

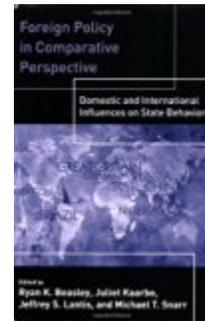
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ryan K. Beasley, Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis, Michael T. Snarr, eds. *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001. xv + 347 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56802-626-8.

Reviewed by James J. F. Forest (Assistant Dean for Academic Assessment and Assistant Professor of Political Science, United States Military Academy, West Point)

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## A Satisfying Feast of Foreign Policy Studies

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In his 1987 presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Melvin Kohn argued that cross-national research is vital for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single-nation studies. "In no other way," he wrote, "can we be certain that what we believe to be social-structural regularities are not merely particularities, the product of some limited set of historical or cultural or political circumstances....Cross-national research forces us to revise our interpretations to take account of cross-national differences and inconsistencies that could never be uncovered in single-nation research."

With this in mind, I have had particular interest for over a decade in books and articles that address a particular phenomenon in terms of cross-national similarities and differences. Regardless of the primary topic of analysis, I have been drawn to studies that ask three general questions: (1) What consistent relationships can be found among a select group of nations? (2) What salient differences exist? and (3) To what forces can these similarities and differences be attributed?

These questions are answered admirably in *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*, as the editors lead us in an exploration of states and the varying influences that frame their international involvement. Framed by introductory and concluding chapters, the book offers a brief

overview of the foreign policy history, current events, and future challenges in thirteen countries: Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, Japan, India, Israel, Iran, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and Mexico. The diversity reflected in this group of countries offers a rich feast for the hungry comparative researcher. The authors purposefully omit a chapter on U.S. foreign policy because, as they state in their introductory chapter, "the United States is...exceptional when compared with other countries of the world...to have included [it] among the countries examined in this book might have made comparison with other countries rather difficult—like comparing apples and oranges" (p. 6).

The chapters are organized consistently and focus on several of the most important highlights necessary for obtaining a respectable base of knowledge in each country's foreign policy. Robert Putnam and fans of two-level games theory will be pleased by the editors' decision to organize each chapter around a discussion of both internal and external influences of policy, as well as the interplay between these two forces. Each author offers their own unique perspective on how the internal and external environments have changed over time, and how these affect the country's foreign policy decisions. Additionally, in most cases, the chapters' authors also provide a few observations or inferences on the relationship between international relations theory and the country's contemporary foreign policy. In a sense, these discussions offer an interesting reflection of the diversity of theoretical

perspectives in the study of foreign policy and international relations. For example, the chapter on Russia reflects the tradition of realism in explaining that country's foreign policy, while others, like the chapter on Mexico, offer more of a liberalist perspective.

In their introductory abstracts to each chapter, the editors offer some tips for the avid reader on how useful comparisons may be made between the chapters. For example, it is suggested that "Britain's reluctance to participate fully in the European Union (chapter 2) can be contrasted with the pro-European policies of France (chapter 3) and Germany (chapter 4)," and lessons about alliances can be drawn from the parallels between the special relationship between the United States and Britain, and the special relationship that Israel (chapter 9) and Japan (chapter 7) also have with the United States. The chapters on Russia, China, France, and Great Britain are particularly useful in framing a discussion of a state's pursuit of influence in the international arena, while the chapters on Brazil, Israel, Nigeria, and South Africa inform conversations on gaining influence within a geographical region. The challenges of coalition governments—such as those discussed in the chapters on Germany, India, and Israel—offer an interesting contrast to the one-party context of communist China.

Research in which nation is treated as context offers a powerful tool to help us understand global events that affect the human condition. For example, in Skocpol's 1979 *States and Social Revolution*, the author demonstrates remarkable parallels in both the causes and consequences of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, and then explains differences—particularly in revolutionary outcomes—in terms of historically unique circumstances. In their concluding chapter, editors Beasley and Snarr organize their comparative analysis of foreign policy around a number of questions on the role of mil-

itary power, economic interdependence, culture, public opinion, governmental structure and leadership characteristics. Their discussion on how various internal and external factors work in combination with one another to influence foreign policy offers a nice, succinct ending to the volume, and highlights the complexities involved in comparative research.

Overall, the volume presents a tremendous amount of information in very accessible language, and for this the editors and authors are to be commended. Each chapter also includes a list of suggestions for further reading—a useful tool for students and scholars of all levels of sophistication—and an index for author and subject terms. It is particularly rare to find such a rich collection of foreign policy histories presented in an easy-to-read fashion. As Kohn observed in his 1987 ASA address, "in interpreting cross-national differences, historical considerations cannot be merely implicit; they must come to the forefront of any interpretation." Perhaps with this in mind our colleagues Beasley, Kaarbo, Lantis, and Snarr have produced a volume of both history and comparative interpretation that will certainly be useful to teachers of undergraduate courses on comparative politics, diplomatic history, international relations, and of course, foreign policy. In teaching a course on International Relations at West Point, I have already found a few useful purposes for this volume. When we reach the point in the semester when cadets are grappling with the concepts of two-level games, win-sets and linkages, I can now offer them a choice of thirteen country-specific descriptions of the interaction between the international and domestic levels of foreign policy decision-making. Not only will this volume enhance their learning experiences and the quality of their research essays, but it will surely make their papers more enjoyable to read, and for that, I am sincerely grateful to the authors and editors for their excellent work.

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