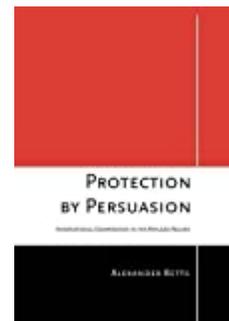




Alexander Betts. *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. xiii + 214 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4824-9.



Reviewed by Daniela Nascimento (International Relations, University of Coimbra)

Published on H-Human-Rights (July, 2010)

Commissioned by Rebecca K. Root (Ramapo College of New Jersey)

The Quest for a Reinforced International Refugee Protection System: From Utopia to Reality

The massive flows of people who are obliged to flee their countries of origin for reasons of persecution and/or conflict is considered one of the most dramatic trends in the world today. Developing countries, especially those most affected by poverty, conflict, and humanitarian crises, are particularly affected by these issues. Nevertheless, and despite the general concern for these problems, the most developed countries have been either unwilling or unable to respond to the challenges posed by refugee flows. In fact, one of the underlying claims of *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime* is that international efforts to create a more solid and sustainable refugee protection regime have not yet been fruitful. These efforts, mostly led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have been based on principles and mechanisms of international cooperation, but Betts's book portrays the reality of what he calls the "North-South impasse" and of the many and complex imbalances of the international refugee protection regime.

Betts's point of departure is the identification of ge-

ographical constraints and problematic trends that disproportionately affect the countries most likely and yet least able to assume the costs associated with dealing with refugees. He highlights some key challenges to addressing this problem and building new and more solid forms of international engagement in the refugee regime. The author thus suggests that international cooperation will evolve and increase mainly through the acknowledgement of a close relationship between security and trade concerns in the global North and reinforced refugee protection in the global South. Betts argues that a solid and effective refugee protection regime based on human rights and security depends on effective international cooperation and hence the willingness of all international actors—states in particular—to address the issue.

The book seeks to fill a gap in international relations research and literature by exploring the conditions under which international cooperation in the provision of refugee protection occurs. This is persuasively presented as a crucial question, not only for its indisputable human rights and security impact, but also because it is

a challenge for international relations studies. The creation of a refugee protection regime based on the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees did not solve the many problems and challenges posed by refugees and has generally not resulted in strong or effective international cooperation on these issues. The author identifies two crucial norms in the refugee regime: asylum (the obligation of states to provide protection to refugees who are in their territory), and burden-sharing (the obligation of states to contribute to the protection of refugees who are in the territory of other states). In this analysis, however, the legal and normative frameworks of these two norms are presented as deeply imbalanced, with burden-sharing being seriously undermined by a very weak framework. This imbalance has problematic implications for the protection of refugees: the most affected countries—which have the fewest resources to respond to the problem—nevertheless have a stronger obligation to provide asylum and protection to people fleeing from neighboring countries, whereas richer but geo-

graphically distant countries tend to assume little responsibility for refugees. This is the core of the “North-South” impasse that Betts describes as resulting from a situation in which countries in the North have had very little incentive to cooperate on burden-sharing and the countries in the South have had very little ability to influence the North. In describing and analyzing the few, though important, efforts led by the UNHCR in the last thirty years to address and minimize this impasse, the author clarifies that the main challenge has been to persuade Northern states to voluntarily contribute to refugee protection in the South through the creation and consolidation of a global protection system.

This is a “must read” for all those who work on international relations and human rights issues, since it not only explores with rigor and detail an often neglected and underresearched human rights issue, but also because it sheds light on the most urgent challenges to reinforcing the international refugee protection regime.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-human-rights>

Citation: Daniela Nascimento. Review of Betts, Alexander, *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime*. H-Human-Rights, H-Net Reviews. July, 2010.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=26299>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.