Reviews

Power in Concert: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Global Governance, Jennifer Mitzen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 280 pp., $90 cloth, $32.50 paper.

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According to many scholars of international relations, international politics is necessarily based on mutual distrust. Due to the anarchic nature of the international system, bad behavior will often go unpunished and no commitment can be trusted. Cooperation among states cannot be taken for granted and will always be precarious. To be sure, such cooperation can be observed to take place in practice. Some international relations scholars—notably the so-called realists—tend to discount its importance. Others—such as the so-called liberal institutionalists—are prepared to concede that cooperation among states matters, yet are careful not to be caught ascribing it to anything but self-interested motives, lest they be suspected of naivety. More recently, constructivists have emphasized that the behavior of states depends in part on states' own perception of who they are.

As Jennifer Mitzen points out in her new book, all these approaches explain cooperative behavior at the level of the individual actors—that is, states. But Mitzen contends that when states publicly commit to joint action in pursuit of a common goal, this fact will exert an influence on their behavior that is not captured by the conventional focus on their self-interest, or even their self-perception. "The idea behind collective intentionality," she writes, "is that some group actions are neither reducible to the intentions of individual members nor necessarily collected into a unitary corporate agent" (p. 5).

Mitzen devotes an excellent chapter to detailing the theory of collective intentionality. For her, the concept of commitment is important in accounting for both individual and collective behavior. Intentions imply commitment—to the self in the case of an individual, to each other in the case of a group of actors. They create an expectation that "simply because we have committed we ought to follow through," independently of whichever beliefs or desires originally caused that commitment—and even if those beliefs or desires, or circumstances, change (p. 35).

A joint commitment creates an expectation of mutual accountability, but this will work only if actors can expect to meet again. What Mitzen calls a "forum" is thus a necessary condition of joint action among actors, none of whom can lay

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down the law to all the others. A forum is premised on an expectation of ongoing social interaction, but, importantly, not on solidarity, or even similarity, of its members. In international politics, this means that a forum will produce "forum effects" influencing the behavior of states even if they do not have much in common, for example, if they belong to different ideological camps. Membership in a forum will cause states "to talk as if obligated" (p. 50). A forum will tend to produce what Mitzen calls a "public reason," that is, a consensus on what ought or ought not to be done regarding the issues in question. Owing to the expectation that behavior should be consistent, states feel less free to alter their behavior and depart from the public reason embodied by the forum.

Mitzen explains that forum effects exert a "behavioral pull" at the "macrolevel," rather than at the level of individual actors, which has so far been neglected in IR theory (p. 226). However, this will not always be effective, as Mitzen readily admits. The point of her book is to show that joint commitment can make a difference; that states can indeed "govern jointly" without giving up their sovereignty or deferring to a hegemon, much less transcending the international anarchy.

Having established the theoretical basis of her approach, Mitzen exemplifies it by an empirical study of the nineteenth-century great-power concert in Europe. She analyzes various crises occurring between the Vienna settlement of 1815 and the Crimean War of the 1850s to show how forum effects helped to shape policies. She compares her own conclusions with existing accounts by historians and international relations scholars to show that her approach provides a fuller understanding of why actors behaved as they did. Those with an interest in this period may not agree with all of her conclusions, but her analysis is careful and detailed.

Some minor quibbles. For one, it did not become clear to me why some significant crises (such as that caused by the Belgian revolution of 1830) are not dealt with. More importantly, Mitzen stresses the novelty of the great-power concert of the nineteenth century, which has no precedent in earlier European history. But more attention might have been paid to the circumstances contributing to its establishment. Revolutionary and Napoleonic France had mobilized a large portion of its population in its wars, as, necessarily, had those who eventually defeated the French armies. Since a return to the highly circumscribed warfare of the eighteenth century with its often small mercenary armies was not to be expected, demographic weight was henceforth much more of a factor in European politics, giving large, populous powers greater relative importance.

This combined with the general fear of revolution—of contestation of the established order in the name of radical ideas—which continued after 1815. It was clear to European leaders that in such conditions another great-power war might not only be disastrous in itself but was likely to trigger fresh revolutionary activity (especially in France), activity that this time might be impossible to contain. No doubt this helped to concentrate the minds of statesmen and induce cooperative behavior in the name of European stability. Mitzen occasionally alludes to this specific political climate (for example, on p. 128), but does not identify it as the major factor that I think it was.

In the early 1850s another round of Russo-Turkish tension was allowed to degenerate into the first great-power war

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since 1815. Mitzen analyzes this as an outcome of the failure of the great powers to commit publicly to the goal of stability of the system—as they had done in strikingly similar circumstances in the 1820s. But she is not clear on why that commitment failed to materialize in this instance. Could it be that concern about the stability of the system had lessened and become less of a perceived constraint?

At the same time, however, the Crimean War remained circumscribed and had no deleterious effects on the European system at large. Was that by accident, or could it perhaps be said that rather than having failed in this crisis (a proposition that Mitzen seems largely to accept) the European concert in a sense was still working? Mitzen mentions a plan by British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston to widen the war by bringing in Sweden and attacking Russia from the north, with a view to weakening it permanently. (It would have been helpful if Mitzen had explained how this related to the allied attacks on Russia that did take place in the Baltic region during the Crimean War.) She states herself that before the war even Palmerston wanted to preserve the European order, and attributes the plan to inflict a crushing defeat on Russia to the British government being "swept away by the events" (p. 208). In her account Palmerston abandoned his plan because "his allies persuaded him to come to the table," meaning the Paris peace conference of 1856 (p. 200). Mitzen does not elaborate on how the allies did this, or why Palmerston changed his mind.

Given the enormous preponderance of the major players in the nineteenth-century European system, the consequences of a British attempt to carve up the Russian empire and eliminate what Mitzen calls the "Russian menace" (p. 208) would have been incalculable, as Palmerston himself presumably realized. This also has a bearing on the applicability of Mitzen's approach to the present day. She points out that since a forum does not require solidarity among its members, joint action remains a possible and promising avenue in a fragmenting world in which even the United States is losing its preponderance (p. 227). But it seems to me that one reason the nineteenth-century concert worked was the interdependence of the major players caused by the potential threat that they posed to each other. Will a forum work as well in a world where, despite ever-increasing economic interdependence, actors taken individually matter rather less to each other than the European great powers did in the nineteenth century?

In sum, I think that Mitzen is right to draw attention to the importance, and the potential, of joint intentionality and of "forum effects" for international politics, and does an excellent job analyzing them —once a forum exists. But future research should perhaps also devote more attention to the conditions that make the establishment of a forum likely, and likely to succeed in the longer term.

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