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Carlos Escude. *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997. 166 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-1493-7.

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Foreign Policy Theory and the Peripheral State

"International relations theory is in a sad state both on the periphery and at the center," proclaims Carlos Escude in the final chapter of *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina.* For this Argentine political theorist, the problem of the lack of foreign policy theory relevant to those less-powerful states outside the international economic center is compounded by the relative poverty of foreign policy theory in general. "Not only is a theory being imported (by intellectuals and politicians of the periphery) that does not correspond to the local circumstances, but it also happens to be bad theory" (p. 128). Basing his work on the experience of Argentina under the momentous foreign policy shift of the Menem administration, Escude attempts to remedy this double deficiency by articulating a foreign policy theory of what he calls "peripheral realism."

Like most ambitious and polemic theoretical undertakings, Escude's project meets with uneven success. Many of the shortcomings of the work may be compounded for readers more accustomed to historical analysis and methodology; others seem imbedded in the development of Escude's arguments themselves. Nonetheless, *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina* does provide interesting insights into the workings of foreign policy in the periphery, while also calling attention to the unintended consequences of well-meaning theorists in the North.

Escude dedicates a considerable portion of *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina* to refuting both the relevance and normative assumptions of international relations theory developed in the English-speaking world. Central to his critique is an examination of the frequent recurrence to "state-centric and anthropomorphic fallacies, that," he argues, "are not accidental blunders but the conventional language of the field, found very often in the literature" (p. 34). Citing examples from Keohane and Nye, John Garnet, Kenneth Waltz, and Richard Ashley, Escude convincingly demonstrates that linguistic slippage and frequent assumptions in the literature to the effect that states, like people, can suffer, be brought to their knees, feel pride and be humiliated, are often integral to the substance of the theories espoused. As "victims of a mind-set in which states represent nations and the relations between nations are parallel to the relations between individual human beings," theorists of foreign relations easily fall into potentially dangerous traps of linguistic origin (p. 35).

Few of us working in the field of history will see Escude's critique of the potentially totalitarian effects of such anthropomorphic notions of the state and their potential to generate the "emotional behavior functional to the mobilization of loyalties toward the state" (p. 45) as earthshakingly new. Yet, Escude feels it imperative that his intended audience–international relations theorists–take the critique seriously, since they often unwittingly provide the ideological justifications for counter-productive, confrontational foreign policies on

the part of peripheral states:

if theorists were more careful with their words, there would at least be no encouragement of Saddam Hussein by brilliant Ivy League professors who give to the world the 'empirical, value-free' statement that 'poor, weak states may be more willing to suffer (the costs of international confrontation).' Care in the use of words could make a difference, a small one maybe but a very real one in terms of the lives that it might save from time to time, if only because a petty tyrant lacked an available ideological justification for his latest folly (p. 45).

Similarly, Escude's argument against the notion, implicit in much international relations theory, that states are juridically equal players in the international arena will find little objection from historians. Escude points to GATT, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and, of course, the veto power of permanent members of the U.N. Security Council as clear indications that different states are not only unequal in terms of economic and military power, but are also unequal in terms of the normal functioning of major international institutions. By also alternately assuming that states on the periphery are of the same general nature as central states in terms of the correlation of economic power to military power, and/or that states are alike in their normative goal of maximizing an ill-defined and all-or-none "autonomy," Escude maintains, only further provides the ideological justification for draining the civilian economy for militaristic ends.

Escude's answers to the distortions inherent in any theory that maintains the anthropomorphic notion of the state and/or fails to adequately address the many differences of central and peripheral states forms the basis for his own normative proposals. To the potential totalitarianism of careless abstractions of the "state," Escude counters with a call for a foreign policy based on the welfare of the majority of average citizens, rather than the issues of national "pride" that consistently benefit elites at the expense of non-elites. Relatedly, he argues that governments of less-powerful states should build foreign policies around the recognition that their populations suffer significantly more than those of powerful states in international confrontations due to the disruptive effects of sanctions, the inflation of military budgets, and shaken investor confidence.

Combining these notions with the concrete experience of Argentine foreign policy during the Menem administration, Escude presents five basic guidelines for the development of an effective foreign policy–or, a "realist theory of damage control"–on the part of peripheral states: "(1) A peripheral government should abstain from interstate power politics and devote itself to promoting local economic development instead....(2) It should abstain from costly idealistic interstate policies. A peripheral government should engage in promoting democracy, freedom, ecological conservation, or other good causes abroad only when it can do so without encouraging material costs or risks for itself and its people. (3) It should abstain from risky confrontations with great powers when they engage in policies that are detrimental to universal good causes but that do not affect the peripheral government's material interests....(4) It should abstain from unproductive political confrontations with great powers, even when such confrontations have no immediate costs because of great powers' reluctance to make use of image-damaging issue linkages. Such confrontations generate negative perceptions within the great powers that can be costly in the long term. (5) And it should study, based on the merits of specific historical circumstances, the possibility of alignment or bandwagoning with a dominant or hegemonic power or power coalition" (pp. 87-89). Such a strategy, Escude maintains, provides the greatest possibilities that not only will external factors become less likely to interfere with the course of economic development, but that such a conciliatory foreign policy towards the important economic powers will bring much needed investment and trade due to greater confidence. The guidelines also cannot be reduced to mere realpolitik, since "peripheral realism is quite different from realpolitik, precisely because it is a realism for those who are deprived of power" (p. 93).

I would venture to guess that most readers' reactions to a foreign policy so deferential to the interests of the United States and other important economic powers would be as negative as that of this reviewer. Escude does, however, have a clear and at least partially convincing response:

there is a considerable frivolity in the criticisms of such policies by liberal intellectuals, especially U.S. academicians. Because of their relative combativeness in the United States, they often enjoy the confrontations generated by Third World states and indirectly promote these policies, without bearing in mind what the costs may be to the countries and their people. They fall into the same syndrome that affects many Third World leaders: they forget that what is at stake is often the welfare of millions of poor and hungry people, they think of countries in anthropomorphic terms, and they treat foreign policy as if it were the sport of states (pp. 97-98).

The author does not consider–nor is it necessarily his concern–that any open endorsement of such policies by U.S. academicians would obviously bring on calls of imperialism.

Such answers to potential criticism, as resonant as they might be, however, assume that the substance and internal logic of Escude's theorizing is beyond reproach. This is clearly not the case. In fact, despite the integrity of his critique of the linguistically-generated traps into which Anglo-American theorists inadvertently fall, Escude himself centers his theoretical project on a term loaded with different historical and political levels of meaning: "socioeconomic development." Thus, despite his pleas that foreign policy theorists choose their language carefully and provide clear definitions of important terms, Escude himself fails to follow his own advice–extensive sections of operational definitions notwithstanding. While Escude writes that "from a peripheral perspective under contractarian, liberal democratic, and mercantilist assumptions, socioeconomic development is the very definition of the national interest; the principal function of a peripheral state's foreign policy is to facilitate development," he nonetheless fails to define "socioeconomic development."

The oversight is far from inconsequential. In fact, by assuming that the very narrow definition which the term has only recently taken is historically constant, Escude not surprisingly finds himself unable to explain adequately–at least for this reviewer–why Argentine foreign policy might ever have differed from its current incarnation. Holding past architects of foreign policy to today's standards, Escude seems unaware that it was not very long ago at all that a not insignificant segment of the country's political spectrum held as common sense the notion that massive foreign investment was actually inimicable to "socioeconomic development." Current objections to the Menem foreign policy strategy, then, may also lie not so much with misconceptions of the nature of the state, but with differing definitions of what is essentially the goal to be pursued.

Similarly, by not taking into account shifting conceptions of development, Escude sees few objections to his claim that, at least in the short term, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialisms and other "major changes in the interstate system as have occurred recently are relatively irrelevant" (p. 90). It is precisely on the conception of "socioeconomic development," so central to Escude's project, however, that the changes of 1989-90 are momentous. The nearly overnight elimination of an economic arrangement that, regardless of its real or perceived shortcomings, seemed a viable alternative to that of late capitalism, is hardly "irrelevant." The very existence of the USSR–even for those who rejected it as a model–belied the possibility that "socioeconomic development" could, in fact, take multiple courses, perhaps as many as there are regions on the globe. Thus, when Escude quotes former president Raul Alfonsin proclaiming in 1986 that Argentina must "define its own road to development" (p. 123), he nonetheless ignores the fact that a road different from that of massive privatization, radical market orientation, and accommodation to foreign capital was only recently imaginable, if not practical. That the current opposition Alianza–an awkward conglomeration of Radicals, dissident Peronists, Socialists, and Communists, among others–promises no substantive economic changes should it assume power only confirms the extent to which the changes of the early 1990s are entirely relevant. Is it merely coincidence that the radical shift in Argentine economic policy and foreign policy (just one of many such shifts in the region) should coincide with the fierce restructuring and massive geographic expansion of a particular form of capitalism, as well as the related dramatic shift in political alliances?

Escude's failure to clearly articulate the ultimate goal of his foreign policy prescriptions is even more confusing given his own political-economic stance:

> (i)n terms of its internal logic, the foreign policy model here proposed is not of necessity associated with the market liberalism adopted by the Menem administration as its economic model. In principle there is no reason why the peripheral realism developed in this book (a fair depiction of Argentina's present-day foreign policies) should not be congenial with a social-democratic economic model, which I would actually prefer (p. 21).

Yet, one cannot help but see his description of peripheral realist foreign policy as intimately related to political and economic neoliberalism, rather than easily separable. At the very least, Escude's implicit claim that the definition of "socioeconomic development" can be left to democratic domestic political debate with no effect on his foreign policy prescriptions should be subject to the same rigorous critical standards that he has set for other theorists. Here it is not. That the Menem administration's current move to moderate its economic model in hopes of achieving a third presidential term threatens imminently to tax the goodwill and confidence that the administration has gained in part through its foreign policy seems to contradict the disjunction.

Despite these failings, *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina*, does, however, provide an interesting basis for future work in both the theoretical, practical, and research realms. One can only hope that Escude soon plans to turn his keen critical insight and intellectual integrity toward a companion empirical study of the foreign policy shift under Menem that would explore the ideological and material links between the administration's foreign policy and the massive restructuring of Argentine society of the last decade.

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