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Review

Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War

Sarah E. Kreps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 240pp.

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Sarah Kreps' *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War* provides a timely comparative analysis of military intervention in the context of a continuously globalizing world. Kreps endeavors to shed light on an important facet of international society today—military intervention. The study explores the question of why states, when they have the capacity to act unilaterally, often choose to take a multilateral approach. More specifically, Kreps questions why coercive and powerful states, particularly the United States, intervene multilaterally when the capacity exists for unilateral action. As the sole superpower in the international system, the way in which the United States utilizes its power in the post-Cold War period continues to be at the forefront of applied and theoretical debates.

In international relations literature, the choice between unilateralism and multilateralism dominates this debate. Structural realists' arguments concentrate on the use of force and unilateral action as tempting given the unipolar nature of the international system. On the contrary, liberal strategies and more normative approaches advocate the use of cooperative strategies as important for shaping international norms that could dampen the temptation to use unilateral force. However, Kreps finds a problem with both these approaches and suggests that a hybrid model may be needed to explain U.S. military interventions. Often, scholars tend to approach the issue of intervention in a proverbially "cut-and-dry" theoretical fashion: either structural realism arguments or

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normative and liberal-based arguments inform the analysis. However, Kreps incorporates segments related to both of these theoretical approaches—structural and liberal/normative arguments. By doing so, she sets the stage for an innovative analysis that incorporates both theoretical arguments regarding how, when, and why states use force and engage international coalitions to ensure a multilateral response to conflict. Kreps utilizes pieces of structural arguments to explain the onset of the Iraq War, but incorporates elements of normative arguments that suggest states would prefer intervention legitimacy on a multilateral basis.

Using four cases from the post-Cold war period (the 1991 Gulf War, the 1994 Haiti intervention, the 2001 Afghanistan conflict, and the 2003 Iraq conflict), Kreps explores what leads states to respond differently to international conflicts requiring military intervention. Time horizons and operational commitments, according to Kreps, play an important role in explaining how states deal with international conflicts. More specifically, the empirical analysis deals with the impacts and effects of time horizons, intensity of international threats, and converging factors with operational commitments. In this context, Kreps develops several hypotheses in an attempt to offer a theoretical and empirical understanding regarding the contrasting methods employed through unilateral or multicultural interventions.

She suggests that when states have the ability to do so, states choose to legitimize intervention through multilateralism when there is no imminent threat. Therefore, when no direct threats to the interests of the state are present, states are more likely to seek an intervention coalition. Using the example of the 1991 Haiti intervention, there was no threat to the interests of the United States. Under this notion and with the presence of a longer time horizon, assembling a multilateral coalition to respond to the situation was more optimal than in instances where time may be in short supply. When direct threats that challenge the interests of a state are present, Kreps indicates that they, too, will seek legitimacy to better the international perception of the intervention. Using the example of the 2003 Iraq Conflict, the Bush administration—in order to legitimize the intervention strategy—sought a "Coalition of the Willing" to mask the largely unilateral intervention in Iraq. The strategies for intervention change due to time, the place, involvement, and more; Kreps reveals that no cut-and-dry theoretical perspectives encompass these nuances in the conflict studies arena.

Kreps also reveals how intervention behavior can be a strategic mechanism on behalf of states due to the incentives that exist globally for nations to respond to situations through multilateral coalitional approaches. This notion is supported through Kreps' evaluation of the 1991 Gulf War coalition and the recent case found in Afghanistan. For instance, in the 1991 Gulf War coalition, the assembling of the international coalition for the response was lengthy, limiting, and according to Kreps, overall less reliable than unilateral responses. However, the international community endeavored upon the construction of a multilateral response for purposes of burden sharing and legitimacy. Unilateral action on behalf of the United States theoretically could have been a losing proposition; the possible loss in the conflict therefore constitutes the incentive to seek multilateral action.

In the case of the strategy implemented through the situation in Afghanistan, the conditions of the intervention changed overtime. The case is utilized for the way the situation evolved due to strategic interests on behalf of the United States. Specifically, Kreps notes that Afghanistan began as primarily a unilateral action regarding combat operations; yet the situation sharply evolved to a multilateral approach during reconstruction. Therefore, the case reflects the notion that actions on behalf of the state differ, in part, due to state interests and overall context of the situation at the various stages of conflict. Moreover, the flexibility provided by utilizing a unilateral approach was desirable within the beginning stages of the intervention, although through time the needs and requirements changed which one actor—the United States—could not solely provide. The careful selection of these cases yields differing situations that enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis at hand.

Overall, this is an innovative study that adds a new dynamic to the field of international relations. It builds a bridge between scholarly approaches that tend to operate from either a realist/structural perspective or a liberal/normative approach. Furthermore, Kreps explains that states do not act unilaterally simply because they have the capacity to do so. Examining U.S. foreign-policy intervention behavior, the study reveals that even for the most unilateral of actors, states may well intervene multilaterally when the option is available. Moreover, when unilateral action is a capability, it does not translate to being a necessity. Kreps explores how, to what extent, and why this is the case. *Coalitions of Convenience* has a definite place in courses related to international

conflict and intervention. It has the potential to transform the dated mindsets that see the world in black and white, neo-realist and liberal terms.