

Book Review

GENERAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Jean-Marc Coicaud and Nicholas J. Wheeler (eds.), *National Interest and International Solidarity: Particular and Universal Ethics in International Life* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, 317 pp., US \$ 36.00 pbk.).

The end of the Cold War has represented a major opportunity to re-conceptualize the relationship between national interests and humanitarian concerns. Many IR theorists interpret the 1990s as the decade that paved the way for a renewed commitment by states to the building of a responsible international community capable of providing troubled populations with humanitarian help. Inspired by the 'intellectual and political climate of the 1990s' (p. 1), *National Interest and International Solidarity* provides a collection of case studies that takes stock of humanitarian claims during the last two decades, through an analysis of the 'motivations of actors who intervene in areas of crisis' (p. 2).

Nicholas J. Wheeler and Jean-Marc Coicaud's starting point is the theorization of an international system in which two ethics collide. On the one hand, there is the particular ethics of the national interest that 'renders it imperative for the group to look after its members' (p. 3), and that consequently tends to privilege 'us' over 'them' in the pursuit of foreign policy. On the other hand, there is the universal and inclusive ethics of solidarity, according to which 'the other is not foreign' (p. 4), and that aims to 'help people who are beyond one's own borders' (p. 3). This state of affairs calls for an investigation into 'the respective weights of national interest and internationalist considerations in current international life' (p. 12).

Although the editors do not refrain from expressing their preference for the ethics of solidarity, the book should not be read as a mere normative attempt to find logical and moral arguments supporting humanitarianism. Instead, the main purpose of the book is to empirically examine whether international actors involved in crisis situations take action on the basis of geo-strategic interests or on the basis of a 'solidarist' effort. Similarly to recent studies that have tried to measure the impact of material interests, norms, and ideas on foreign policy making,¹ *National*

1. Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathrin Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jeffrey T. Checkel, "International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, No. 4 (1997): 473-495.

Interest and International Solidarity investigates the relative weight of interest-based considerations and legitimacy-driven concerns in the foreign policy-making of actors.

The book is divided into three sections. The first presents two cases of bilateral relationships between rival states (India versus Pakistan and China versus the US) among which a real risk of confrontation exists. The second is centred on cases of external action by powerful states in conflict management, for example, US and EU involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and US foreign policy toward Colombia. The last section focuses on examples of international intervention to help victims of intra-state conflicts, such as the Yugoslav wars of secession and the East Timor crisis. All cases are extremely detailed and provide important insights. Nevertheless, the second section is particularly useful because it not only presents controversial cases but also problematizes the theoretical puzzle set out by the editors.

From the editors' introduction and conclusion, the reader might be unconvinced by the way Wheeler and Coicaud sharply distinguish between national interest and solidarity. Fortunately, in her study of US and EU involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Chapter 5), Mira Sucharov provides an analysis that shows how the two dimensions are often intertwined rather than opposed. By focusing on the role of political identities and key domestic actors, Sucharov emphasizes that 'national interest and solidarity may in fact be operating in tandem within foreign policy decision contexts' (p. 171).

Moreover, the way the editors posit national interests in opposition to solidarity – the former depicted as 'leftover from the past' (p. 294), and the latter as the fundamental condition for improving well-being and security worldwide – is not entirely persuasive and risks oversimplifying a complex debate. In particular, the editors' approach fails to recognize that solidarity can be used as a rhetorical device to mask purposes that do not have much to do with humanitarian motives. In this respect, Doug Stoke's analysis of the US's 'Plan Colombia' (Chap. 6) offers an interesting explanation of how policies devised in the name of humanitarianism can become instruments to pursue geo-strategic interests.

Despite these limitations, this book constitutes a valuable contribution. First, it helps to bridge the gap between philosophical discourse and empirical analysis. In particular, the authors of the case studies are not simply interested in claiming the moral superiority of solidarity over national interests. Indeed, every chapter aims to explain how solidarity can work in a world in which actors have to consider their geo-strategic exigencies and material needs. Second, differently from previous contributions, this book demonstrates awareness of the limits of solidarity and humanitarianism in the international system, where 'social integration has never reached the degree that it has in the democratic national realm' (p. 296). There is probably broad agreement that genuine solidarity is more functional to peace and stability than narrowly conceived national interests. Nevertheless, until the

international community is based on the rule of law, both the universal ethics of solidarity and the particular ethics of interest will have to be taken into serious account.

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