

Summaries

7–39

The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars

Barbara F. Walter, University of California, San Diego

The number of radical Islamist groups fighting in civil wars in Muslim countries has steadily grown over the last twenty years, with such groups outlasting and outperforming more moderate groups. By 2016, Salafi jihadist groups accounted for most of the militant groups in Syria and half of such groups in Somalia. In Iraq, a third of all militant groups were composed of Salafi jihadists. Many analysts argue that the rise of these groups reflects an increase in radical beliefs in Muslim societies. Under certain conditions, however, rebel leaders have strong incentives to embrace an extreme ideology even if they do not believe the ideas that underlie it. When competition is high, information is poor, and institutional constraints are weak, an extremist ideology can help rebel leaders overcome difficult collective-action, principal-agent, and commitment problems. All three of these conditions have been present in the post-2003 civil wars in the Middle East and Africa, and all help explain the emergence and growth of radical groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaida.

40–77

Why Nuclear Energy Programs Rarely Lead to Proliferation

Nicholas L. Miller, Dartmouth College

The conventional wisdom suggests that states with nuclear energy programs are more likely to seek or acquire nuclear weapons. Yet there is a dearth of systematic empirical work that directly assesses this proposition. A systematic analysis of the historical evidence suggests that the link between nuclear energy programs and proliferation is overstated. Although such programs increase the technical capacity of a state to build nuclear weapons, they have important countervailing political effects that limit the odds of proliferation. Specifically, nuclear energy programs increase the likelihood that parallel nuclear weapons programs will be detected and face counterproliferation pressures; they also increase the costliness of nonproliferation sanctions. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, states with nuclear energy programs historically have not been significantly more likely to seek or acquire nuclear weapons. A combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence supports the plausibility of the countervailing political effects of nuclear energy programs.

78–119

The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion

Michael Beckley, Tufts University

Many analysts argue that China will soon dominate East Asia militarily. In reality, China is far from achieving this goal and will remain so for the foreseeable future. China's maritime neighbors have developed antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities that can deny China sea and air control throughout most of its near seas, and China cannot afford the power-projection capabilities it would need to overcome these A2/AD forces. This regional balance of power enables the United States to preserve the territorial status quo in East Asia at moderate cost and risk to U.S. military forces.

120–154

Rousing a Response: When the United States Changes Policy toward Mass Killing

Amanda J. Rothschild, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

When do U.S. presidents change policy to respond with increased intensity to mass killings of civilians in other countries? The twentieth century witnessed a series of state-sponsored mass killings in a variety of regions around the world. Conventional arguments suggest that although the United States has the capability of responding to such atrocities, it often fails to do so because of a lack of political will for action. Historical evidence suggests, however, that although the modal response of the United States is inaction, at times U.S. presidents reverse course to respond more forcefully to mass killings. Three factors explain when and why these policy shifts happen: the level at which dissent occurs within the U.S. government, the degree of congressional pressure for policy change, and the extent to which the case of mass killing poses a political liability for the president. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's creation of the War Refugee Board in 1944 during the Holocaust supports this theory.

155–190

On Systemic Paradigms and Domestic Politics: A Critique of the Newest Realism

Kevin Narizny, Lehigh University

Both Gideon Rose's neoclassical realism and Andrew Moravcsik's liberalism attempt to solve the problem of how to incorporate domestic factors into international relations theory. They do so in very different ways, however. Liberalism is a "bottom-up" perspective that accords analytic priority to societal preferences; neoclassical realism is a "top-down" perspective that accords analytic priority to systemic pressures and treats domestic factors as intervening variables. These two approaches are not equivalent, and the choice between them has high stakes. Although it has gained rapidly in popularity, neoclassical realism is fundamentally flawed. Its intellectual justification is weak; it is logically incoherent; and it induces the commission of methodological errors. Realism can incorporate certain domestic factors without losing its theoretical integrity, but it does not need and should not use neoclassical realism to do so.

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