking to counteract or bypass the state's claim on a monopoly of legitimate force. These developments not only suggest that further study of the origins and larger political impacts of these new patterns of armed force might take us far in explaining the potential obstacles to world peace, and even the erosion of democracy and citizenship rights in the contemporary era; they also shed light on a potential paradox that few were prepared to consider during the celebratory dawn of the initial post–Cold War euphoria: as the probability of world war diminishes, the likelihood of "internal" war and subnational violence may be increasing, at least for certain countries of the world.

What seems to have changed, in short, is not the likelihood of militarized coercion and armed conflict so much as its character and scope. In those regions of the world where violence seems most prevalent, the predominant forms of war-making and the means of coercion appear markedly different than in the immediate past; and with the terrain of experience shifting so dramatically, old theories and long-standing analytic points of entry must be called into question, even if the persistence of conflict is not. Today we see a large number of armed conflicts in which the main protagonists comprise not nationally conscripted standing armies waging war in the name of sovereign nations but states acting against their own peoples. We also see popularly constituted or clandestine armed forces who frequently act on behalf of subnational groups (often defined in terms of ethnicity, language, region, or religion) and whose claims to national sovereignty themselves are problematic. What seems to be most under contention, then, are not the interstate hegemonies or globally contested geopolitical balances of power that led to large-scale wars in previous decades, but the legitimacy, power, and reach of national states, especially as seen from the point of view of those populations contained within their own territorial jurisdictions.

The stakes and terms of these conflicts also are different than they were when nations primarily fought each other. Many of these more "irregular" armed forces – ranging in form from paramilitaries and the police to vigilantes, terrorists, and militias – derive their charge and calling from civil society; and if they do answer to the state in some fashion, it is generally not to the national executive or the military defense establishment but to locally organized law enforcement agencies (as in the case of police) or more clandestine security apparatuses (as with specialized paramilitary forces). These latter agencies may be closely articulated with the national executive and national defense ministries, to be sure. But historically, police, militias, and paramilitary personnel have operated under different organizational,

political, and disciplinary dynamics than have conventional armed forces. Moreover, to the extent that many of these alternative armed forces comprise previous military personnel, especially in the context of the transition from authoritarian rule, they may carry with them traditions, techniques, and networks (not to mention arms) that still link them to national defense ministries although they are formally separate from national armed forces. As such, their relationships to the military, the state, and even civil society may differ in ways that are not well articulated in the conventional literature on armed forces.

The military as a key national institution is not about to disappear; nor in all probability will the nation-state and interstate or international conflicts, including those in which nations cooperate regionally or globally to fight against particular regimes. But developments in recent years, especially when compared to the period starting with World War I to the end of the Cold War in 1989, do suggest a fundamental transformation in what we have generally considered war-making, and in the types of coercive violence being deployed by citizens and the state.[1] To the extent that so many different forms and agents of internally directed violence now seem to proliferate, it is time to reexamine conventional views about warfare, armed force, and their larger implications. We must be prepared to consider the possibility that nation-states, in addition to losing their monopoly over the means of coercion, may also be in the position of losing the incentives, will, or means to establish universal social contracts with their own peoples, as occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when national governments conscripted citizens to fight on their behalf.[2]

Reconsidering the War-Making–State-Making Nexus

Our collective aim in this volume is to examine alternative or "irregular"[3] agents of militarized coercion and armed struggle, to consider the extent to which their activities – both in form and impact – parallel those of conventional armed forces, and to assess the theoretical and practical implications of this knowledge for the study of national politics and state formation. Among the issues that concern us here are whether the apparent pervasiveness of irregular armed force in the contemporary period necessarily entails a rethinking of the literature on war-making, especially the relationship between war-making and state-making or national political development. Should we assume that the predominance of armed veteran groups, police, militia, paramilitary, and a variety of other subnational forces in the front lines of violent coercion is really as new as it may appear, both in given countries or across the board? Or, is it just that methodological blinders and prevailing theoretical frameworks – as opposed to substantively "real" transformations – have discouraged us from examining them with a sharpened comparative and historical eye?

Scholars have been slow to tackle these questions or to examine conscientiously the relationship between irregular armed force, state-building, and national political development. For decades, the most popular theoretical guides to war-making and state-making among political scientists, sociologists, and historians analyzed the relationship between standing armies and the development of state structures and capacities, with the actions of conscripted military personnel whose role is to defend national sovereignty vis-à-vis foreign or external aggressors serving as the main empirical point of departure. Most of this literature identified the nation-state as the key unit of analysis, while conventional organizations for warfare were considered the primary mode of militarized conflict. These assumptions were evident not just in the seminal writings of historians and sociologists like Charles Tilly (1990) and Michael Mann (1988), who constructed many of their arguments about military power and state formation on the basis of propositions about militaries and states drawn from classic works by Max Weber, who himself was most interested in the rise of national states and interstate conflict during the early modern era. The failure to transcend the confines of the nation-state or to examine nonconventional military forces also held true in most of the political science literature, in which scholars crafted arguments about the relationships between militaries and national states for the purposes of supplanting larger claims about international systems of states, Cold War balances of power, and the likelihood of democracy or authoritarianism (with a leading concern in the latter studies being the extent to which the state is subject to civilian or military rule) in Africa, Latin America, and East Asia as their nations sought to modernize both politically and economically.

To be sure, despite their firm theoretical grounding in the early modern experience of mainly European nation-states, most of the originating arguments about military power and states were judged to be so powerful and compelling that they also enjoyed much contemporary regard, and were frequently utilized to explain late twentieth-century forms of political development in a variety of comparative contexts. As such, it is not that scholars have completely failed to think comparatively and historically about armed force and national politics or state formation. Writings by Charles Tilly (in *Bringing the State Back In*, 1985) and Peter Evans (*Embedded Autonomy*, 1995) are exemplary in these regards, as is recent work by Robert Bates (2001). While the former authors are well known among sociologists for developing the notion of protection rackets and focusing on predatory states that exploit their own peoples through military rule and other coercive techniques, Bates has posed new and intriguing questions about the impact of the global political economy on late-developing states' predatory relationships vis-à-vis their own populations. In the process he has raised the possibility that recent transformations in the global political economy may have fundamentally altered the long-standing connections between war-making,

state-making, and the rise of democratic institutions that prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in no small part by reinforcing warlord-type politics in regions of the world like Africa. In these regards, he comes close to suggesting a historical convergence between the premodern and postmodern eras or, perhaps better said, between early and late developers.

Despite their application to a more contemporary period, however, and the comparative-historical advances contained in these studies, most writings on the present period still tended to use conventional armed force as their key frame of reference, looking for the ways that patterns of political and economic development might disrupt their dynamics rather than vice versa, as we do here. It is no real surprise, then, that much of the available literature on the topic does not easily transfer to the globalized, early twenty-first-century world where the nation-state is ever more called into question and where violence and armed coercion continue even in the face of democratic inroads. One of our aims here is to continue with Bates's formulation and to analyze what is similar and what is different across these comparative and historical contexts. To what extent do the models that emerged out of close examination of much earlier historical experiences hold up in new or different contexts? What modifications might be necessary to account for new patterns of internally as well as externally directed warfare and the wide range of armed forces now active in regions and nations around the world? And what are the implications of any such modifications for our theoretical and practical understanding of politics and coercive forces in both the past and the present?

To be entirely fair, a focus on nonconventional militaries organized locally, as mercenaries or other forms of paramilitary armed brigands, is not completely absent in the literature. Charles Tilly, whose own contribution in the first section of this volume sets the framework for the studies that follow, has underscored elsewhere that most of the original writings about war-making and state-making were built on the assumption that subnational coercion and the use of "irregular" armed force were necessary to the consolidation of national states in the first place. He and others have shown that the putative national states of the early modern era used irregular forces to reinforce conscription patterns, to form standing armies, to continue interstate war-making, and thus to further extend and reinforce citizenship rights, all in ways that buttressed national state institutions and capacities. But this narrative is generally reproduced in the context of conventional war-making–state-making dynamics, with a focus on the militarized conditions under which national states form, expand their institutional reach, and become legitimate, and with an analytical focus on the outcome of these processes. One consequence is that nation-states and conventional war-making organizations have remained the central subject of study in the literature, while the focus on irregular forces, generally speaking, as well as subnational domains of political organization, has dropped out of the

picture unless the premodern period remains of interest. A second consequence is that scholars armed with this framework tend to gravitate toward the study of times and places most likely to parallel conditions present in the early modern era that inspired the argument in the first place. This explains the preoccupation with Western Europe and the study of interstate rivalries in this part of the globe during the period of the world wars, as well as the continued focus on those countries of the world not yet considered "modern," like Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Our practical aim in this edited volume is to reintroduce studies of irregular or nonconventional armed forces to the literature on politics and state formation, to do so with an expanded focus that includes countries and time periods routinely ignored in this literature, and to do so with an eye to subnational as well as transnational politics and coercive actors. The collection comprises both historical and contemporary case studies as well as theoretically informed essays that examine a wide variety of experiences in which armed forces other than national militaries representing sovereign national powers in interstate conflicts are the subject of study. In presenting these cases and theorizing their implications, we stand on the shoulders of several recent authors in the fields of political science and sociology who have made significant gains in these regards already. In addition to Robert Bates, whose *Prosperity and Violence* (2001) has been noted earlier, they include Margaret Levi (1997) and Mark Osiel (1999), whose recent books have taken the field in entirely new directions by focusing on how preparation for war, either in the form of conscription or military training, establishes and sometimes transforms the social contract between the governing and the governed. We also turn for inspiration to Theda Skocpol's pioneering work, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (1992), whose focus on postwar dynamics sustained a larger argument about the impact of veterans organizations and claims for veterans' pensions on the formation of the U.S. welfare state. In this edited volume we continue in the spirit of innovation embodied in these leading works, but we try to expand our framework and analytic scope even more to include a far wider set of countries, armed forces, and historical time periods in the mix. We accomplish this in four specific ways.

First, we include essays that analyze the interaction between war-making and state-making in countries where the coercive arm of the state and the activities of national militaries are internally as well as externally directed, such that agents of the state search for enemies within their own borders and/or repressively police their own populations. Second, we showcase the work of authors who focus their attention on a variety of armed personnel, including militias, paramilitaries, and police, as well as demobilized militaries, including veterans. Third, rather than focusing only on the nation-state as the principal source of coercive capacity, both regular and irregular, internally directed or not, we also examine armed forces active or

convened on behalf of local states and imperial states, seeking to understand the ways that the activities of locally or globally constituted armed forces also contribute to national state formation and political developments, both domestic and international. Last, we make a deliberate effort to transcend the constraining assumptions drawn from work on authoritarian versus democratic regime types by rejecting the popular epistemological premise that irregular armed forces and internally directed coercive agents are analytically or theoretically relevant only in authoritarian countries. As such, we include studies of irregular armed forces across a variety of comparative and historical contexts, democratic or not.

Given the book's originating concern with the present period, it may seem counterintuitive to be raising questions and offering case studies that span the centuries and all parts of the globe, as we do here. The essays in this book focus on countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia as well as France, Greece, Japan, and the United States, and they treat periods as early as the fourteenth century and as late as the newly crowned twenty-first century. Yet the selection of these widely divergent cases and sweeping time periods is purposeful and grounded in careful attention to the importance of history and method. It allows us to ask similar questions about earlier historical cases and the present, and to look for parallels or differences either in terms of the nature of the armed forces involved or the domains in which these conflicts have unfolded. Together, this methodological framing should provide the tools and materials to understand the dynamics of militarized coercion and politics in the contemporary world, even as they may also shed new practical and theoretical light on the past.

Transcending Past Assumptions

What guides do we use to recast our understanding of the relationships between militaries, state formation, and national politics as well as to establish our own comparative and historical points of entry? Perhaps the best point of departure is the literature itself, which can be evaluated for its internal logic as well as for its capacity to account for contemporary and historical developments in the world of states and wars. In addition to the classic literature on war-making and state formation by Tilly and Mann and to the newest variations on these themes in the work of Bates, Skocpol, Levi, and Osiel, noted earlier, there exists a substantial body of literature on the military, state power, and national political development formulated by political scientists, historians, and strategic defense specialists of the Cold War era that must be considered. Its authors have paid considerable attention to the ways that levels of economic development, the organizational power of the national state, and the absence of democracy can affect a country's capacity institutionally to subordinate the military to civilian rulers, and vice versa (see, e.g., Huntington 1959: esp. 80–85; Vagts 1973;

Rouquié 1987; Remmer 1989). To the extent that this literature laid much of the groundwork for contemporary knowledge of the relationship between armed forces and political development, it is worth reviewing here in order to assess what must be salvaged or discarded to make sense of the present.

Historically, this field developed around three "generations" of scholars, each attentive to pressing contemporary questions, but all preoccupied with the relationships between militaries and democracy or regime type more than state formation. The first generation of scholarship was organized in the 1960s around modernization theory. Its authors were concerned with how former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America could achieve political "development," and they identified military professionalization and civilian control of the military as essential to the modern democratic project. In the 1970s, a second generation of scholars, reacting to the wave of military regimes that appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s, replaced the optimistic teleology of modernization theory. These social scientists were divided into two camps. One camp applauded military intervention, seeing the military as a middle-class institution that could control popular "disorder" and usher in political modernization; the other condemned military intervention, attributing it to dependent capitalist development and superpower clientelism reflecting Cold War antagonisms. Most recently, a third generation, responding to the collapse or negotiated transition of many military-based authoritarian regimes, sought to explain why such political transitions occurred, and what role miltaries should play if new democracies are to be consolidated.

We find three blind spots in this literature, each of which sustains our current effort to seek a new analytic framework. The first blind spot, alluded to already, results from the use of broadly defined regime type as the central axis of comparison, a strategy that has meant that most scholars have failed to examine commonalities across political systems or differences within them. All three generations of scholars have assumed that significant differences in military actions and power are best captured in a regime-type trichotomy (democracy-authoritarianism-totalitarianism). Within this formulation, democracies are characterized by civilian control of the military, which authoritarian regimes lack (Finer 1982; Perlmutter 1982; Wolpin 1986; Maniruzzaman 1987; Lopez and Stohl 1989). In democracies, for example, the military is assumed to be institutionally subordinated to the state, and thus is neither a significant nor a threatening political actor in government and society. In authoritarian regimes, in contrast, the military often shares power with the state, which means it can politically influence state actions and oppress civil society, although perhaps not completely. In totalitarian regimes, the military is assumed to dominate the state and terrorize society in despotic ways that limit political opposition and curtail political freedom on all levels.

Armed with this framework, scholars interested in the military's role and impact on society, politics, or state power turned most of their attention to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Again, their studies have specified the features that distinguish these types of regimes from each other and from democracies, rather than the historically produced commonalities across them. Most important, perhaps, owing to these assumptions scholars failed to explore systematically those variations in the military's character and political capacity that occurred even within democracies, because in this regime type the "problem" of the military was assumed to be nonexistent. To be sure, some scholars have questioned both the assumption that the military's power and political influence in the state correlate strictly with regime type and the extent to which the military's role or influence in democracies is politically unproblematic. This approach is perhaps best demonstrated by recent studies on the varying forms of military power within countries now shedding authoritarianism and embracing democracy (Stepan 1988; Aguero 1992; McSherry 1992; Zaverucha 1993; Acuña and Smulovitz 1996; Pion-Berlin 1997). Nevertheless, even these newer studies are based on the assumption that once democratization is formally on the political agenda, formerly authoritarian countries will institutionalize an effective separation of military and state power, and thus the "military question" is no longer problematic. It is presumed that once such a separation is implemented, discussion of political stability or democratic consolidation can move on to other concerns.

A closer look at the evidence, however, as well as the articles presented in this book, suggests that it is important to examine the historically constituted differences in the nature of the military or other armed forces and their popular legitimacy among similar regime types, even and especially within democracies. Much is lost in the study of both new and old democracies, for example, if we fail to recognize that countries may have had similar or dissimilar histories of military autonomy and development, and that these historical patterns have had important impacts on the institutional and ideological contours of democratic states and their national politics. In this volume, this point is made in Susan Browne's examination of the postcolonial United States, Richard Bensel's discussion of the post–Civil War era, and Lizabeth Zack's discussion of the Third Republic in France. All three articles underscore that even in old democracies like France and the United States what we call militarized forces – ranging from militias to veterans to police – possess varying degrees of popular legitimacy and, as such, have differentially affected internal political developments.

A second assumption in the existing literature on the military and politics is that the military is a relatively centralized and homogeneous national institution established in the service of the national state (Huntington 1962; Finer 1982; Perlmutter 1982; Clapham and Philip 1985; Maniruzziman 1987; Im 1987). In contrast, we argue the importance of seeing military