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Martinez, Diana Jean

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Sentimental state(s): affective politics of order and belonging. Edited by Heike Paul and Sarah Miriam Pritz. Bielefeld, Germany: transcript publishing. 2025. 368pp. Pb.: £50.00. ISBN 978 3 83767 417 0. Available as e-book and open access.

The politics of order and belonging can be a force for empathy, political mobilization and resistance, but it can also be deployed in ways that suppress critique and obscure power. Far from the normative stereotypes of sentiments as facile feminine emotions, *Sentimental state(s)* treats them as a ‘communicative and relational code’ (p. 9). The contributors examine the diverse ways in which these codes manifest as a force for the politics of order and belonging across the globe. To do so, they look at a variety of contexts, from those often associated with sentiment (sometimes derided on this basis)—such as the public mourning of Diana, Princess of Wales and the White House’s deployment of Christmas trees—and those considered as the traditional terrain of global politics—like the speeches and public engagement of German political figures or the mourning of Chairman Mao Zedong. I juxtapose the inclusion of mourning in the case of Princess Diana and for Chairman Mao precisely because this book successfully challenges the historic dismissal of the sentimental scenes of public mourning as trivial, making the case that sentiment is a significant and specific aspect of affective politics. While mourning has been dismissed differently in these two instances, the book successfully argues that both are significant political events worthy of considered investigation.

The sites in which the contributors engage with the politics of sentiment are widely varied, including fictionalized representations of historical events and fictional films, such as *The Crown* (the Netflix series), *M3gan* (the 2023 film) and *Selma* (the 2015 film). This way, the book builds on the methods for engaging with world politics and popular culture that have been expanding over the last 20 years, contemplating how cultural artefacts are deeply political, irrespective of their status as serious or non-fiction (see Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies and Simon Philpott’s ‘Pop goes IR? Researching the popular culture—world politics continuum’, *Politics* 29: 3, 2009). In contrast, two other contributions explore what is intended to be realist representation of political violence: Saowanne T. Alexander and Duncan McCargo’s chapter on Thai election campaign messages

and Anna Corrigan's discussion of family photographs via Lucila Quieto's *Filacion* (2013) exhibition. Here, the contributors showcase how the choice of images and subject-matter is implicated in the political constitution of political parties and the (re)constitution of those who have been killed and disappeared. This careful attention to the blurring of realist non-fiction and the obvious play with historical fiction helps to diversify where we might look for sentiment as a political mode. The book also speaks to the ways in which sentiment has been deployed in populist politics, in the context of recent contemporary events, such as COVID-19, and it highlights how music can help us to understand 'the durability of autocratic regimes' (pp. 310–11). The book's scope of application is thus substantial, and its contributors make a formidable case for considering sentiment in the investigation of global politics.

The diversity of content and approaches deployed in this book is both an asset, and, at times, a little bewildering. For instance, Antonia Thies's chapter contains a useful and comprehensive discussion of how this contributor conceives of sentiment, building on the introduction chapter and linking to the themes that appear across several of the chapters. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising to find it in the middle of the section on 'Sentimental Leadership', when it feels like a bookend chapter. Other chapters delve more quickly into the case-studies explored, focusing on the empirical contributions with less attention to the theoretical (see Julian Müller's analysis of former German vice-chancellor Robert Habeck's public online persona; Harald Zapf's consideration of United States' national poet laureates; and Carmen Birkle's examination of the role of tears). While both approaches are useful, and likely to be both challenging and inspirational, reading the book cover to cover can nonetheless prove somewhat disconcerting. Instead, I would encourage readers to dip in, exploring chapters as vignettes on a theme, rather than seeing the pieces as explicitly in conversation with each other.

One of the greatest successes of the book is that most readers are likely to find at least one familiar thing that is rendered unfamiliar in the readings and analyses, as well as a handful of things that are strange but which are rendered familiar. We are prompted to consider not just artefacts, actions, representations of emotions and events, but also the physical spaces in which sentiment plays out, including balcony scenes (see Jan-Henrik Witthaus's chapter). Sarah Pritz's final chapter, exploring place and space, is thus an interesting place to end the book, both via the literal exploration of the construction of lost spaces, but also in the way we are encouraged to continue thinking about sentimental spaces more broadly.

Kathryn Starnes, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Depletion: the human costs of caring. By Shirin M. Rai. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2024. 288pp. £64.00. ISBN 978 0 19753 554 7. Available as e-book.

How can we account for the (in)tangible harms of invisible everyday labour? *Depletion* brings a comprehensive account of social reproduction in the realm of international politics through the innovative framework of depletion. The book builds on Shirin Rai's co-authored 2014 article, expanding its conceptual framework and research questions (see Rai, Chaterine Hoskyns and Dania Thomas's 'Depletion: the cost of social reproduction', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16: 1, 2014). Depletion can be understood as the historical and anticipatory harms of social reproduction. Rather than assuming that the latter is cost-free because it is not financially compensated, social reproductive labour has 'affective and material consequences for individuals, households and communities and for their environments' (p. 4).

Rai clarifies the importance of the book's intellectual endeavour early on: 'our lives, and the lives of future generations, are dependent on the work we call social reproduction, the reproduction of life itself, which can be and is being eroded through depletion' (p. 3). Recognizing the full costs of depletion is also a process of centring the histories of inequalities that truncate those experiencing the most harm within the capitalist pursuit of endless accumulation. The book showcases these experiences through a plethora of methodological and global approaches. From debates of well-known methods, such as time-series surveys, to in-depth fieldwork following women from different socio-economic backgrounds in New Delhi, Rai brings a multiscalar perspective on understanding the embodied and structural implications of invisible social reproduction at large.

The book succeeds in the temporal structuring of its chapters. In chapter four, Rai explores the 'liminal labour' of commuting to and from workplaces, which depletes and suspends time in ways that harm but also regenerates selfhood through mobility freedoms (p. 108). Here, the processes of movement and transition bridge the binary between public/private and paid/unpaid realms of labour. Chapters five and six contend with the futurity of depletion, which is about coming to terms with the dire consequences to life-worlds if social reproduction does not undergo structural transformations. Chapter five explores the implications of child carers in Coventry, England, and how they experience depletion differently. Rai's critique is twofold: on the one hand, non-recognition of children as carers brings adverse harms for generations ahead; on the other hand, these conditions are rife in one of the richest countries in the world due to neo-liberal austerity policies. Then, Rai turns to anticipatory harms in chapter six. The author observes how communities resist extractivism through the case of anti-mining political organizing in Xolobeni, South Africa. Using visual methodologies, Rai embarks on the book's most ambitious conceptual endeavour, showcasing how 'the struggles to reverse depletion and destruction of alternative modes of living are inextricably linked' (p. 171). Beyond the stress and anxiety of a futuristic dystopia where their lands and resources are used for multinational extractivism,

the very process of envisioning better imaginaries often becomes part of the social reproductive burden of gendered and racialized bodies.

Rai makes a claim that is seldom discussed in radical social movement discourses: that the social processes of struggle, resistance and solidarity are embedded within social reproduction. Depletion allows for the articulation of how maintaining life and caring for one another is precisely what makes the conditions for utopic thinking possible. In other words, to create these imaginaries requires continuous work, and it is a social process that is not devoid of harms along the way. While these are difficult questions that Rai ponders over in her conclusion, the discussion does not clarify the political possibilities that may alienate entrenched authorities, such as the nation-state. In other words, the urgency is felt, but the way forward remains less tangible. The book could have benefitted from engaging with the budding literature on refusing structures—like kinship, institutions or entire systems—which would enrich Rai's critique of how care itself is being weaponized under the current conditions (see Angela Y. Davis's *Women, race & class*, London: Random House, 1981; Sophie Lewis's *Abolish the family*, London: Verso, 2022; and Jennifer C. Nash's *How we write now*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024). Equally, the book has the potential of linking contemporary experiences of depletion to what original thinkers of radical utopia would call 'ideology shattering' (see Ida Dadewid's *Resisting radical capitalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Rai's book is already becoming one of the foundational texts of social reproduction *vis-à-vis* international politics, with implications beyond academia. Ultimately, that is intellectual activity at its best: when it reveals the links between intimate experiences and structural wrongdoings, and it urges us to not turn away from new political possibilities.

Carina Uchida, University of Oxford, UK

Cosmopolitan imaginaries and international disorder. By Aaron C. McKeil. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. 2025. 200pp. £68.95. ISBN 978 0 47207 606 2. Available as e-book and open access.

One can hardly envisage a more intelligently cogent exploration of the cosmopolitan imaginary in international society. In this book, Aaron McKeil addresses the broad question of why successive modern efforts to imagine and construct a cosmopolitan order have struggled to take shape, even as global interdependence and universalist aspirations have intensified. Ultimately, he finds that cosmopolitan projects unravel because their transformative ambitions unsettle the perceived order and subsequently lead to contestation over two aspects: 'hierarchy legitimization conflicts' and 'recognition struggles' (p. 5). This synergetic pairing exposes visions of human belonging to a universal civitas that repeatedly reinvigorates state power and exclusionary national identities in moments of instability. Amid escalating geopolitical competition, accelerating ecological collapse and deepening ideological fractures, McKeil supplies

a timely framework for understanding the recurrent intensifications and failures of modern cosmopolitan ambitions. In it, the author clarifies the international social forces that shape—and often undermine—cosmopolitan visions.

The book unfolds as an extensive narrative of ancient cosmopolitanisms, revolutions, emancipatory movements, ideological battles and emerging global pressures, which are organized into three parts. In the first part, McKeil situates his analysis and distinguishes between a ‘thin’ internationalist cosmopolitan order and a far more demanding institutional vision—one that would require genuine integration and more effective authority than the modern cosmopolitan imaginary has displayed (p. 30). Drawing on Martin Wight for his framework, the author argues that the modern global cosmopolitan imaginary stands in stark contrast to ancient cosmopolitan orders. McKeil adds that modern power structures and prevailing forms of belonging create circumstances that are inhospitable to any form of global cosmopolitanism (p. 32). Thus, the chief obstacle to successful cosmopolitan ordering is not anarchy, with its qualitative variations over time. Rather, the absence of a cosmopolitan order stems from the ‘steep conditions’ needed for its emergence, including stabilizing and legitimating new hierarchical authorities and building collective identities that align with cosmopolitan norms (p. 42). No modern movement has met these conditions, rendering cosmopolitan order a theoretically imaginable but practically unattained configuration.

In the second part, McKeil explores four modes of modern cosmopolitanism. These chapters extend the framework across a broad historical sweep, showing how Kantian universalism, Marxian internationalism, postcolonial world-making and green cosmopolitanism advance competing visions of global community. These four modes demonstrate how modern cosmopolitanisms have repeatedly provoked counter-mobilizations that reshaped international society in unanticipated ways. For instance, the book analyses human rights advocacy as a source-of-recognition struggle and examines new environmentalist forms of cosmopolitan belonging, which face both ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ resistance in a period of intense geopolitical rivalry (pp. ??). In this manner, McKeil’s international society demonstrates that world politics can never be wholly reduced to the explanatory simplicities of power and his framework proves especially helpful in making sense of these diverse movements.

A particularly refreshing dimension of the book is the author’s refusal to confine the cosmopolitan imaginary to political and international thought alone. McKeil draws liberally on works of fiction, especially speculative and science-fiction literature, to illuminate how cosmopolitan ideals have been conceived and creatively reimaged. These narrative sources enrich his analytical chapters, making the book accessible and strikingly original. McKeil shows how imaginative literature expands the horizons of cosmopolitan possibility, underscoring that cosmopolitan visions are lived and dreamed as much as they are theorized.

Equally, there is one respect in which the book invites opportunity for future inquiry. In demonstrating that hierarchy–legitimation conflicts and identity recognition struggles are both central to the fate of modern cosmopolitan

projects, the book leaves open the question of whether one or the other may hold greater weight in certain contextual conditions and why—or whether they come as a mutually constitutive pair. In the chapter on world communism, one wonders which of the two processes above was the more explicit driver of events, along with how we might distinguish their effects. Nonetheless, it is a strength that the book's own framework opens the space for such questions.

Overall, this is a work of considerable intellectual generosity and analytical depth. It brings conceptual clarity to a phenomenon often clouded by wishful thinking, yet it never abandons the transformative promise that animates cosmopolitanism. It shows how cosmopolitan ideals arise from a genuine yearning for justice; how they shape and unsettle international society; and how countervailing pressures have emerged and become their undoing. In doing so, McKeil offers one of the most robust contemporary engagements with international theory. This is a major contribution to the study of international society that elaborates, sharpens and extends Wight's legacy, as the author analyses the cosmopolitan imaginary through the political and social realities of our complex, modern and always potentially disorderly world.

Kieran O'Meara, *University of St Andrews, UK*

The politics of international norms: a rhetorical approach. By **Anette Stimmer**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2025. 378pp. £105.00. ISBN 978 1 00945 544 2. Available as e-book.

Anette Stimmer's *The politics of international norms* offers a significant contribution to current debates surrounding norms in world politics. According to Stimmer, norm contestation is a ubiquitous feature of international politics, arising 'whenever a general legal norm is applied to a specific situation' (p. 3). Yet despite widespread acknowledgement of this phenomenon, the impact of norm contestation remains under-theorized. Why do some norm disputes lead to a renewed consensus, strengthening the norm in question, while others result in erosion or stalemate? Drawing on theories of rhetoric, Stimmer tackles this question and develops an analytic framework that explains variation in contestation trajectories and their impact on norm strength.

The book's central innovation lies in the distinction between two aspects of contestation: normative frames and behavioural claims. Normative frames describe justificatory principles that ground certain positions: appeals to sovereignty, human rights and self-determination, among others. Behavioural claims describe concrete actions that follow from applying those frames to discrete situations. Actors can disagree on frames, claims, both or neither. The resulting typology encompasses four 'alternative endings' of contestation: norm clarification (frame and claim agreement); norm recognition (frame agreement with claim disagreement); norm neglect (frame disagreement and claim agreement); and norm impasse (frame and claim disagreement) (pp. ??). These four outcomes have different consequences for the strength and clarity of norms.

Stimmer applies her typology to eight case-studies involving hard legal norms, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. In chapter three, the author identifies norm impasse in disputes over the independence of Abkhazia, Kosovo and South Ossetia. In chapter four, Stimmer turns to norm neglect in debates around Libya's no-fly zone and the Philippines's access to Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. Chapters five and six illustrate, respectively, norm recognition in the context of the 2003 Iraq War and norm clarity within the 'war on terror'. In each case-study, Stimmer argues that what determined outcomes was not material power alone, but rather the rhetorical interplay between speakers, audiences and arguments.

In arguing for the importance of rhetoric, the book joins a burgeoning movement in constructivist International Relations that highlights the explanatory role of justification and legitimation in world politics. The unifying premise goes something like this: in order to pursue certain courses of action, states must justify their choices and—this is the critical part—not all actions are justifiable. States craft arguments that others will accept in order to legitimate themselves. Norms, properly understood as widespread expectations, serve both as constraints in justificatory discourse, as well as rhetorical resources that are deployed strategically in legitimation struggles.

The critical question is, how far can this go? Can anything be legitimated or justified? Stimmer does not think so; she emphasizes instances in which justification attempts fail. Most notably, George W. Bush administration's legitimation strategy for its alleged torture programme was unsuccessful because relevant audiences—including the American public and its allies abroad—rejected the US' legal rationale for enhanced interrogation. What explains these negative reactions? Stimmer points to various argumentative modes and their effects. However, such mechanisms can only take us so far without risking tautology: a claim failed to achieve social support because it was poorly argued, and we know it was poorly argued because it failed to achieve social support. Another potential constraint involves potential hypocrisy costs. Stimmer emphasizes that states can be 'entrapped' by their own rhetoric and constrained by precedence, which limits both the arguments that they are willing to propose as well as their reactions to others' justifications (pp. ??). Nonetheless, it remains empirically unclear whether states are punished for hypocrisy or limited by precedent in these instances. In an era of hyperpolarization, calling a politician hypocritical appears almost quaint.

My overall point is this: it is very difficult to predict *ex ante* what claims are justifiable, where and when justification attempts succeed, or what that would mean. Returning to the torture example, consider how the episode could be different today under the current US administration. Would domestic outrage be as powerful, considering the loyalty that Donald Trump garners among certain sectors of the American electorate? Would the president even care about social expectations in the first place? Clearly, the situation has changed over the last 20 years, and those changes lie squarely in the realm of politics (as opposed to

relating to law). In today's world, it is not clear that a theory privileging rhetoric is sufficient to explain why these changes have occurred.

Despite these limitations, Stimmer's rhetorical approach is a welcome corrective to overly reductive accounts of international norms as either objective guardrails or inconsequential window-dressing. The book also deserves credit for attempting the theoretically daunting task of delineating the effects of contestation on norm strength and erosion. This is an especially pressing task in the current moment, as we confront mounting debates around genocide and sovereignty. As Stimmer shows us, disputes over established norms, however ferocious, will not necessarily lead to their demise.

Rochelle Terman, *University of Chicago, US*

International history

Enduring empire: U.S. statecraft and race-making in the Philippines. Katrina Quisimbing King. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2025. 344pp. £112.00. ISBN 978 1 50364 267 6. Available as e-book.

The task set before Katrina Quisimbing King is a daunting one: to describe the United States empire—a shape-shifting behemoth whose existence is, in the first place, in doubt. The task is made more complex because, as Quisimbing King details in the book, the endurance of US empire is predicated on that which renders it both invisible and forgettable. The book's potentially confusing title underscores this difficulty: is this a history of empire, or that of an emerging state? However, on second reading, the title reveals that race-making and statecraft (or nation-building) are presented as features of US empire. Moreover, it goes against how nation-building (fostered under the watchful eye of Wilsonian internationalist institutions) was presented to the world as a bulwark against the potential re-emergence of imperial forms.

In the broadest sense, *Enduring empire* is a useful, detailed and insightful addition to a steadily expanding discourse on US empire, a conversation that has gained traction following the release of Daniel Immerwahr's *How to hide an empire* (London: Penguin, 2019)—a book aimed at bringing this hidden history to a popular audience—and Ross Douhat's public lamentations over what he views as US empire's troubling demise (published in the *New York Times* and the *New Left Review*). Although this more public debate sometimes has an overshadowing effect, there is a steady stream of focused and deeply invested scholarship that offers new frameworks for understanding and analysing US empire, to which this book contributes.

In the book, Quisimbing King examines the processes of law-making and institution-building that have accommodated and hidden the racist imperatives that are structural to the liberal imperial state. According to the author, these practices follow distinct patterns. To better understand the simultaneous mutability and consistency of the patterns of racial-imperial rule, she offers

grammar as a heuristic that organizes what can at times be an overwhelming amount of information (even for someone familiar with the material). For Quisimbing King, grammar ‘illustrates how deep organizing structures, principles, and rules—like those of law—endure and adapt’ while ‘evolv[ing] with debate and through use’ (pp. 4–5). Studying the grammar of these practices enables Quisimbing King to identify syntactic continuity where others see only semantic distinctions. Thus, before certain practices like western expansion were seen as colonial and even after the official end of US colonial sovereignty in the Philippines, we can see the unity of imperial practice—through, for example, the mechanism of aid, which the author addresses in part three.

Quisimbing King’s tables are particularly useful, assisting readers in navigating the complexities of the dense and rapidly shifting imperial legal seas that she examines. These tables allow readers to observe, at a glance, how often the territorial classification of the Philippines changed; how that territorial classification affected Filipino citizenship status; how Filipino citizenship status was legally codified over time; and how the status of Filipinos following ‘independence’ was racially differentiated (pp. ??). Organizing these data points is just one of the ways in which Quisimbing King places imperial law and colonial administrative structures under a new light, both building upon and departing from the legal scholarship of Gary Lawson and Guy Seidman’s *The constitution of empire* (New Haven, CT: New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), Bartholomew H. Sparrow’s *Insular cases and the emergence of American empire* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006) and Benjamin Allen Coates’s *Legalist empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). While these crucial books set the legal scholarly foundation for the inquiry into the Insular Cases—a central object of inquiry for Quisimbing King—Quisimbing King places these case-studies, laws and policies within a ‘conflictual and changing political landscape’ (p. 7). This allows her to capture the racial-imperial discourses that subtended the authorship and enforcement of those laws and policies. In doing so, she reveals how white, hegemonic power evolved, even as racial equality was trumpeted as the moral foundation of both the American state and its internationalist institutions.

The importance of Quisimbing King’s book lies in its substantiation of the historical and legal connections between the ‘conflicting and evolving metropolitan practices of racial-imperial rule’, those developed to govern Native Americans and (formerly enslaved) Black Americans and to exclude Asian Americans and the rule and administration of overseas empire (pp. ??). Quisimbing King contextualizes the US colonial occupation of the Philippines within a broader practice of producing racialized American Others, taking a significant step towards addressing the persistent amnesia surrounding the US’ colonial occupation of the Philippines, which appears in this book not as an aberration, but as part of an evolving and capacious history of a durable US empire.

Diana Jean Martinez, University of California, Berkeley, US

Disputing disaster: a sextet on the Great War. By Perry Anderson.

London: Verso Books. 2024. 400pp. £30.00. ISBN 978 1 80429 767 4. Available as e-book.

One of the chief questions that has drawn public attention to the First World War is the question of war guilt, first introduced at the 1919 Peace Conference in Versailles. According to this idea, only one power (Imperial Germany) was responsible for this war and thus German reparations payments to the victorious powers were legitimate and justified. Since then, the question of ‘who was at fault?’ has fascinated the general public and historians around the globe. While orthodox historians believe that Germany was chiefly to blame, the revisionist historians argue that, to a great degree, all the great powers (and Serbia) should also be held accountable (see Christopher Clark’s book *The sleepwalkers*, London: Penguin, 2013; reviewed in *International Affairs* 89: 4, July 2013).

The one-time journalist and academic Perry Anderson has now entered this debate. Despite having no prior interest in the subject of the origins of the First World War, Anderson’s *Disputing disaster* offers a substantial, if idiosyncratic, exploration of the historiographical debate on the origins of the conflict. By idiosyncratic I refer to the book’s organization: it is divided into six chapters, each named after a historian of the origins of the war. All historians included hailed from one of the powers involved in the conflict, from well-known figures Fritz Fischer, Sir Christopher Clark, Luigi Albertini and Pierre Renouvin, to little-known authors outside academia, Keith Wilson and Paul Schroeder. According to Anderson, two factors governed his selection process: ‘impact inside or outside their own country and originality’ (p. x). Each chapter covers the historian’s family background, their academic training and their career (if any existed) prior to taking on the subject of the origins of the First World Order. Then, Anderson assesses how each of the six historians has contributed to the debate.

This historiographical analysis has one commendable aspect: Anderson should be applauded for bringing attention to the life and contributions of these men. As a result, there may well be a renewed interest in the work of those historians who have remained less well known until now. The chapter on the German historian, Fritz Fischer, is the best one in the book. Anderson narrates Fischer’s orthodox contribution to the debate on the war guilt question, contextualizing it in the well-known fact that the historian was a member of the Nazi party in his early adult years. The author then reveals that Fischer was also a convinced adherent to Nazi ideology, illustrating his anti-Semitism up to the end of the Second World War—something which was not widely known until recently. According to Anderson, this background undermines Fischer’s thesis that Imperial Germany was primarily responsible for the outbreak of the war in August 1914, given ‘the unreliability of his [Fischer’s] relation to the past’ (p.134). While it is fairly obvious that Anderson adheres to the revisionist views of Clark, Schroeder and Welson on the war’s origins, he does not allow this fact to bias him against Albertini, Fischer and Renouvin, the orthodox proponents of Germany’s guilt that he discusses in the book.

One other aspect worth discussing concerns Anderson's choices of which historians to write about. While Albertini, Clark, Fischer and Renouvin are sensible and sound selections—who have made major contributions to the question of the origins of the war—Schroeder and Wilson make for far less persuasive choices. Although both historians did write and think about the origins of the First World War, this was to a limited extent, and neither was able or willing to write a book-length treatment on the subject. For both historians, all we have are some journal articles and contributions to edited volumes. As Anderson admits, neither of these historians' work on the origins of the First World War had a significant impact on the academic debate or on the educated public (pp. ??). In terms of alternatives, Thomas Otte and Bernadotte Schmitt, from the United Kingdom and the United States respectively, may have been more suitable. However, if Anderson sought to spotlight more revisionist contributions to the debate, and this informed his criteria, then the current selection may make more sense. Nonetheless, Anderson should be thanked for writing this rather unusual analysis of the historiographical debate regarding the origins of the First World War.

Charles Giovanni Vanzan Coutinho, The Royal Historical Society, London

Governance, law and ethics

International organizations and peaceful change in world politics.
Edited by T.V. Paul, Anders Wivel and Kai He. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2025. 364pp. £100.00. ISBN 978 1 00950 937 4. Available as e-book.

What role, if any, do international organizations (IOs) play in influencing peaceful change in world politics? Do they facilitate or hamper it? These are some of the questions that the contributors to this insightful, cogently argued and refreshing book address.

Two strengths make this edited volume stand out. First, despite the different approaches that its 13 contributors bring to the table, the book has a coherence that is often lacking in edited volumes. Specifically, in the introduction, editors T.V. Paul, Anders Wivel and Kai He frame the issue while leaving the contributors considerable room for manoeuvre. Second, the book combines theoretical and historical inquiries, which are supplemented with empirical analysis, providing a consistent, balanced and convincing argument. While hardly ground-breaking, the book proposes that IOs can bring peaceful change but also hamper it. As the editors note, '[s]ometimes they are actors of change, shaping and steering global governance by direct regulation or by orchestrating voluntary support and compliance. At other times they are arenas for struggles over what to change and how, or instruments for great powers seeking to uphold the status quo or push for peaceful change for ideological or material reasons' (p.14).

Yet when are IOs most likely to bring about peaceful change? According to the book, three conditions must be met for IOs to affect the behaviour of great powers: there must be a modicum of ideological or normative consensus among them; there must be a stable distribution of power in the international system; and there must be clarity regarding the rules of the game, which the great powers accept as legitimate. The problem of our age is that none these conditions exist. As such, ours seems to be more than ‘an era of systemic power transitions’ (p. 5). Rather, it is a time of readjustment during which IOs appear to be transitioning from tools of a US-inspired liberal order to expressions of a ‘contested pluralism’ (pp. ??).

All of these points are developed organically throughout the book’s two main parts, one of which is theoretical and covers the role of the great powers in promoting peaceful change (chapter two), as well as views from liberal internationalism, constructivism and realism. In a second, empirical part, the track record of five IOs in fostering and hampering peaceful change is then analysed: these are the United Nations General Assembly, UN Peacekeeping, the UN Environment Programme, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization. The separation between theory and practice has no negative impact on the book’s overall consistency and argumentation; on the contrary, it works as a continuous dialogue among contributors, including a good dose of healthy disagreement.

Another strength of the book is its claim—well supported both theoretically and empirically—that IOs can lead to peaceful change only if they are understood as political actors. This is an observation that both international civil servants and national diplomats tend to resist on the ground that states alone are supposed to be the political masters of IOs, while international civil servants are their servants. However, looking at IOs as passive spectators of great power games is both misguided and misleading since IOs can project, as well as reflect, peaceful change. As the editors put it, ‘while IOs may contribute to peaceful change in important ways, they do so as political actors (even when they shy away from viewing themselves in this way). As political actors, they contribute to the struggle over who gets what, when, and how in international politics, with important consequences for the prospects of peaceful change’ (p. 5).

One cannot help but wonder what the future holds for IOs in an age of contested pluralism, increasing great power rivalry and populist nationalism. IOs can become a source of inequality, as well as hierarchy, creating and legitimizing exclusive clubs of states and a division of labour that is based neither on equality nor on a comparative advantage. Finally, history suggests that rising powers are not necessarily the problem; rather, it is how declining and rising powers interact that can make the difference between war and peace. This has important implications for our own age. As Arie M. Kacowicz writes, ‘[a]lthough we tend to think about China as the revisionist rising power, one might argue that it has supported the “traditional” principles of the Westphalian system regarding state sovereignty and non-interference in other states’ domestic affairs, in contrast to

the unilateral turn of the United States in the last thirty years. Thus, paradoxically, it was also the USA that has challenged the primary institutions of the international order despite the fact of being itself the hegemonic power (at least until the 2010s)' (pp. 50–51).

Perhaps the biggest irony about our so-called new and supposedly post-western and post-liberal order, then, is that it remains stubbornly anchored in Eurocentric notions of Westphalian sovereignty—the only value that seems to be universally cherished by the society of states.

Herman Salton, ICU University, Japan

Knowledge, power, and migration: contesting the North/South divide.
Edited by Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Mireille Paquet and Ethel Tungohan.
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2025. 414pp. Pb.: £33.00. ISBN 978 0 22802 465 1. Available as e-book.

Knowledge, power, and migration addresses silences in the dynamics and structural aspects that underpin the organization and production of immigration scholarship. It moves away from a focus on global North perspectives on immigration, which frequently prioritizes state-designated categories, such as skilled workers or irregular migrants. Instead, this edited volume develops a new agenda that equally accounts for research from the global South and the global North. Notably, the book includes non-hegemonic foci, experiences and voices. In doing so, it challenges what the editors argue are limited understandings of migration, and it tackles the shortcomings that they identify in how migration is traditionally discussed in the media, politics and in the wider social sciences.

This book engages with migration politics at different levels, ranging from sub-national, state, regional and transnational levels. It begins with a detailed introduction from the editors, Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Mireille Paquet and Ethel Tungohan, which summarizes the structure and main arguments of the book. The book is divided into three parts and asks readers to look at migration politics within broader cultural, historical, social and political contexts. The case-studies themselves explore the experiences and traditions of migrants and refugees; the policies that different actors have enacted, including states; and the regional and transnational multilateral approaches to migration governance.

The first part emphasizes how immigration policies affect the lives of migrants and refugees. The contributors illustrate how these two groups resist the often-oppressive structures of migration policies within the nation-states where they reside. For example, Shahina Parvin and Dani Magsumbol discuss, respectively, the gendered racism that permanently settled immigrant women in Canada face and the policies of the Canadian state that affect this population's mental health (see chapters four and five). In the second part, contributors analyse the dynamics of migration within nation-states and how migration governance varies from state to state. In chapter eight, Lisa Walter details Germany's asylum policy over

time and explains how human rights principles can influence these types of policies. In part three, contributors turn to how states must collectively grapple with the balance between protecting migrants' well-being and addressing security and economic concerns. In chapter eleven, Martha Pachoka and Diego Caballero Vélez highlight the regional difficulties of managing the influx of irregular migrants in Europe during the 2015 crisis. In chapter twelve, Ruth Mireille Manga Edimo focuses on the African Union, assessing its policy framework for tackling regional irregular migration. Other chapters concentrate on south Asia–Gulf migration and the kafala system in Gulf states, expanding on the book's comparative range (see chapters 13 and 14). The editors conclude the book with an afterword.

One of the book's strengths is its multi-level approach to the investigation of migration politics and policies, and, in turn, demonstrating the interconnected nature of what drives migration patterns, experiences and the policies themselves. It provides space for the stories of those involved in migration, moving away from the predominant narratives that frame migration discourses and policies. This edited volume contributes to the growing scholarship that aims to be more inclusive and mindful of the role of the global South in shaping migration policy. However, in undertaking this task, it is imperative not to stop here, but to continue working to decentre western perspectives and towards more inclusive approaches to migration research. (As a scholar from the global North, I tried to be reflexive and acknowledge my position while writing this review.) The afterword serves as a call to action that should be taken seriously, as the editors make suggestions on how this can be achieved. In particular, the editors urge readers to account for and try to combat disparities in visa access and costly conference models. While the book's objectives remain situated in fostering inclusivity in migration research across the global North/global South divide, an interesting next step could be to connect this scholarship to policy-making.

Serena Clark, *Stony Brook University, US*

Conflict, security and defence

A measure short of war: a brief history of great power subversion. By Jill Kastner and William C. Wohlforth. Oxford: Oxford University. 2025. 304pp. £22.99. ISBN 978 0 19768 316 3. Available as e-book.

A measure short of war brings the concept of subversion, often relegated to the margins of intelligence studies, into the mainstream of International Relations (IR) scholarship. The book's impressive historical breadth, spanning Ancient Greece to the digital age, allows Jill Kastner and William Wohlforth to trace recurring themes and persuasively counter the perception that we live in an unprecedented new age of subversion.

A perennial challenge when writing about sub-threshold, liminal, grey zone, hybrid or covert statecraft is setting the conceptual parameters. Kastner and

Wohlforth settle on 'subversion' as their preferred focus, defining it as direct, hostile activity within the borders of the target state, which is designed to weaken the state or alter its policy (pp. 1–3). The authors reject the term covert action on the grounds that it overemphasizes secrecy and fails to distinguish between hostile and supportive interventions. This is a welcome addition to the literature, and one in line with some recent scholarship on intelligence (see Rory Cormac and Richard J. Aldrich's 'Grey is the new black', *International Affairs* 94: 3, May 2018). The book's inclusion of state–private promotion of democracy and human rights extends this contribution nicely (p. 3). However, the definition raises questions. The notion of directness is not fully unpacked, especially in light of how others explicitly define subversion as indirect exploitation and manipulation (see Lennart Maschmeyer's *Subversion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024; reviewed in *International Affairs* 100: 6, November 2024). Despite this conceptual shift towards subversion, much of the analytical framework remains familiar to scholars of covert action, as the book revisits themes such as deniability, escalation control and the trade-offs between secrecy and effectiveness.

Kastner and Wohlforth focus exclusively on great powers subverting each other, deliberately excluding instances where great powers target weaker states. While this narrow focus helps clarify core dynamics and nuances of how subversion varies according to different actors, their great power lens inevitably has its own trade-offs. First, it downplays proxies, whereby a great power tries to subvert another through third parties. Second, it risks attributing too much agency to great powers at the expense of domestic factors. For instance, the suggestion that German leader Otto von Bismarck influenced William Gladstone's resignation as British prime minister in 1885 is plausible but not fully demonstrated. Likewise, the discussion of the KGB's influence on Cold War peace movements acknowledges the difficulty of disentangling correlation from causation but then leads to claims about the limited effectiveness of Soviet active measures. This comes back to the question of (in-)direct activity and the problem of isolating agency from impact.

Recognition of this problem, however, leads to a compelling contribution: that the perception of subversion often matters more than its actual impact. The psychological effects—fear, paranoia and political overreaction—are central to the logic of subversion. From ancient Spartan fears of Athenian interference to modern American anxieties about Russian cyber operations, the spectre of subversion has historically shaped policy responses more than the acts themselves. The authors also address the role of technology in subversion. They persuasively argue that while innovations such as the printing press, the internet and artificial intelligence each temporarily enhanced the reach and appeal of subversive activities, they have not fundamentally changed its logic. Thus, Kastner and Wohlforth offer a measured response to alarmist narratives about technological disruption, situating digital subversion within a long historical continuum.

Several other fascinating insights emerge from the book's broader IR framing. First, the concept of the 'subversive hangover' suggests that wartime institutions

and personnel often sustain subversive practices in peacetime (pp. ??). This helps explain why subversion persists in the aftermath of major conflicts and why it is more likely to occur in periods of regular war. Second, the authors argue that states, including democracies, have become more resilient to subversion over time, offering a reassuring counterpoint to contemporary anxieties. Third, they show that norms against violating sovereignty tend to weaken during periods of transnational ideological or religious struggle, increasing the likelihood of subversion. Fourth, they suggest that subversion can serve as a safety valve, a delaying tactic or a prelude to open conflict (in so far as its failure, such as when a target state resists effectively, can provoke escalation).

Kastner and Wohlforth go beyond the Cold War and the developments surrounding Donald Trump's first election, underscoring the enduring nature of subversion in international politics. Bribery, manipulation and the exploitation of internal divisions have been staples of statecraft since antiquity. As the authors acknowledge, this is not necessarily a surprise, but their long-term perspective is refreshing, and it sheds light on patterns, drivers and perspectives. The book is a timely, lively and thought-provoking contribution, which reminds us that, while subversion is not new, understanding its dynamics remains as urgent as ever.

Rory Cormac, *University of Nottingham, UK*

The double black box: national security, artificial intelligence, and the struggle for democratic accountability. By Ashley S. Deeks. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2025. 270pp. £18.99. ISBN 978 0 19752 090 1. Available as e-book.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning have started to feature in the International Relations research agenda. *The double black box* engages with this literature, investigating the issue in terms of the secret nature of national security, the risks for public values and the future of democracy. Ashley Deeks focuses on the ethical and legal aspects of AI use in intelligence and military decisions in the United States. She argues that both traditional and current methods of protecting national security create a dilemma, referred to as the 'black box', in a democratic government (pp. ??). The national security black box, due to the secret and confidential nature of national security decisions, limits surrogate actors from placing checks and balances on the Executive branch. This existing problem has sharpened with the emergence of the algorithmic black box. Using AI and machine learning in national security effectively doubles the traditional national security black box—hence, Deeks's 'double black box' (pp. ??).

With the AI age coming closer, general suspicions have arisen. Deeks addresses fundamental criticisms of AI as part of her main argument. The most significant criticism regarding the use of AI and machine learning focuses on the use of biased data to develop these technologies—a process that lacks legal responsibility for faulty algorithms and which leads to the increasing dehumanization of social

and legal affiliations. For Deeks, the opaque nature of AI, in producing its results and subsequently building on them, is highly problematic (p. 64). The book investigates how the checks and balances mechanisms will be conducted considering advanced technology and in the context of the national security black box, which is already powerful, secret and complex. Deeks questions the possibilities for the US public to safeguard the values and virtues of its democracy when its government adopts these tools. According to her, it is difficult to ensure that the national security executive is adopting safe, transparent and reliable AI in its secret activities because AI's operations are opaque even to its users (p. 11). The US government may, whether intentionally or inadvertently, permit the development and use of AI tools that are either unlawful or ineffective, or that promote detrimental policies. The issue of the double black box lies in its potential for secrecy, leading democratic governments to act contrary to public law values, including legality, competence, accountability and justification. (p. 97).

In the second part of the book, Deeks presents her suggested methods to reduce the opacity of the double black box. According to the author, non-traditional surrogates, including foreign allies, US states and certain technology companies, can be the most important actors in checking and balancing the double black box (p. 63). As discussed in chapter five, they have access to information and/or infrastructure essential for the federal government to fulfil its national security objectives. They can also evaluate the legality, effectiveness and rationality of US policies, and they may have motivations to advocate for the modification of unsound policies (p. 180). Deeks applies Jack Goldsmith's concept of the 'synopticon', which describes a distributed network of actors that surveys the executive branch, adding well-informed players to the 'secrecy synopticon' who can provide more control and monitoring without sacrificing too much privacy. Thus, she describes this situation as a worthwhile development (pp. 62–3).

Chapter six is very complementary to the overall argument. In it, Deeks questions the usefulness of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI), which is rather unpredictable and uncontrollable even in democratic contexts. The author also prompts readers to think about the limits of international law in terms of the international consequences that states using AI may face. Similarly, Deeks asserts that this chapter aims to highlight the greater challenges in achieving effective international legal solutions for high-risk AI, when compared to national regulations (p. 245). Even so, she remarks that the implementation of new international regulations to govern NSCAI systems can diminish the scope of the national security black box and eradicate the detrimental applications of AI. In addition, the author argues that in-depth information exchange with allies can provide more transparency, as it prompts states to disclose information regarding the use of algorithmic tools to outside actors (p. 206).

Overall, the book provides valuable legal insights for those interested in the application of advanced technology within the US system of checks and

balances. Deeks presents the problem in the first part and discusses ways to overcome it in the second part. The book's examination of the ethical and legal dimensions of AI and machine learning use through the United States case-study contributes an analysis of a democratic system to the literature. However, the issue in question represents a grey area not only for the US but also for other states. Indeed, the book explores a highly central aspect of the interplay between politics, technology and the existing legal order.

Şeyma Tok

Ground combat: puncturing the myths of modern war. By Ben Connable. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press. 2025. 352pp. £89.00. ISBN 978 1 64712 541 7. Available as e-book.

As US President Harry S. Truman said decades ago, 'the only thing new in the world is the history you do not know'. I use it here to highlight the main contribution of Ben Connable's assessment of ground combat since the onset the Second World War. Western scholars, strategists and military planners continue to focus on a few key battles, like the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley (1965) during the Vietnam War; the Battle for the Falkland Islands (1982) during the Falklands War; and the Battle of 73 Easting (1991) during the First Gulf War. However, hundreds more combined arms engagements (various mixes of infantry, armour, artillery, aircraft, drones, rockets and so on) have occurred around the globe, each involving hundreds or even thousands of combatants. There is more war out there than you think. Nevertheless, these battles are hardly known, under-reported, or largely ignored by scholars and soldiers alike. Connable offers an appropriate conclusion: no one in strategic studies seems particularly interested in assessing land warfare, and, even if they were interested, there is often little information to assess.

The new empirics introduced in this book address two important issues. First, they speak to the academic and military efforts to determine if and how future battles will resemble past ones. In other words, while the nature of war remains unchanged throughout history, the character of war can change, as new technologies, weapons, tactics and operations are introduced. Strategists should therefore incorporate these changes into their defence planning. Second, the book is relevant to the anticipation of a revolution in military affairs (RMA), which can result from the ongoing integration of information-age technologies into military operations, weapons and communication and reconnaissance systems. Connable traces the first predictions of a looming RMA to the late 1960s, while noting that new forecasts of a coming revolution have occurred at roughly ten-year intervals ever since. The latest so-called revolutionary development involves the integration and miniaturization of computational power into increasingly autonomous drones, which is now on full display in the Russo-Ukraine war.

Even the most ardent RMA advocates have conceded that ground combat was the domain of warfare least affected by the introduction of information age

technologies. Put differently, the fact that you have an iPhone in your pocket is not going to make much of a difference once you can see the ‘whites of their eyes’, to borrow a phrase from an infantry battle that took place during the American Revolution. In the air, however, reconnaissance-strike complexes do provide capabilities that approximate RMA expectations. For example, a semi-autonomous drone fired two Hellfire missiles that killed Ayman Al-Zawahir, a 9/11 plotter, on the balcony of a safe house in downtown Kabul in 2022. That sort of capability was not available until relatively recently. Connable’s thoughtful case against the RMA is based on an assessment of the land domain of war, which is the least affected by technology.

The author’s real contribution is his history. His sampling of scores of battles suggests that land combat has evolved very slowly from the patterns set in the Second World War. Land forces, to the best of their ability, undertake combined arms operations against their opponents. Opposing forces are usually equipped with the same Soviet/Russian or Chinese weapons, armour and artillery. Victory sometimes turns on superior equipment, training or leadership, but asymmetries in the ‘will to fight’ also have significant explanatory power (pp. ??). There is also a sort of dreary pattern in these battles: units work to gain some sort of firepower dominance before the opponent sorts out their issues and gains firepower dominance over them.

Connable looks beyond the usual case-studies, integrating our past, present and future into an empirically grounded and rational perspective that is insulated from hyperinflated proclamations about our technologically determined present or future. For example, he notes that television-guided semi-autonomous drones were used in the Second World War and that all kinds of increasingly autonomous drones have been used in most ground battles ever since (pp. ??). Thus, the so-called drone revolution in the skies above Ukraine has been in the works for decades.

Connable is a rare voice for continuity in military affairs, amid the cacophony of technophiles who embrace sometimes nebulous theories of victory. He is not the only sceptic when it comes to techno-military utopianism: Colin Gray has also noted that Americans were obsessed with technology (see Gray’s *Modern strategy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Additionally, the author was not the first to realize that doctrine is often based on the sand of wishful thinking, not on the bedrock of experience (see Brian McAllister Linn’s *The echo of battle*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Still, techno-military innovation can shape battlefield outcomes, at least until the opponent devises counter-measures. The book’s analysis suggests that strategists should focus on exploiting these fleeting opportunities, when a novel weapon provides a tangible advantage, while avoiding the opponents’ battlefield innovations. Most importantly, they should stop searching for a war-winning silver bullet (or weapon) that never seems to materialize.

James J. Wirtz, Naval Postgraduate School, US

The new calculus of escalation: avoiding Armageddon in great power conflict. By **Martin C. Libicki**. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press. 2025. 248pp. £84.00. ISBN 978 1 6471 257 5. Available as e-book.

Given the ongoing wars across the globe, Martin C. Libicki's *The new calculus of escalation* is a timely contribution. The book complements existing literature on deterrence and escalation, analysing contemporary scenarios. Libicki argues that traditional escalation ladders are increasingly obsolete, proposing instead a 'lattice' that better reflects the range of strategic choices available to states (pp. ??). Unlike a simple ladder, a lattice allows horizontal movements in addition to vertical movements. The book is divided into an introduction, seven thematic chapters, a conclusion and two appendices. The appendices address the relationship between deterrence, thresholds and norms, as well as the question of nuclear threats.

The first chapter opens with a classic escalation–de-escalation scenario. It examines rationales for escalation, including the role of nuclear weapons and the logic of 'escalating to de-escalate' (which the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates). Libicki argues for the establishment of thresholds to manage escalation. These thresholds can stand as parameters for action or inaction. They may be unilateral but work best bilaterally. However, thresholds also depend on perception and trust. Thus, they must be universally accepted, symmetrical, clear, robust and, above all, 'recognized by relevant parties as influencing behavior' (pp. 22 and 24).

Chapter two turns to cyber operations, asking whether these could serve as a prelude to kinetic conflict. Libicki outlines possible responses to cyber attacks: doing nothing, responding in kind or resorting to kinetic means. He discusses cyber espionage and its normalization, noting that cyber attacks, although damaging, rarely provoke kinetic responses—with exceptions, such as in the context of Israel–Iran interactions throughout the past decade. Alliances add complexity, but Libicki concludes that cyberwar is unlikely to spill into the kinetic domain. Chapter three turns to attacks on space assets, which also rarely lead to war. The author surveys anti-satellite weapons and defensive measures and concludes that escalation would depend on both parties and their perception of escalation.

The fourth chapter discusses the possibility and the viability of a threshold between activity at the local level and at the global level. The author addresses the concept of 'first-strike instability', which can transform a local conflict into a global one (p. 83). If a localized war erupts, the author asks, '[a]fter what point would a rational leader conclude that while going first would guarantee escalation, failing to go first would guarantee defeat'? (p. 85). In such a scenario, local wars would be difficult to keep below the large-war threshold.

The fifth chapter examines the impact of conventional operations against nuclear-related systems, which heighten escalation risks by blurring nuclear/non-nuclear thresholds. While the rationale for striking nuclear assets exists, it entails severe interpretive risks. Even cyber attacks, while unlikely to prompt nuclear retaliation, could destabilize nuclear command and control systems.

Hence, the definition and implementation of thresholds remain difficult, as perceptions will vary. Then, chapter six discusses the viability of the nuclear threshold in the context of tactical versus strategic nuclear weapons. While tactical nuclear weapons may seem credible deterrents, their definitional fuzziness undermines potential thresholds defined according to their use. Moreover, Libicki warns that using tactical weapons as signalling tools risks misinterpretation. Ultimately, once nuclear weapons of any variety are used, escalation options narrow, and full-scale nuclear responses are likely to follow.

The final chapter asks whether thresholds emerge organically. Libicki highlights mismatched escalation ladders, missing rungs and asymmetries in perception—all of which complicate the emergence of viable thresholds. Declared or negotiated thresholds face problems of ambiguity, asymmetry and mistrust. Notwithstanding, Libicki posits that lattices, rather than ladders, offer more stability due to the associated increased number of choices, which could move away from crossing the nuclear threshold. In the conclusion, the author emphasises that old thresholds—between war and peace and between nuclear and conventional weapons—must be reinforced, given the complexity of establishing thresholds due to factors such as new technologies and definitional issues.

Overall, the book makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature, providing an assessment of the continued relevance of established thresholds in light of contemporary contexts and capabilities. The discussions and examples presented in each chapter effectively guide readers through the rationales that underpin the actions of superpowers with competing interests. That said, there are three small areas for improvement. First, the inclusion of more diagrams that better illustrate the lattice structures across specific domains could have strengthened the analysis. This would have been particularly useful in scenarios involving more than two decision-making parties. Second, the discussion can be slightly US-centric, with a predominant focus on nuclear superpowers, which overlooks other nuclear powers. Third and last, the book assumes a degree of rationality in decision-making that may not hold in practice.

Nevertheless, the book is written in an academic yet accessible style, though some technical knowledge of military systems is needed to follow its threshold analysis. It is best suited for policy-makers, senior military professionals and scholars of strategic studies. Overall, it is a well-researched and valuable contribution to the literature on deterrence and escalation.

Marina Miron, King's College London, UK

Political economy, economics and development

There will be the devil to pay: central bankers, uncertainty and sense-making in the European financial crisis of 1931. By Per H. Hansen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2025. 522pp. £125.00. ISBN 978 1 00950 531 4. Available as e-book.

The European financial crisis of 1931 transformed the Great Depression from an American disaster into a global catastrophe. Yet it remains in the shadow of the broader literature on the 1930s. Most historians who study 1931 focus on the collapse of Austria's Credit Anstalt, treating subsequent events as dominoes falling. Per Hansen's *There will be the devil to pay* breaks from this pattern, tracing the crisis through Europe over five chaotic months and putting the focus on its spread, rather than on how it contributed to global economic collapse. This is the story of a pivotal moment in twentieth-century economic history, marked by the end of the gold standard and the global expansion of the Great Depression. Hansen structures the book chronologically, taking readers through the crisis week by week, or even day by day sometimes, beginning with the failure of Credit Anstalt in May and culminating in Britain's departure from the gold-exchange standard in September of 1931.

Hansen argues that previous histories have misunderstood the crisis due to reliance on hindsight, rather than focusing on how contemporaries grappled with events in real time (p. 13). Analysing the 'epistemic community' of central bankers through extensive primary-source materials, Hansen attempts to reconstruct, or 'emplot', the crisis as it unfolded (p. 13). This approach, which Hansen labels 'thick description' in a nod to ethnographic methodology, aims to provide a historical account that resists retrospective determinism (p. 14). Herein lies both the book's strength and its fundamental weakness. Hansen's archival research is invaluable, yet its presentation is more like compilation than interpretation. Long stretches of the book consist of verbatim quotes from historical documents, strung together with minimal analytical commentary (pp. 48–9, 98–102, 182–4, 186–96, 199–202, 245–7 and 338–40). While these passages faithfully reproduce the voices of historical actors, they make for tedious reading and are better suited for an appendix rather than a narrative history.

Hansen invokes social science concepts such as radical uncertainty, sense-making, epistemic community and emplotment so often that they begin to feel more like academic buzzwords repeated for search optimization than incisive conceptual tools. These terms describe something straightforward: that central bankers faced an unprecedented crisis and tried their best to understand it as it unfolded. While this style of exposition sheds valuable light on the thinking of central bankers, it leaves readers to do most of the analysis themselves. It would have been helpful if Hansen had situated events within the broader historiographical debate and assessed, for example, whether they support or undermine the Monetarist, Keynesian or 'Golden Fetters' accounts of the Great Depression.

That said, Hansen does make several substantive contributions. First, he demonstrates that debates among central bankers were not as constrained as previously thought, often breaking with gold-standard orthodoxy (p. 40). Central bankers spoke about the crisis in stark terms, fearful about the survival of capitalism itself if they did not organize an adequate response (p. 348). Second, Hansen shows that even optimal policy-making might not have prevented this ‘crisis of capitalism’ from spiralling out of control, challenging the view that the Great Depression was a ‘recession that turned into a depression because of central bankers’ (pp. 345–6). Most interestingly, Hansen’s archival sources include correspondence with private sector bankers that are overlooked in previous research of monetary policy discussions of this era. This correspondence highlights the continued importance of private actors in the monetary system, even in a world of central banking. While the Federal Reserve removed the need for individuals to act as lenders of last resort, as J. P. Morgan did in the Panic of 1907, the private banking system remained integral to the functioning of global capitalism.

Finally, Hansen reveals the coordination problems and political constraints that hampered international cooperation, issues that remain important to consider in contemporary debates about financial and other crises’ management, such as the climate one. These coordination problems meant that even when there were policy solutions, political constraints meant they could not be administered within the time necessary to contain the crisis. While today’s central bankers have a much larger set of tools at their disposal, the coordination problem remains, and the globalization of finance means that crises can unfold in a matter of minutes rather than in weeks. Thus, it has never been more important for central bankers to act and prevent crises before they can start.

The book makes for a tough read, not because of the complexity of its ideas, but because of its density. It succeeds admirably at reconstruction but falls short on interpretation. For experts of interwar financial history or central banking, the book will prove valuable as a reference work. Researchers will appreciate the careful mining of relevant primary-source documents for their own projects. For general readers or even academics from non-adjacent fields, however, it is unlikely to be worth the slog.

Samuel Zucker, Council on Foreign Relations, US

Europe

Discussing Pax Germanica: the rise and limits of German hegemony in European integration. Edited by Emmanuel Comte and Fernando Guirao. Abingdon and New York: Routledge. 2025. 278pp. £150.00. ISBN 978 1 0327 9259 0. Available as e-book.

It is my pleasure to review *Discussing Pax Germanica*. In the book, the contributors examine Germany’s pivotal role in European integration and evaluate the usefulness of the concept of hegemony to describe it. Here, hegemony is

conceptualized in relation to two main defining features: a state that possesses superior structural power resources and an international order underpinned by the consent of other states rather than military force.

The book places the debate about German hegemony in historical perspective. It begins with the continuities from the Holy Roman Empire and it ends with the war in Ukraine. In doing so, it covers a long historical period and it also features an impressive wide range of topics and case-studies. In the first part, readers find discussions on the types of sovereignty (indivisible, as in the French tradition, versus multilayered, as in the German model); the question of nationalism; and the process of building national identity through economic performance. In the second part, the chapters investigate the reasons behind Germany's crucial role in European integration and offer a detailed examination of the Franco-German relationship. The third part focuses on the constraints and limitations of German hegemony, accounting for how German leaders have prioritized western integration over German reunification, as well as for how the European monetary system has emerged. The fourth and last part of the book is dedicated to the question of German hegemony in the twenty-first century and it deals with energy policy, as well as the crisis of the eurozone, migration and COVID-19. Throughout the book, the contributors reach different conclusions regarding German hegemony in the history of European integration, especially when it comes to monetary affairs and as a lender of last resort—Charles Kindleberger's understanding of a hegemon.

This is an ambitious edited volume that makes a significant contribution to the academic literature in four ways. First, its historical perspective offers a rich and unique examination of the role of Germany in contemporary Europe. Given the exhaustive coverage of the book and the wealth of information it contains, readers will learn something new undoubtedly. Second, analytically, it reduces the ambiguity and fuzziness around the concept of hegemony. Third, the chapters provide a nuanced and contrasting account of German hegemony, illustrating the complexity of the question that guides the contributors through their arguments. Fourth and last, the contributors comprise of a diverse group in terms of the disciplines and professions that they hail from. The book includes contributions from first-class historians and political scientists, from a journalist and a former high-level politician. This diversity of perspectives certainly increases the attractiveness of the book.

Beyond its obvious valuable elements, I would raise two shortcomings. The first relates to the conclusion of the edited volume. The final chapter concludes that hegemony is a useful concept to describe Germany's essential role in the history of European integration and provides several examples to sustain this claim. However, this somewhat blunt conclusion may seem surprising, given that several contributors found little evidence in favour of it and even argued against it (see, for example, chapters seven, eleven and twelve). After reading all contributions, I expected a more nuanced concluding chapter. My second objection concerns a missed opportunity regarding Germany and the western

Balkans. The book says very little about Germany's role in this region and about its preferences regarding the European Union's enlargement in the Balkans. Considering the current geopolitical importance of the region, this additional discussion would have been relevant in the book.

Despite these two issues, I highly recommend the book. It addresses the ambitious questions of 'what does hegemony mean?' and 'is Germany a hegemonic power in contemporary Europe?', providing historically grounded and nuanced answers. Anyone interested in European and German history and the future of the EU will benefit from reading the book. Overall, this edited volume offers valuable insights on peace systems, and it is particularly relevant in the current context of increased geopolitical tensions, contested globalization and limited economic growth.

Laura Pierret, European University Institute, Italy

European security: from Ukraine to Washington. By Richard Rose.

London: Bloomsbury. 2025. 192pp. £65.00. ISBN 978 1 35047 130 6. Available as e-book.

The European security architecture that will emerge in the next decade will most likely be organized against Russia. That much is clear. But what shape will it take exactly? While many bright minds are currently struggling to find a convincing answer to this question, Richard Rose successfully takes on the challenge in his most recent book, *European security*. Rose brings his decades of experience researching European politics to bear on what he characterizes as security's fundamentally fluctuating nature—a central theme that distinguishes this book from more static analyses of contemporary geopolitical challenges. Rose structures his argument around the insight that 'security is contingent not constant' (p. 1). The author traces European security dynamics from the post-Second World War period through to what he terms the current transition from 'cold peace' to 'hot war' (p. 3). The book's three-part structure—building cold peace, changing security boundaries and security heating up—provides a coherent framework for understanding how European security arrangements have evolved and adapted over nearly eight decades. This historical sweep is perhaps the book's greatest strength, offering readers a comprehensive narrative that contextualizes contemporary challenges within longer-term patterns.

The author's expertise shines through in his treatment of institutional development. Rose demonstrates considerable knowledge across a remarkable breadth of topics, from the Marshall Plan's economic foundations to NATO's eastward expansion. Moreover, he focuses on a fundamental tension that remains unresolved today: while the European Union 'has many of the characteristics of a state, including a flag, an anthem and a diplomatic service', it still lacks an armed force that can defend its borders against aggression (pp. 6 and 137). Similarly, Rose characterizes Putin as 'a Soviet-style European', who remains fixed on the past (or a particular time when the Soviet Union could rightly

claim to be a world power), providing valuable insights into Russian strategic thinking (p. 107). Rose writes with admirable clarity, although the book's accessibility can represent both a strength and a limitation. While the book avoids academic jargon and presents complex developments in straightforward terms, it sometimes sacrifices analytical depth for breadth. For instance, the connection that Rose draws between changing immigration patterns in the United States and the declining US commitment to European security feels underdeveloped and somewhat tangential to the core argument about European security challenges.

The book's forward-looking analysis is particularly valuable, even as events have already overtaken some of Rose's predictions. Indeed, the author's assessment that the US will not finance the rebuilding of Ukraine and that the money 'will have to come from Europe' has proven prescient (p. 8). However, the book's temporal limitations are evident. Written before the 2024 US presidential election, Rose's analysis of American political dynamics and their implications for European security feels somewhat dated. His treatment of potential transatlantic tensions, while valuable, cannot account for the rapidly evolving political landscape that has emerged since publication. This highlights a broader challenge facing any analysis of contemporary security issues: the staggering pace at which events unfold can quickly render well-informed assessments obsolete. Then, Rose's treatment of the EU's role reveals both insight and analytical gaps. While he correctly identifies the EU's fundamental limitation in lacking independent military capabilities to match or replace NATO structures, his analysis of how European governments might develop 'a European security institution as a backup for America's role' remains somewhat sketchy (p. 144). Here, the book could have benefitted from a deeper engagement with the practical and political obstacles to such institutional innovation, particularly given the EU's decades-long struggles with consensus decision-making on security matters.

The book functions more effectively as a comprehensive policy guide than as a source of theoretical innovation. Rose openly acknowledges this orientation, noting that the book focuses on 'what has substantive consequences for the security of Europe today and tomorrow' (p. 9). For policy-makers and analysts seeking to understand the strategic context within which they operate, this practical emphasis is highly valuable. The book succeeds in mapping out European security challenges without claiming to provide definitive solutions to problems that remain difficult to resolve. Overall, Rose offers a knowledgeable and accessible overview of how European security dynamics have evolved and where they might be heading. While the analysis sometimes lacks the depth that specialist academic audiences might seek, the author's comprehensive grasp of historical developments and institutional complexity provides essential context for understanding contemporary challenges. The book will prove most useful for students, policy-makers and general readers seeking to understand what options Europe has to address an increasingly complex strategic environment.

Rose's honest acknowledgment of analytical limitations—combined with his impressive breadth of knowledge—makes this a worthwhile contribution to ongoing debates about Europe's security future.

Mikhail Polianskii, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), Germany

Russia and Eurasia

Backlash: China's struggle for influence in central Asia. By **Bradley Jardine and Edward Lemon.** London: Hurst. 2025. 320pp. Pb.: £35.00. ISBN 978 1 80526 304 3. Available as e-book.

Central Asia—composed of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—has become a strategic region in the shifting global order. Bordering both Russia and China, its relevance has surged following the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the increasing interest in resource-rich states like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Bradley Jardine and Edward Lemon's *Backlash* fills a gap in the literature, offering a nuanced account of China's expanding footprint in central Asia. At its core, the book advances a sharp thesis: China's engagement in the region seeks to create a new world order where economic dependence overtakes ideological alignment and multipolarity unfolds on Beijing's terms (p. 16). The book goes beyond conventional foreign policy analysis to explore how regional states respond to China's assertiveness, and how China manages resistance to protect its reputation and interests. In part one, the authors trace China's evolving role since the collapse of the Soviet Union, situating the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in historical context. Then, part two explores backlash themes, including Sinophobia, nationalism, the Xinjiang crackdown and environmental and labour concerns. In part three, Jardine and Lemon turn to China's strategic responses, from soft power to local engagement and expanded security.

A key contribution is the focus on the disconnect between elite-level cooperation and grassroots resistance. The authors describe this dynamic as 'warm politics, cold publics', noting that while governments welcome Chinese investment, the domestic publics accuse China of 'fueling corruption, damaging the environment, taking jobs from locals, and eroding sovereignty' (p. 16). Drawing on rich fieldwork, the book shows how expansionist aims, security concerns and efforts to culturally integrate the region drive China's engagement with central Asia (p. 46). It details how Beijing reinforces influence through surveillance and curated historical narratives. The authors also trace the rise of official denial surrounding human rights in Xinjiang abuses and note that public dissent has been largely muted as a result of state repression and widespread apathy (p. 179).

Jardine and Lemon contend that China's expansive security ties with central Asian states foster reliance on its technology and military aid, which may erode local autonomy and bolster authoritarianism (p. 185). The book highlights China's growing regional influence through initiatives like the Quadrilateral

Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism, which strengthen China's ties with central Asia while sidelining Russia. The authors argue these platforms support authoritarian governance and hinder democratic progress (p. 197). The book also examines China's use of private security companies and its wider web of surveillance, military presence and arms supply (p. 203). The epilogue presents the case-study of the Atbashy logistics centre in Kyrgyzstan, where protests in 2020 led to a renegotiated deal amid fears of foreign investment. In response, China adjusted its strategy, favouring gradual engagement through local institutions (p. 246). The authors advise host nations to assert control over BRI projects and negotiate terms to build domestic legitimacy and public support (p. 247).

While the book offers robust analysis, it could have benefited from deeper exploration of the evolving tension between China and Russia. The book hints at China's growing independence from Moscow but stops short of a full account of how central Asian states navigate this dual pressure. The authors also observe that China's limited cultural influence leaves space for nationalist pushback and western engagement (p. 209). Rather than direct rivalry, they propose targeted strategies like promoting transparency, cultivating future leaders and providing viable investment alternatives to counter Chinese influence (p. 241). The authors advocate for a western strategy focused on deeper diplomatic and economic ties, alongside regional cooperation and tech support to curb dependence on China (pp. 241–2). They urge the US to adopt a pragmatic stance, embrace tactical cooperation and respect the region's multi-aligned foreign policy to foster strategic flexibility (p. 243).

Importantly, the book challenges western assumptions about the region's political rigidity and calls the West to leverage soft power, diplomacy and civil society support in order to obtain meaningful results (p. 243). Jardine and Lemon recommend a nuanced understanding of regional elites, cautioning against simplistic pro- or anti- China labels and urging policy-makers to appreciate the complex motivations behind decision-making (p. 243). They invite western countries to see the region as a collection of states 'motivated by their own interests' and striving to 'maximize autonomy and long-term growth' (p. 244). In sum, the book is a vital contribution to understanding China's foreign policy and the limits of its influence. It is essential for both specialists and general readers, offering richly detailed insights into the future of central Asia and illuminating the contours of the emerging global order.

Oya Dursun-Ozkanca, Elizabethtown College, US

Western Asia

The great betrayal: the struggle for freedom and democracy in the Middle East. By **Fawaz A. Gerges**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2025. 384pp. £30.00. ISBN 978 0 69117 663 5. Available as e-book.

Fawaz Gerges's latest book might be his lifetime masterpiece. It has all the ingredients to become the reference point for the study of the Arab world and the Middle East for many years to come. It is, simultaneously, a point of arrival and a point of departure; it is a book that I wish I could have read a long time ago, as I tried to understand the Arab uprisings and the changes and continuities that followed.

It is a point of arrival in the sense that it brings together and systematizes ideas and arguments that have long guided the study of the historical evolution of the region, combining political economy, International Relations, comparative politics and the study of social movements. As such, it offers a detailed, rigorous and vivid discussion of the key socio-political phenomena that have punctuated the history of the Middle East, starting with the formation of the Arab state system from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire through colonialism, through to the struggle for independence, the rise and collapse of Arab nationalism(s), the Cold War and arriving at the Arab uprisings and the subsequent 'intensified competition for space, resources, and survival rather than coexistence' (p. 3). In this respect, Gerges's core argument resonates with the conclusion that other academics have reached before: 'the convergence of political authoritarianism with constant intervention by foreign powers, combined with the effects of prolonged conflicts ... explain[s] why political change and self-determination have been constantly thwarted over the past century' (p. 293). The author traces this century-old history and reveals the continuation of old ways of governing, which rely on borrowing, extractive economies, securitization and militarization, subsidization and the manipulation of tribal and sectarian identities. As a result, the region remains in a state of perennial and unsustainable transition.

So, what does the book offer that is new? Gerges attempts to go beyond two usual suspects. First, the book provides a grassroots perspective on the history of the Middle East, its key events and watershed moments. This way, it complements the more mainstream views on state and nation-building that centre political elites and leaders in their analysis. Second, it offers a diverse and detailed account of national trajectories, differences and nuances, dwelling on the cases of Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen in a systematic and comprehensive way. While this may sound as if the author is resisting the need for in-depth studies of different countries' trajectories and how they can be combined to make sense of the regional picture, this approach is what makes the book a definitive contribution to the study of the Middle East.

This book is also a point of departure in reimagining the Middle East, especially in its final chapter. It charts a way forward in very concrete terms to prove 'how historical events are still present and relevant today, and whom they

affect' and 'how the politics of the past can give way to a politics of the future' (pp. xi and 4). This is a daunting task, but the author accomplishes it brilliantly. Gerges outlines the contours of the new social contract that should form the basis of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, critically engaging with the role of the United States, China, Russia, NATO and other collective organizations. The author discusses the institutional changes, revolutions and leadership challenges that the region has faced and continues to grapple with, exploring the impact of climate change on the security, development and governance of the Middle Eastern countries. As a result, Gerges identifies the key issues of youth disenfranchisement, grievances and unemployment as the most important underlying failure(s) (and betrayal) in the regional struggle for freedom and democracy over the past century.

Then, the question arises as to how and under what conditions grassroots collective action and political change can take place in the region today. Among other things, it is worth noting the current context in which, for the first time in history, a local genocide is almost live streamed on social media to a global audience. In this regard, the author suggests we keep an eye on the local, micro and civil society levels that could empower changes from the bottom up and foster resilience. Even though the road to success remains long and bumpy, the book's underlying optimism is justified given the Middle East's spirit of resistance and the resilience of its people. As Gerges concludes, 'the future of the [region] will ultimately be determined by the massive and growing Arab/Muslim youth population, not by the dictators who rule over them' (p. 20). Finally, the book's accessible style reinforces this overtone of realistic and candid optimism, against all odds and the bleakness of the history that has been depicted. The author does not indulge in hyperbolic critique, and he speaks truth to power.

Silvia Colombo, NATO Defense College, Italy

Master peace: Lebanon's violence and the politics of expertise. By **Nikolas Kosmatopoulos**. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2024. 224pp. £103.00. ISBN 978 1 51282 675 3. Available as e-book.

Master peace explores how conflict experts have framed violence in Lebanon, and how we learn about it, with profound consequences for how we understand war and the (im)possibility of peace in the country. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos conducts an ethnography of scale, which allows him to focus on Lebanon, as well as on a wealth of cosmopolitan experts, who can have broad global networks but sometimes limited contextual knowledge. The book explores the emergence, persistence and reproduction of hierarchies of knowledge production that give technocrats a central and powerful role. Focusing on Lebanon, the book traces the workings of colonialism and argues 'against the claim that political violence, real or perceived, and the social stalemate that feeds it are outcomes of endemic divisions to which experts are the solution' (p. 3).

Kosmatopoulos traces the role of experts and the workings of coloniali-

ties in their multiple and complex ways. In Lebanon, certain framings, like 'ethnic conflict' or 'state failure', put people and processes into a box with important consequences for how we think about conflicts and the possibility of peace. Importantly, the book explores how conflict theory and peace practice in Lebanon collapse social and historical inequalities into racialized, innate cultural and sectarian divisions, thereby naturalizing them. According to the author, metropolitan theories, communalizing practices and unaccountable experts (re)produce new forms of hierarchical and unequal relations of domination in different war-torn countries (see also W. E. B. Du Bois's 'The study of the Negro problems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 11: 1, 1898). On the one hand, Kosmatopoulos argues that some of these theories have exacerbated violence and designated it as endemic. On the other hand, they have also converted the radical demand for just peace into a chronic, unequal relationship of dependence. As such, agents located in the peripheries become exporters of raw data that feed into the same processes of knowledge production, which prevents those far from the core from becoming empowered. Moreover, the argument goes beyond foreign experts and examines the role of Lebanese experts and diplomats, who use their geopolitical powerlessness to signal moral superiority (see chapter two).

The title of the book refers to the power that experts exercise over debates, actions and solutions that are put in place to address the contemporary problems of violence. These powerful experts instil a narrative whereby peace should be the result of their efforts. It is worth noting that Kosmatopoulos also criticizes the so-called local turn to local experts, as these actors do not challenge certain features of the dominant concept of peace. Nonetheless, those experts typically from the global North tend to impose moral categories without being sensitive to the historical contexts. As a result, they trigger 'second-order violence' in the name of peace, identifying and singling out a group or populations to be trained and monitored (pp. ??). Overall, this book makes a very important contribution to the study of peace and conflict. It engages critically with multiple strands of literature and makes a powerful call for the so-called experts, like me, to reflect on the unintended consequences of their epistemic interventions when entering extremely complex contexts such as in Lebanon.

I question two elements of the book, which in no way detract from its excellent quality and importance. First, the book challenges how divisions between war and peace are often treated as fixed. Kosmatopoulos finds that the boundary between politics and ethics is a secular construct and that the boundary between war and peace is a liberal myth. He shows how epistemic theories work to produce more myths, such as 'ethnic conflict', 'failed state' and 'liberal peace theory' (pp. ??). I agree that more should be done to acknowledge the power of these categories and how they hinder change. Yet some categories are useful to navigate these spaces and to draw international attention (for example, the concepts of genocide or the continuum of violence that feminist scholars have developed). Understanding these dynamics as a permanent state of non-peace

may be useful, but transformative change also requires concepts and categories.

The second question relates to what the alternative to master peace might be. In the conclusion, Kosmatopoulos identifies revolutionary and reformist anti-war movements as the antithesis of master peace, and the author concludes with a call for becoming the master of non-mastery through the 're-enchantment of nature' (pp. ??). But what does this mean? Kosmatopoulos points to the importance of meaningfully reintegrating non-peacemakers into peace processes and to (re)democratizing our processes of knowledge production. However, his argument does not reflect on how to concretely dismantle some of these structures, nor what role the experts might play in this process.

Notwithstanding these aspects, this book is a powerful reminder of the importance of the deeper structures that are at play and how experts have important responsibilities: to apply context-sensitive solutions and to speak truth to power without reinforcing dichotomies.

Chiara Ruffa, *Sciences Po, France*

East Asia and Pacific

Reimagining the international: Chinese world ordering before the West. By Yongjin Zhang. Bristol: Bristol University Press. 2025. 224pp. £80.00. ISBN 978 1 52923 734 4. Available as e-book.

In *Reimagining the international*, Yongjin Zhang moves beyond critiquing the traditional Eurocentrism of the International Relations (IR) discipline to answer, more productively, 'the recent call for constructing a global IR' (p. 1). Fortuitously, as Zhang describes it, there have been two 'international turns' in intellectual history recently that have developed parallel to each other: that of transatlantic IR and that of Chinese intellectual history (p. 190). In the book, the author places these two strands in conversation through his central theme of pre-nineteenth century 'Chinese world ordering' (pp. ??).

Zhang conscientiously uses world ordering instead of Chinese world order, as the latter can carry 'historical and normative baggage often associated with claims of Sinocentrism' (p. 5). As IR discourse on the rise of China still often uses the Thucydides trap framework as a starting-point, Zhang helps to move beyond this sort of ahistorical posturing. After all, Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian war* was itself a product of its time and place: the author sought to make sense of the brutal war between two Greek city-states, Sparta (the established power) and Athens (the rising power).

Thucydides and his Greek contemporaries, Plato and Aristotle, lived during the Axial Age, which was a time of intense intellectual ferment in ancient Greece and China alike. As part of his push to re-historicize the IR discipline, Zhang devotes considerable time to contextualizing Axial China through a history of ideas (see part one). Namely, Zhang examines why the concept of order was so important to Chinese thinkers and how Confucian thinkers understood world

ordering through their own *moralpolitik* (p. 10). Then, the second part deals with various historical accounts of Chinese world ordering and the third part explores how Chinese intellectuals have recently approached this world ordering.

In part two, Zhang provides a fascinating series of historical case-studies from the Axial Age through to the nineteenth century to document Chinese world ordering before the West. Zhang's use of the term 'organized hypocrisy' to describe the practical operation of the tribute system is particularly striking (pp. ??). This concept allowed for considerable 'wiggle room' between the ideological claims of the tribute system and the 'normal state of affairs' that often entailed considerable 'behavioral deviations' (p. 99). Zhang masterfully challenges the presupposition that European–Chinese meaningful exchange only began in the nineteenth century with the outbreak of the First Opium War (1839–42). Instead, he argues that we must examine several centuries of contact between Europe and China in which the European missionaries, traders and diplomats played by the 'China world ordering' rules for the most part, and unwittingly 'helped produce *Pax Sinica* in East Asia' (p. 121).

In part three, Zhang's chapter seven on Chinese world ordering as a history of ideas is particularly noteworthy. It offers an intellectual history of the growth of the IR field in China from the late 1970s to present. Here, the author focuses on three contemporary Chinese scholars and their respective engagements with the 'battle of ideas in pre-Qin China': Yan Xuetong, Zhao Tingyang and Qin Yaqing (p. 155). Yan, Zhao and Qin intentionally engage the past in order to draw lessons for contemporary China. Rather than seeing this as an inherent weakness, Zhang views it as apropos for the goal of 're(dis)covering the international in ancient Chinese political thought for the purpose of challenging and enriching the existing IR theories' (p. 185). Indeed, in looking to the past for examples to improve the future, Chinese IR scholars are arguably following in the footsteps of their intellectual predecessors from the Axial Age. After all, Confucius and his contemporaries themselves looked to the past and the sage kings of Zhou to make sense of their own socio-political vicissitudes.

Given how the first and the third parts could flow seamlessly from each other, a case could be made for reordering the book so that recent Chinese intellectuals could be introduced right after Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Hanfeizi and Xunzi. This would ensure that readers would not have to constantly flip back and forth between chapters one and seven. However, the advantage to the current ordering is that it is loosely chronological.

Overall, Zhang's book provides a refreshing re-examination of the IR field that moves beyond trite critiques of Eurocentrism, opening up the conversation in constructive ways. This reimagining could also be extended to other parts of the global South that traditional IR theory often neglects. In particular, Africa has been sidelined and even erased in the dichotomy of East versus West (see Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen's *The myth of continents*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

In the quest to construct a more global IR and to recover 'the forgotten

foundations of global order', Zhang convincingly demonstrates the centrality of history (p. 194). Without it, and to paraphrase Alexis de Tocqueville, humanity's past moral and political systems will continue to be 'successively found, forgotten, found again, [and] forgotten once more only to reappear a little later' (p. 147).

Emily Matson, Georgetown University, US

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China's vision of international relations. By Eva Seiwert. Bristol: Bristol University Press. 2025. 256pp. £80.00. ISBN 978 1 52924 692 6. Available as e-book.

What might a China-led international order look like? Through what mechanisms might Beijing be seeking to shape new and existing global rules and institutions? How do China-led regional and intergovernmental organizations fit into this broader project? Could these platforms mark the emergence of an alternative, China-led multilateralism, one that mirrors the form but not the values of the liberal order? Eva Seiwert's *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China's vision of international relations* tackles these questions. While most scholarship debates Beijing's intentions, far less attention has been given to the kind of change the country seeks and the methods through which it aims to achieve it. Seiwert argues that Chinese-initiated intergovernmental organizations, above all the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), are key instruments for reshaping the normative environment of world politics. Rejecting portrayals of such bodies as mere 'talking shops', she presents the SCO as both an expression and a vehicle of China's normative power (pp. ??). Grounded in the English School's concept of international society, the book reimagines the SCO as a formally institutionalized regional society, nested within a plural global order (p. 15). Through this lens, Seiwert shows how China is codifying, enacting and disseminating its preferred norms—sovereignty, non-interference and civilizational pluralism—thus quietly experimenting with order-building outside the West.

The introduction situates China's post-2013 foreign policy within the broader project of 'national rejuvenation' informing its strategy until 2049 (pp. ??). Founded in 2001 and expanded to ten members in 2024, the SCO offers a prime lens for observing Beijing's rule-making strategy. The chapter outlines a mixed research design combining qualitative content analysis of official texts with elite interviews with government-affiliated think tankers. Seiwert's central claim is that regional organizations created by emerging powers act as platforms for normative entrepreneurship, enabling them to codify, enact and diffuse their own principles within the global system (pp. ??).

In the second chapter, Seiwert establishes the conceptual framework: distinguishing norms on paper (treaties, charters) from those in action (behaviour). The following chapter follows the SCO's shift from the 1996 Shanghai Five into a more comprehensive body, spanning security, economics and culture. Here, interviews portray the SCO as an 'experimenting field' for Chinese multilat-

eralism that is only limited by Russia's resistance (p. 33). Chapter four dissects the organization's core ideas: the Shanghai Spirit, New International Order and Three Evils, showing how they encode pluralism and sovereignty as alternatives to western norms and feed back into China's domestic law. In chapter five, the author demonstrates normative layering, as the SCO recasts liberal concepts like non-interference, democracy and the community of common destiny to align with Chinese preferences. Chapters six and seven test these norms in action, examining: regional crises, such as the Kyrgyz revolutions of 2005 and 2010; the context of instability in Afghanistan; and the implications of the Iranian nuclear issue. In each instance, the SCO upholds regime stability and non-interference, while SCO's responses to conflicts in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine expose the limits of China's control over the organization's members, especially Russia. Chapter eight turns to the admission of India and Pakistan (2017), Iran (2023) and Belarus (2024) to the SCO, revealing the spread of multipolar rhetoric through a web of partners. The conclusion argues that China's engagement with the SCO represents incremental norm-shaping that produces a partial order: 'thin' compared to the European Union but exhibiting notable normative cohesion through institutionalized common norms and rules that guide international relations (pp. ??).

I agree with Seiwert's call for further research into 'international societies that reject the Western-dominated liberal order's claim to universal norms' and her suggestion to examine the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a comparative case-study (pp. 38 and 185–6). Yet two issues stand out. First, the SCO and ASEAN embody fundamentally different logics. The SCO represents authoritarian multilateralism, whereas ASEAN reflects diplomatic pluralism, designed to preserve south-east Asia's regional autonomy and equilibrium amid great power competition. Second, while Seiwert's use of Chinese-language sources adds rigour and credibility to an often-opaque organization, the analysis is less explicit about Chinese intent or central Asian agency. Beyond noting Russia's constraining role on China's ambitions, it leaves open how smaller members act as co-constituents of regional order, rather than as passive norm-takers.

I close this review with brief methodological reflections. China increasingly operates across multiple, overlapping regimes rather than within a single liberal order. In east Asia, calibrated contestation and coexistence with United States-led structures have seen China act as participant, shaper and challenger. Norms are reshaped incrementally through institutions, standards and discourse, often to secure regime stability rather than to export ideology. This is evident in the transplantation of SCO terminology into Chinese domestic law and the author's claim that the SCO has evolved from a border-management device into a normative laboratory for newly confident but normatively insecure emerging powers to consolidate authority and promote norm change.

Stefanie Kam, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Hidden wars: gendered political violence in Asia's civil conflicts. By **Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True.** Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2024. 230pp. £68.00. ISBN 978 0 19006 416 7. Available as e-book.

Hidden wars advances a compelling conceptual framework for understanding sexual and gender-based violence. The book examines how structural gendered hierarchies shape patterns of reporting and non-reporting in low-intensity subnational conflicts in Asia. Sara Davies and Jacqui True provide new insights into how the confluence of politicized conditions and gendered norms can affect the accurate documentation of sexual and gender-based violence. The authors move beyond conventional binaries to position their argument between interpretations that delineate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as an explainable category of violence and those who regard it as an escalation along a continuum of violence. Davies and True invite readers to confront the politics of knowledge production itself, arguing that institutional reporting practices and effective methodologies for data collection and analysis are 'inseparable from the problem, as well as the solution to this violence' (p. 6). The book identifies and foregrounds systematic silences, recentring victim survivors and reinvigorates the feminist debate on the politicized desire for 'some stories to be told over others' (p. 38).

The book consists of two parts: the first lays out the theoretical and methodological foundations, while the second turns to three substantive case-studies, culminating in a comparative analytic chapter. Theoretically, the book provides a sharp synthesis of existing approaches to explaining sexual and gender-based violence, suggesting that the complexity of certain contexts—such as low-intensity conflict environments—explains the absence of substantial research outputs on the topic. The authors posit a feminist reflexive methodology intent on addressing gaps and silences in the data, bringing attention to how 'silence does not mean absence (of violence). Rather, silence often masks the violence and ensures that the acts can continue' (p. 8). If the book's conceptual framework and case-study selection are considerably ambitious, so is its methodological self-awareness. Noting that existing methods are ineffective for looking at conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in Asia, Davies and True advocate for a mixed-methods approach to improve data collection. The authors rely on a dataset of sexual and gender-based violence open-source reports, which they supplement with in-country semi-structured interviews and with some secondary sources that contain testimonies. Davies and True critique the social and political conditions that shape existing reports and that lead to 'path dependent' narratives of 'who commits and who is subjected to SGBV' (p. 42).

The second part applies these theoretical and methodological frameworks to three empirical case-studies: Burma, the Philippines (with a focus on the Mindanao region) and Sri Lanka. These chapters have a similar structure, beginning with the conflict's historical and political background and then moving on to a critical examination of existing narratives on sexual and gender-based violence. These case-studies illustrate how structural gender inequalities, political

institutions and cultural norms not only shape the environments within which sexual and gender-based violence occurs, but they also influence the visibility and documentation of such violence. Davies and True stress that contextual analysis and the careful interrogation of silences are required to understand that what is not recorded formally is as analytically significant as what is documented.

Davies and True make a significant contribution to feminist International Relations (IR) in three ways. First, they have created a new coded dataset on reports of sexual and gender-based violence in three under-researched countries. In bringing attention to these case-studies, the authors expand existing knowledge and ultimately fulfil the role that we, as feminist researchers play, that is 'to explain and prevent violence' (p. 15). A second major contribution lies in their methodological treatment of silences as analytically meaningful. Davies and True link these silences and gaps to political denial, institutional weakness and cultural norms/stigmatization, transforming a limitation of data into a source of insight. Third and last, the book asks, 'how intense does a conflict need to be for conflict-related sexual violence to be counted?' (p. 3). In centring their argument around this research question, Davies and True rethink obstacles to reporting sexual and gender-based violence. The authors call for us to situate our research on sexual and gender-based violence within the gendered and racialized structural context of inequality and discrimination that the violence occurs in. This expands which incidents count and it ensures that instances of sexual and gender-based violence in low-intensity conflicts are documented with as much attention as those in high-intensity environments.

In sum, this book provides an enlightening clarification and a much-needed contribution to the field. Crucially, it offers a methodology to tackle gaps and silences in sexual and gender-based violence research, which shows how feminist IR can expand what can be considered valid data. The book poses questions for further research in its final section, particularly on 'other endogenous and exogenous forces that we do not yet know will affect conflict-related SGBV' (p. 167). While this question stands, Davies and True ultimately remind us that the study of sexual and gender-based violence cannot be confined to measurability and record-keeping. Instead, the book compels scholars to engage with the politics of invisibility; warning readers that silence often signals the persistence of harm.

Emily Gee, University of Leeds, UK

North America

The Québec–United States relationship: political, security, economic, environmental and cultural dynamics. Edited by **Frédéric Gagnon, Christopher Kirkey and Stéphane Paquin**. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2025. 426pp. £44.99. ISBN 978 3 03176 112 6. Available as e-book and open access.

The relationship between Québec and the United States has long been a subject of interest in both political and academic circles, yet it remains underexplored in contemporary scholarship. *The Québec–United States relationship* aims to fill this gap and it offers a multidimensional analysis of the historical, political, economic, environmental and cultural interactions between Canada, Québec and the US (p. xi). This edited volume presents an extensive examination of Québec's paradiplomacy, trade relations and policy engagements, making it a valuable resource for scholars of north American international relations and substate diplomacy.

The book is structured into five sections and divided into 15 chapters. The first section introduces the relevance of Québec–US engagement and situates it within broader global trends of substate diplomacy. This section sets the stage, providing a historical overview of Québécois foreign policy initiatives, which the *Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie* [Ministry for Franco-phone International Relations] has coordinated, as well as of its unique position within the Canadian federation (p. 3). The subsequent sections delve into political and economic considerations (p. 21); migration, climate and commercial interests (p. 191); the role and place of cultural and social environments (p. 337); and the intellectual foundations of the Québec–US relationship (p. 395).

One of the book's strengths lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining political science, economics, environmental studies and cultural analysis. As the editors put it, 'no other scholarly publication exists that brings together leading policy-oriented scholars to examine this subject in a comprehensive and multidisciplinary framework' (p. 11). Three chapters stand out as particularly insightful: those on Québec's participation in regional governance frameworks; its implications for climate change policies and cross-border energy cooperation; and how its international identity is promoted through the arts, heritage and language (see chapters 6, 11 and 14). The analysis of Québec's evolving trade policies, especially from 2014 until now, provides a nuanced understanding of the province's role in north-eastern American economic integration. Stéphane Paquin and Alexandre Millette meticulously examine how Québec has adapted its trade strategies to navigate the shifting US political landscape, highlighting the province's proactive measures to safeguard its economic interests during Philippe Couillard's government (2014–18) and under François Legault's subsequent administration (pp. 138–47).

Cultural dynamics are another key aspect of the Québec–US relationship that is explored in the book. The contributors examine the cultural experiences that

both sides have shared, including the impact of media and arts in fostering cross-border ties. In chapter 15, Louis Patrick Leroux provides a fascinating look at how Québec promotes its distinct identity abroad, emphasizing initiatives from Montreal's big three companies: Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize and 7 Fingers. Importantly, the ticket sales of touring shows and resident productions in the US greatly supported their activities. Leroux concludes that the contemporary circus industry would not have flourished without US capital, talent, networks and its risk-taking culture (p. 368).

Despite its breadth, the book could have benefitted from a more explicit theoretical framework linking the various contributions. While the empirical depth is impressive, a stronger conceptual thread weaving together the different dimensions of Québec–US relations would have enhanced the coherence of the book. Additionally, more direct comparisons with other substate actors engaged in similar paradiplomatic efforts would have further contextualized Québec's approach within global trends. For instance, a comparative analysis with Catalonia or Scotland could have provided valuable insights into the similarities and differences in substate diplomatic strategies. On a minor note, one could have expected some rationale for the choice of English as the language of publication for a book that deals primarily with issues affecting the primary French-speaking society in north America.

Overall, the book makes a timely and significant contribution to the study of International Relations, particularly for those interested in substate diplomacy and north American political dynamics. It provides a compelling account of how Québec navigates its unique geopolitical position, balancing economic interests, political autonomy and cultural identity in its interactions with the US. The book is recommended for scholars, policy-makers and students seeking a deeper understanding of Québec's role in international affairs and its evolving partnership with the US. The editors have succeeded in compiling a comprehensive and insightful edited volume that sheds light on the multifaceted nature of Québec–US relations.

Amour Joel Ombassa, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada

Vigilance is not enough: a history of United States intelligence. By **Mark M. Lowenthal.** New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2025. 832pp. £35.00. ISBN 978 0 30026 929 1. Available as e-book.

Intelligence—the collection and analysis of information, ideally to assist national decision-making—has been vital to the United States' national security. However, Mark Lowenthal warns that 'the freedom of intelligence from partisan debate may not always be sustained' (p. 643). Lowenthal tells us that during President Donald Trump's first term (2017–21), the US intelligence community came under an unprecedented and sustained attack (p. 631). This attack has continued into Trump's second term, with the president decrying the 'Russia, Russia, Russia hoax', despite US assessments to the contrary. US officials have come

under attack for the ‘egregious weaponisation and politicisation of intelligence’, though the Trump administration is the guilty party (pp. ??).

The twisting of intelligence is nothing new in the history of US intelligence, as Lowenthal reminds us in *Vigilance is not enough*. This is an impressive and thoroughly researched piece of scholarship, documenting the use (or misuse) of intelligence, from before the American Revolutionary War (and the creation of the US), through to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The book also traces the development of the US intelligence community, now comprising 18 agencies and spending over \$100 billion. Despite the remarkable insights that intelligence can give, presidents and heads of states around the globe are ‘free to disagree with intelligence officers or ignore them altogether’ (p. xi).

Lowenthal is a former deputy assistant secretary of state and assistant director of the CIA. His observations on the nature of intelligence are prescient: intelligence is often glamorized and over sensationalized; it is just one factor in leveraging military advantage; and, yet, it remains key for decision-makers, if used correctly. The US is an intelligence behemoth, yet the development of the community has been ‘unplanned and even accidental’ (p. xii). While the National Security Act of 1947 is often identified as a starting-point, the book correctly points to the older history of US intelligence—some of it organized, but most of it unorganized. Intelligence shaped the young Republic; it played a role on the battlefields of the Civil War; and it gradually become formalized as part of the US military before the end of the nineteenth century. During the First World War, US intelligence ‘grew out of necessity, but fitfully’ (p. 131). By the end of the 1930s, intelligence had ‘survived’ but ‘not prospered’, becoming the victim of bureaucratic battles (p. 164). Intelligence came of age during the Second World War, setting the stage for the CIA and the development of the postwar community-supporting policy responses to the Soviet threat. Intelligence was, and remains, a key aspect of US global power.

Lowenthal’s analysis is important as it places US foreign intelligence activity alongside domestic work. The author does a good job of combining source collection with intelligence’s other activities (covert action and counter-intelligence). The chronological structure of the book provides a detailed overview of the development of the US agencies, and the struggles within. New developments in the structure of postwar intelligence were almost knee-jerk reactions to perceived failings in the intelligence machine. Yet, while sensationalized accounts of US intelligence are often highly critical, Lowenthal draws out the many successes from the Cold War to the present. For example, technological innovations led to great strides in signals intelligence and the use of imagery.

Lowenthal observes that US intelligence had a mixed record against the Soviet Union. Early assessments overemphasized Moscow’s power, while later assessments were more accurate. US intelligence did a good job in tracking Soviet decline and the growing problems that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the 1990s saw US intelligence ‘getting more lip service than support’ from policy-makers, who were facing the looming terrorist threat

(p. 526). Lowenthal is clear in highlighting the failures around the 9/11 attacks and the assessments of the threat that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction posed, but he acknowledges the difficulties of implementing reforms.

Given the book's length, readers may get lost in contextual detail. The broader development of US foreign policy is certainly important, and a criticism often levelled at intelligence history is that it is sometimes taken out of the wider political and diplomatic context. Readers may also want to see a punchy conclusion, outlining what the history of US intelligence tells us about the future and about some of the wider themes emerging from the book.

Lowenthal's account of US intelligence is a valuable addition to the literature. This is a thorough history of the failures and successes of the community, and the story of the development of intelligence is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the shape of the present-day community. While history tells us that presidents may ignore or misuse intelligence for a variety of reasons, the US community has never come under such sustained attack as it is under today. This makes the book an even more important read.

Dan Lomas, University of Nottingham, UK

Breaking the engagement: how China won & lost America. By David Shambaugh. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2025. 456pp. £22.99. ISBN 978 0 19779 242 1. Available as e-book.

David Shambaugh's *Breaking the engagement* offers a timely and analytically rigorous account of the rise and ultimate collapse of America's long-standing engagement policy toward China. Why have US–China relations historically oscillated between cooperation and estrangement? How have they reflected a historical pattern of mutual mistrust, misperceptions and strategic recalibration? Why did the engagement strategy, pursued since diplomatic normalization in the 1970s, ultimately unravel? Shambaugh addresses these questions systematically, first reconstructing the historical evolution and internal contradictions of the engagement policy, subsequently analysing internal US developments alongside external Chinese factors and finally proposing the concept of competitive coexistence as a pragmatic alternative strategy.

The idealistic assumptions underpinning US–China policy since the 1970s are central to Shambaugh's critique (see chapters one and two). He convincingly argues that the American approach rested on expectations that proved untenable: above all, the belief that China's economic modernization would inevitably lead to political liberalization (pp. 31–3). As Shambaugh emphasizes, this assumption was deeply rooted in America's liberal paternalism and missionary impulse. Rather than following a coherent strategic blueprint, US engagement evolved incrementally through diverse initiatives aimed at integrating China into the liberal international order.

In chapter three, Shambaugh analyses the genesis of the 'engagement coalition', emphasizing its initial strength as a broad network of governmental

agencies, corporate interests, academia, NGOs and bipartisan political elites (pp. 53–5). While it was initially cohesive in promoting stable relations with China, it also had latent tensions due to conflicting goals: commercial actors prioritized economic stability, while NGOs and human rights groups pressed for political liberalization. Such fundamental differences sowed the seeds of internal fragmentation. Chapter four builds on this argument, showing how these latent tensions intensified as bilateral economic interdependence grew. Increased institutional integration, Shambaugh argues, exacerbated rather than resolved these underlying contradictions. Economic stakeholders increasingly sought to minimize political frictions to safeguard market access, whereas human rights organizations amplified their critique of China's authoritarian trajectory. Intensified US integration efforts also proved counterproductive, fuelling Chinese defensiveness, as vividly illustrated in the detailed examination of Chinese perspectives provided in the Appendix.

However, internal contradictions alone do not sufficiently explain the policy's collapse. Chapters five, six and seven examine external developments, notably China's authoritarian consolidation under Xi Jinping, which intensified domestic repression and assertive foreign policy. China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and the expansive Belt and Road Initiative directly contradicted US expectations of liberalization and modernization. Furthermore, as Shambaugh underscores, China's rising power fundamentally altered the bilateral dynamic, reducing Beijing's willingness to accommodate American expectations. These external developments profoundly reshaped perceptions within key American institutions. In chapters six and seven, Shambaugh further identifies significant recalibrations within American institutions and in broader societal attitudes toward China. Influential official institutions, including Congress, the Pentagon, intelligence agencies and the State Department, increasingly framed China as a strategic threat, marking a departure from previous cautious support for engagement. Concurrently, influential non-governmental actors, particularly corporations, think tanks and media outlets, contributed to eroding domestic support due to concerns over Chinese intellectual property theft and human rights abuses.

Building upon this analysis, chapter eight evaluates contemporary strategic alternatives that the US could adopt to deal with China. Shambaugh assesses five options from re-engagement to outright containment, discussing their ideological assumptions and feasibility. He regards a return to engagement unrealistic given China's trajectory, while containment entails significant geopolitical and economic risks. Positioned between these extremes are the alternatives of 'managed competition' and 'comprehensive competition', which Shambaugh views as viable yet challenging (p. 251). In particular, the author finds these alternatives risk delineating competitive and cooperative domains that could inadvertently trigger unintended escalation. In chapter nine, Shambaugh synthesizes insights into the strategic concept of competitive coexistence, explicitly positioned it as a middle ground between naive engagement and confrontational

containment (pp. 324–5). This approach pragmatically acknowledges ongoing Sino–American rivalry, particularly in technology, trade, security and ideological domains, while advocating for targeted cooperation on global challenges such as climate change, pandemics and economic stability.

In conclusion, the book represents a significant scholarly contribution, offering an analytically rigorous account of the rise, internal contradictions and eventual collapse of America’s long-standing engagement policy toward China. Shambaugh’s critical examination of the flawed assumptions that underpinned US strategy for decades is particularly insightful. Given its analytical depth, Shambaugh’s book pairs exceptionally well with David M. McCourt’s *The end of engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024; reviewed in *International Affairs* 101: 3, May 2025), which highlights the critical role of epistemic communities and expert networks in shaping and ultimately dismantling America’s China policy. Together, these books offer an essential resource for policy-makers, scholars and analysts navigating one of the twenty-first century’s most consequential bilateral relationships. Shambaugh’s book is essential reading.

Stefan Messingschlager, Helmut Schmidt University, Germany

Latin America and Caribbean

Dictatorship across borders: Brazil, Chile, and the south American Cold War. By **Mila Burns**. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 2025. 258pp. £79.00. ISBN 978 1 46968 962 3. Available as e-book.

In *Dictatorship across borders*, Mila Burns explores the Brazilian dimension of the conspiracy to topple the socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile (1970–73). In much of the standard literature on the subject, this overthrow has been ascribed almost solely to the United States’ machinations. This is not the first attempt to posit a Brazilian connection; indeed, as early as January 1974, journalist Marlise Simons drew a link between the Chilean coup and authoritarian Brazil in an article in the *Washington Post*. More recently, Tanya Harmer in *Allende’s Chile and the inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011; reviewed in *International Affairs* 88: 2, March 2012) framed the Allende presidency as part of an intraregional struggle that pitted Chile and Cuba against the US and Brazil, in which the latter actively collaborated against left-wing governments throughout south America.

Burns has seemingly assembled all the evidence currently available to flesh out the relationship between Brazil and Chile, from the former’s right-wing coup in 1964 to the Allende years and beyond. She has availed herself of the now available files of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry’s Intelligence Centre, which enabled her to proclaim the complicity of Brazilian diplomats in the activities of the 1964–85 regime. Thus, she counters the implausible assertion that the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Ministry had remained neutral during the period. This is in line with her designation of the regime as a ‘civilian–military dictatorship’,

although it overlooks the fact that all the Latin American military dictatorships in this era had a strong civilian component (pp. ??). Burns also draws heavily on interviews conducted with Brazilian leftists who had been exiled in Chile, elucidating their status during Allende's Popular Unity period, and their post-coup suffering at the hands of Chilean and Brazilian interrogators. Although they had been available for decades, the memoirs of these Brazilian exiles are now treated with the credibility and respect that they deserve.

Burns underscores Harmer's claim of US–Brazil collusion against Allende, and yet the author elevates the relationship to one of co-equals in the fight against communism in the region (p. 13). She argues that Brazilian hostility towards Allende pre-dated his election in 1970; it shared the same grounds as the earlier right-wing opposition to the policies of the deposed Brazilian president João Goulart (1961–4). Burns contends that Allende's welcome to Brazilian exiles was enough to exacerbate tensions between the two countries. Partly based on the testimony of these exiles, the author asserts that Brazil played a part in the solidification of the Pinochet regime, supplying torturers, military aid and medicine to the national stadium, which was used as a prisoner's camp after the coup. She concludes that the 11 September 1973 coup in Chile was 'the pinnacle of a plot that had been almost a decade in the making' (p. 127).

The book is divided into six chapters, two of which deal intimately with the plight of the exiled Brazilians in Chile. The other chapters range freely and somewhat synoptically over certain topics that may cause some confusion over chronology for non-expert readers. In this regard, chapter one, titled 'Before Allende', is the most challenging. While the author resorts to copious source citations, she occasionally refers to works in their entirety without the requisite page references. The book also contains a number of factual errors. First, Burns claims that Allende was elected in 1970 by a 'majority' of Chileans, only to state later, and correctly, that victory was owed to a slim plurality (pp. 30 and 113). Second, from the outset she continually refers to the Economic Commission for Latin America as ECLAC, which it became in 1984 only when the Caribbean sub-region was added to its mandate (before that, it was known as ECLA). Third and last, she asserts that, in the 2005 presidential term, Chile 'was reduced to four years with no possibility of re[-]election' (p. 170). In fact, it was with no possibility of consecutive re-election, thus allowing Michelle Bachelet and Sebastián Piñera to alternate in office between 2006 and 2022 for two terms each.

In conclusion, the book provides much useful new information on the Brazil–Chile relationship in the period between 1964 and 1973, to which it largely confines itself. Apart from a few passing mentions, Burns unfortunately has nothing more to say about Brazil's interference in its more immediate neighbours, Bolivia and Uruguay, in the context of the wider south American Cold War, nor does she expand much on what is already known about US–Brazilian collusion. Nonetheless, the book is a most welcome addition to the historiography of the inter-American Cold War.

Philip Chrimes