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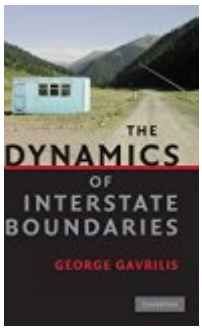
George Gavrilis. *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 216 pp. $80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-89899-7.



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Commissioned by Christopher L. Ball (DePaul University)

Arguably, “state strength” has become the leitmotif of much writing about contemporary statehood with considerable attention given to detailing why some states succeed and others fail because of the relative adequacy or “strength” of their central state apparatus (p. 2). In his thought-provoking book about the management of interstate borders, George Gavrilis will have none of this. He uses border management and control to offer a different and distinctive understanding of state authority.

Gavrilis begins by noting how ineffective most states are at managing their borders. He goes on to examine in considerable empirical detail his theoretical position that border management is a function of state “preferences” rather than “capacity” (as in the conventional wisdom), domestic politics is the best predictor of such preferences, and the nature of the border “regime” determines the effectiveness of management (p.4). Most of his empirical analysis is devoted to establishing that cooperative border strategies with devolution of control to the local level are best at producing secure borders. The other parts of the argument are largely inferred from this rather than demonstrated separately.

Views of the book by political scientists concerned with questions of domestic politics versus international context and state preferences versus state capacities will depend on how well Gavrilis is judged to have made the connections. I think that this may well be the Achilles' heel of the book. From the perspective of those of us more interested in borders simply as instruments of state building, however, it is the typology of border management strategies and the innovative empirical studies undertaken to investigate them that stands out as the main accomplishment of the book. In this regard, Gavrilis has produced a first-rate monograph that will be widely read and stimulative of other research on border management.

The book is divided into seven chapters moving from a general outline of the central theoretical conundrum of border management, that those which are least policed through central fiat are

the most successfully managed, and theoretical claims about how borders are illustrative of various facets of state formation, to detailed studies of the nineteenth-century Greek-Ottoman border in what is today central Greece and contemporary border management in Central Asia. The fundamental premise of the study is that borders are institutions and are shared with neighboring states. This leads to the central claim that "borders are local manifestations of the claims of a state's authority" (p. 6). A typology of border control strategies is used to lay out how from the outset "new states" adopt one of four approaches which reflect the nature of domestic politics within the state at that time. The four approaches are boundary regimes (involving local cross-border cooperation between guards), unilateral policing, conflictual unilateral policing, and ad hoc strategies. Following in the theoretical footsteps of Elinor Ostrom, Charles Tilly, and Roger Gould, Gavrilis focuses on how locally negotiated cross-border cooperation through shared communication and monitoring capacity rather than rent-seeking and corruption determines the course of state formation. The state's ability to let its local agents make their decisions unmonitored from the center is seen as crucial to securing borders and thus enhancing state formation. Successful states and secure borders are established from outside-in rather than vice versa. Gavrilis uses the case studies to empirically bolster his general argument.

Gavrilis relies on a mix of Greek and Ottoman archival sources to show how the border between the two sides was policed from the 1830s until the 1870s. He shows quite convincingly that there was considerable cross-border collaboration, particularly in the central more highland area before 1856. He interprets this as suggesting how much both governments converged in their approach to state-building by resisting centralized micromanagement of the border. As he notes, however, the longstanding system of provincial rule within the Ottoman Empire (of which Greece was, of course, also recently a part) encouraged such local collaborative policing. Many border guards on both sides were also former bandits whose local knowledge, multilingualism, and common norms worked to favor collaboration. Over time, and from the Greek side in particular, the policing became increasingly unilateral with negative consequences for both border management and relations between the two states. Great Powers, particularly Britain, are also invoked as having some role in resolving episodic disputes but they are downplayed theoretically in a resolutely domestic-focused explanation for why border strategies take the form they do. Whether the case study has much to say in such different circumstances as those that prevail, say in Africa or in Latin America, is clearly open to question.

The Central Asian case study relies more on ingenious and time-consuming fieldwork than archives, including the close observation of various border crossings between the various republics since their independence from the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Again, the theoretical thrust is that prior to interaction with other states, their governments established preferences for how they would manage their borders, thus illustrating their approach to state formation. In Central Asia, if Uzbekistan has the most state-controlled economy and has the most centrally controlled borders, Kyrgyzstan stands at the other extreme with the most liberal border regime oriented to demarcation more than control. Gavrilis does not investigate why this should have happened this way and for these particular states. All of the states were, until recently, Soviet republics. One might have expected greater uniformity after independence in border management practices than appears to be the case. Rather, Gavrilis assumes that they reflect the preferences of the respective political elites. He resists the idea that ethnic or nationalist politics or external influences have anything to do with it.

The most important contribution of this book is to make a simple point, albeit one that is frequently missed in border studies: that border security depends on institutional design (particularly that which encourages local cross-border collaborative policing) than on such vacuities as a state's capacity or strength, usually measured in terms of the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and military spending. The problem with the book is that it tries to do much more than this in suggesting how elite preferences (which seemingly are arbitrary constructs) determine the character of institutional design and strongly dismisses the wider international context as having much if any role. In these respects I find it overstated and unconvincing. Yet, its counterintuitive claim that a state which "delegates and surrenders authority to its boundary administrators has a better chance of achieving a secure border" is given substantial support, particularly from the Central Asian case study (p. 2). This is in itself an important achievement. It is one that enthusiasts for ever tighter, centralized, and unilateral border controls in the United States and elsewhere need to reflect on before they realize the exact opposite of what they intend.

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