Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis. By Jutta Weldes. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 316p. $47.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.

Aaron Belkin, *University of California, Santa Barbara*

The Cuban missile crisis may be one of the most studied (overstudied?) cases in the literature on international relations. Theorists of almost every stripe have turned to it for evidence, and a brief search through the University of California's on-line library catalog indicates 83 books and 103 journal articles on the case. Despite the abundance of scholarship, however, Jutta Weldes has written a fresh and compelling book, one that no scholar of foreign policy crises should skip.

Weldes begins with an interesting question (pp. 2–3): "How do we get from the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba to the Cuban missile crisis?" After the Kennedy administration discovered Nikita Khrushchev's attempts to sneak medium-range ballistic missiles into Cuba, the American interest in getting rid of them was self-evident, and the White House never considered inaction to be a viable response. Although theorists have spent millions of foundation dollars investigating Soviet motives, no one has asked why the administration believed it could not ignore the situation. The answer is nonobvious and essential, Weldes suggests, for understanding the origins of the crisis.

Why did American national interest require removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba? Weldes argues that the unthinkability of ignoring the deployment resulted from "the constant, numbing repetition of the same stock phrases and descriptions," repetitions that "contributed to the reception of these representations as common sense" (pp. 226–7). These stock phrases (e.g., "the Soviet Union is bent on world domination") were the linguistic effects of the "security imaginary," a set of ideas about entities that populated the international system as well as relations among them. The postwar American security imaginary depicted the United States as the defender of freedom, while appeasement, Soviet duplicity, the creeping subversion of international communism, and the Cuban revolution were figured as threats. Security imaginaries clarify who we are and who our enemies are and how and why they threaten us.

Two processes—articulation and interpellation—explain how the national interest is stitched together out of the security imaginary. Articulation refers to the process by which "different terms and ideas come to 'summon' one another" (p. 98). For example, "references to Castro and his revolutionary associates were persistently articulated to the adjective 'bearded.' " Invoking Castro's beard implied that he was "irresponsible, uncivilized, and a danger to the United States" (p. 98). Weldes argues that the national interest draws on numerous articulations ("communist," "aggression," and so on) and that, through repetition, these pairings can come to appear natural and part of common sense.

Interpellation refers to processes by which "identities are created and concrete individuals are interpellated by, or 'hailed' into those subject positions" (p. 103). "Out of an abstraction designating a territory, a population, and a set of governing principles and apparatuses is created an anthropormorphization, the fiction of an apparently acting subject with motives and interests" (p. 104). Weldes shows that postwar American identity came to incorporate several overlapping ideals, including leadership, defense of freedom, and the maintenance of credibility. The construction of U.S. subjectivity helps explain why President Kennedy could not imagine ignoring the missiles, as failure to remove them would have undermined the core of American identity.

This study may call into question some of the value of applying scientific methods to the analysis of international crises. Certainly, the Cuban missile crisis can be conceptualized as an instance of a broader pattern of interactive events whose predictors and internal logic might be discovered through scientifically disciplined inquiry. It seems unreasonable to suggest, to take one of many possible examples, that there is nothing at stake in efforts to determine whether the missile crisis is best viewed as a prisoner's dilemma or a failed bluff (Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations*, 1977, p. 114). But the reader comes away from Weldes's analysis suspecting that an appreciation of idiosyncrasy probably is essential for understanding what matters most about the story.

Of course, Weldes does not try to answer every important question about the origins of the Cuban missile crisis. She acknowledges thoughtfully that her emphasis on socially constructed aspects of international relations is not intended to imply that politics are arbitrary, and she says that power relations constrained the range of possible outcomes (p. 102). Perhaps in future work she and other scholars will explore interactions among reality constraints that are grounded in power and socially constructed national interests.

The findings of this study gesture ironically at a complicated set of relationships between scholarship and decision making. Motivated by the best of intentions, scholars who study international crises have spilled more ink formulating recommendations for policymakers than perhaps any other subset of the discipline. For better or worse, few if any of these recommendations appear to have been taken seriously in Washington (Richard K. Betts, "Should Strategic Studies Survive?" *World Politics* 50 [October 1997]: 7–34). Yet, Weldes suggests that scholarship did have an important although possibly unintended influence on policy during the Cuban missile crisis. "By authoritatively defining the real, [international relations theory] removed from critical analysis and political debate what was in fact a set of socially constructed representations" and "led to the reception . . . of one particular U.S. national interest (that of securing the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba) as common sense" (p. 241). Weldes is not the first to notice this phenomenon, but her expertise on the origins of the national interest lends weight to the argument.

Another ironic implication of the study is that American decision makers may have had very little freedom of choice. Weldes and other critical theorists, such as Alexander Wendt, argue convincingly that individuals shape as well as respond to structure. If the missiles' meaning was socially constructed, perhaps Kennedy and his advisors could have interpreted the situation differently. Weldes does such a convincing job of linking the Cold War vilification of Soviet communism to the administration's belief that it could not ignore the missiles, however, that one wonders whether the White House could have imagined the weapons as anything but a metaphor for the East-West rivalry. Perhaps the president and his advisors could have chosen to understand the deployment in a different way, but they would have been swimming against a very strong discursive current that was only partially of their own making. What a terrifying thought to consider.