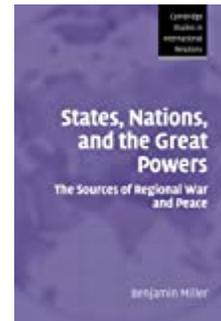




Benjamin Miller. *States, Nations, and the Great Powers: The Sources of Regional War and Peace.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 500 S. \$125.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-87122-8; \$44.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-69161-1.



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B. Miller: States, Nations, and the Great Powers

“Why is it that some regions are peaceful while others are not?” is the key question posed by Benjamin Miller in his bulky volume on “States, Nations, and Great Powers”. A professor of International Relations at the School of Political Sciences at the University of Haifa with a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and previous positions at Harvard, MIT and Princeton University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem as well as Duke University, Miller originally comes from traditional International Relations realism. His book is an attempt to reconcile and develop further theoretical positions framed in the so-called realist-liberal debate. In his former work he took an interest in classical peace and security questions, such as the determinants for cooperation under “anarchy” Benjamin Miller, *When Opponents Cooperate. Great Power Conflict and Collaboration in World Politics*, Ann Arbor 2002. .

In his latest monograph, Miller develops a theory of regional war and peace to explain “the transition from war to peace, or vice versa, in the same region in different periods, and the variations among regions with regard to their state of war or peace during the same

period” (p. 11). Unfolding case studies on the Middle East (post World War II), the Balkans (1830-1913), Latin America (20th century) and Western Europe (post-1945) Miller discusses whether regional propensity toward war or peace is influenced by “systemic distributions of power”, i.e. global developments, or by developments in the regions and within regional states. His findings are framed as a theory of regional war and peace. First of all, in terms of conflict intensity, Miller differentiates between “hot” and “cold” outcomes. His empirical chapters are then structured by two propositions: Firstly that regional and/or domestic factors are responsible for hot outcomes and global factors are responsible for cold outcomes; and secondly that so-called “state-to-nation” imbalances are the underlying cause of regional war proneness. The latter refers to a long-standing debate in political science International Relations and some propositions originally introduced by Kenneth Waltz (actually in 1959) on the question of “the level on which causal variables best explain behaviour and outcomes in international politics” (p. 22). According to Miller the “state-to-nation” balance is depending on the extent of state strength (i.e. the success of state-building) and the de-

gree of congruence (i.e. the success of nation-building). Hence, there are 'strong' and 'weak' states, as there are states in which people strongly or weakly identify with their nation. So basically, the nature of the state and its interaction with other states in the region and the extra-regional 'great powers' become the decisive factors to explain Miller's puzzle. And the logic which explains best the empirical variation of cases is a combination of interest and distribution of capabilities which Miller calls 'integrated realism' (p. 371).

Within, and only within, these parameters Miller's argument is developed compellingly and seemingly strongly supported by the empirical narratives offered in his case studies. However, there are two directions from which his set of hypothesis can and probably needs to be challenged. Firstly, the so-called spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has severely questioned key pre-assumptions of traditional IR reasoning. The essentialism with which nations and states are treated as containers and the international system of states is imagined as an unambiguous hierarchy of social entities developed around the state no longer is accepted in debates which have developed over the past 15 or so years at the fringes of disciplines, such as critical geography or global history. Political Science, or more specifically neo-realism and liberal IR, has yet to face up to this criticism. Secondly, more recent debates in the so-called area studies, some of which are inspired by post-colonial reasoning, have undermined conventional assumptions

not only about the nature of the state in, let's say, sub-Saharan Africa, they have also contested the very possibility to understand the social realm in this part of the world through a vocabulary which is so inextricably linked to the particular experience of the Western world and the norms associated with 'the state'. Although not at the fore of Miller's argument, a look at the categorization 'based on his theory of regional war and peace' of African case studies helps to support this point. In Africa, Miller argues, the combination of 'state weakness and national incongruence' has led to 'state failure', for instance in Somalia (p. 59). Social anthropologists as well as political economists with a background in African Studies have strongly contested both this finding and its interpretation. And few specialists in the history of conflicts in Africa would accept the reductionist statement on the major causes of conflict in the list of '22 wars' (1945-2004) as offered by Miller (pp. 432-435). To summarise, this is another rigorous, strictly designed and well executed IR argument which needs to be contextualised through and within non-IR debates. Symptomatic for most IR reasoning the book doesn't speak to a growing body of literature which simply is no longer buying into the knowledge order associated with 'realism', 'liberalism' and the like. The question remains how to deal more systematically with the silence or communication difficulties between disciplinary approaches on the one hand and, for want of a better word, 'post-disciplinary' arguments on the other.

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