



Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas

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The volume, *Perspectives on International Relations*, is a welcome addition to the range of textbooks aimed at students of international relations and politics. Written by a leading American academic with experience of working in government and public policy, the author brings this wide-ranging perspective to an engaging explanation of international relations. The book has plenty of resources for the teacher and students, including study questions and summary tables at the end of chapters, maps, feature boxes using statements and commentary from politicians and academics to illustrate relevant perspectives, and graphical timelines of major historical developments.

The three-part structure of the book will be recognizable to the international relations teacher: international conflict and war; globalization and the world economy; and, fragmenting and unifying issues. Several aspects make it distinctive from the existing literature, however. For one thing, there is a consistent attempt to link theory and practice so as to engage the student in a theoretical analysis of each issue right from the beginning. Nau opts for the concept of ‘perspective’ rather than theory to illustrate such core issues as power, conflict, institutions, and ideas. In each chapter, he illustrates how the realist, liberalist, and constructivist perspectives might interpret and explain the relevant topic, and this repeated engagement with the alternative perspectives throughout the book serves to both reinforce and consolidate understanding of the three perspectives. Nau’s engagement with constructivism is also consistent, and he goes further than many textbook authors to elaborate this emerging approach to international relations. There is a strong interdisciplinary focus, with the political science explanations accompanied by significant contributions from history, economics, and political economy, a disciplinary mix that works well to portray the complexities of the international system and the behaviour of states without undermining either the disciplinary integrity or the intellectual experience of the student.

Nau uses the perspectives approach in the explanation and analysis of causal factors in international relations, while he seeks the origins of these causal factors in the levels of analysis — the individual, the national, and/or the systemic level. So, we may be able to explain the cause of World War I in realist terms as the rise of a powerful German state that caused a subsequent change in the distribution of power and ultimately gave rise to a struggle for power, but the explanation is more nuanced if we can take account of where these causes originate. Did the struggle for power emanate from the individual human being’s search for power, or from an aggressive state, or from the uncertainties of a decentralized system of power? Throughout the book, Nau intertwines the perspectives and levels of analysis approaches to good effect in demonstrating how we might understand some of the basic arguments about international conflicts over the past century.

In part one of the book, we see history and politics combined to examine why conflict occurs, and to consider what are the options and solutions to international violence. The



study of conflict and war presents a perfect opportunity to illustrate how the three perspectives interpret conflict and prescribe different solutions, while the levels of analysis tease out what factors might lie beneath the surface of a realist or constructivist view of, say, the failure of the League of Nations, the power of Nazi Germany or the actions of the Stalinist regime, or the end of the Cold War. Interestingly for the student of international relations, the treatment of history extends much further back in Chapter 2 to offer a summary version of world history from Mesopotamia 3000 BC to the 20th century. That history matters is clearly not in dispute, although the author's warning that any selection of the facts depends on our perspective, and the observation that 'from mythology, to religion, to nationalism and political ideologies, the world constructs and contests alternative futures' (p. 70) resonates with familiarity and relevance for the post-September 11, 2001 global order.

Students new to international relations will find the book's examination of identity perspectives quite comprehensive, best exemplified in the chapter on the causes of, and eventual collapse of the Cold War. Although many constructivists may regard the exposition of the Cold War in terms of a struggle between good and evil, and as a tussle for power between the free world and totalitarianism, as somewhat dramatic, other explanations are taken into consideration in this volume. In particular, the analysis of the end of the Cold War takes into account certain 'identity' factors, including a mellowing of Soviet ideology and the shift to new thinking by Gorbachev and his advisers, capped by a convergence of ideas internationally as US ideas out-competed and eliminated communist ideas. In the framework set out by Nau, the identity perspective 'emphasises the importance of ideas that define the actors (at the systemic, domestic or individual level) and motivate the use of power and negotiations by these actors' (p. 4). In contrast to realism's focus on power and state actors, or the liberalist focus on cooperation and institutions, Nau pinpoints how it is ideas that define and construct identity, shaping the values, norms, and beliefs that governments and institutions hold — and these identities in turn determine the interests of actors.

Part two deals with the different varieties and ages of globalization, ranging from the imperial expansion of *Pax Britannica* and the successor, *Pax Americana*, to the contemporary globalization of the late 20th century. Here again, the analytical framework of part one is used to good effect in examining the emergence and decline of hegemonic powers (Britain and America), economic globalization, the technological revolution of the late 20th century, and the battle for ideas on the role of the state *vs* the market in economic and social development. Nau develops the arguments in part two with the assistance of references from economics and international political economy — providing along the way a distinctive addition to the volume that is not often found in the mainstream international relations textbooks. Chapters 11 and 12 move to a regional rather than global focus, with an interesting discussion on growth and development, and setting out the international relations perspective on differences in the comparative experiences between and within the regions of Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The attempt to go beyond the Western perspectives on international relations, and to take account of issues and concerns in other regions of the world is certainly a welcome addition in this particular volume, and indeed the many cases and examples used throughout the book present a reasonably balanced account — although the chapter on Africa and the Middle East does attract a number of



generalizations and preconceived notions about the regional state of affairs that might not be easily recognizable to those living in and familiar with the region.

Part three of the volume deals with what the author calls the fragmenting and unifying issues, with chapters on ethnic conflict, environment, and global governance. Ethnic conflict is viewed as a fragmentation of the international order, and this volume provides a comprehensive set of tables summarizing the scale and geographical range of these conflicts on a global basis. However, these conflicts are much more complex both as to the cause and impact, and the long-term effects for many actors and groups, including those beyond the immediate ethnic community, are not necessarily identified as easily or comprehensively as the summary tables presented here might suggest. Environmental concerns currently compete for the attention of political actors against such issues as ethnic conflict and the more traditional security concerns; the chapter on pandemics provides an insight into an issue area that may well come to dominate the international public policy arena, with a discussion that offers an opportunity to apply the perspectives approach to understand the challenges for policy and for international cooperation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the chapter on global governance raises many questions that go to the heart of international relations, yet fail to deliver clear-cut answers even with the application of Nau's tightly structured framework. Who controls international institutions, and will they behave differently than state institutions? Can global governance provide a structure to tame anarchy? What happens to national sovereignty in the face of global governance? These are old questions, and we are still likely to continue in search of the answers for some time to come.

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The Use of Force in Humanitarian Intervention: Morality and Practicalities

John Janzekovic

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Over the last couple of years, much has been written about the controversial issue of humanitarian intervention. Most books, however, have dealt with it from a relatively narrow perspective focusing only on its legal, political or moral aspects. The reviewed publication, written by John Janzekovic, lecturer of international relations at the University of Sunshine Coast in Australia and the Vaxjo University in Sweden, seeks to overcome this limitation by opting for a comprehensive, inter-disciplinary approach and by combining elements coming from both the theory and the practice. This ambitious effort, though, is only partly successful, since the author faces numerous problems caused as much by the complexity of the topic as by the absence of a clear methodology and the conflation of certain terms and concepts.