

he claims, nuclear-superior states are more likely to prevail in international crises because they are willing to stand firm when others are not. Several chapters of the book find support for this claim in quantitative analyses and brief vignettes of four international crises. Armed with these findings, the book concludes with a lengthy Pentagon shopping list, calling for hundreds of new nuclear warheads, a new nuclear earth-penetrating weapon, more accurate ballistic missiles, new cruise missiles, and a variety of additional missile defense capabilities.

The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy follows in the footsteps of nuclear hawks who advocated a doctrine of nuclear superiority in the 1970s and 1980s. But although it arrives at the same conclusion as these scholars, it does not share their theoretical sophistication. The Cold War hawks' case for superiority rested on the belief that the United States needed a range of flexible nuclear options to be able to deny Soviet war aims at any level of violence. Without this capability, it was feared, the Soviet Union might try to force the United States to capitulate in a crisis or war by using limited nuclear strikes against US conventional forces, holding the rest of its arsenal in reserve to deter retaliation against Soviet cities. Several scholars recently have issued similar warnings about Russia and China. Although their conclusions are contested, these scholars are right to consider whether adversaries might perceive advantages from using nuclear weapons short of all-out nuclear war. Kroenig's argument, however, neglects this critical nuance. It depicts nuclear conflict only in its least plausible form: as a singular, full-scale nuclear exchange. In this way, it sidesteps the most vexing problems confronting US nuclear planners today.

The book argues that states with larger nuclear arsenals than their adversaries are more likely to prevail in crises because they can inflict comparatively more damage. But it was Schelling who identified the error in this logic in *Arms and Influence* (1966, p. 36) more than a half-century ago. Schelling pointed out that leaders do not decide whether to escalate a crisis by weighing their expected war costs against those of the other side. What matters is whether one's costs for escalating are outweighed by the anticipated gains. It is entirely possible, therefore, that a weak state might stand firm against a much stronger opponent if it cares about the stakes enough, as the United States has discovered to its chagrin many times. Powerful states can be sensitive to pain, and weak states can be indifferent to it.

By conflating military capabilities with resolve, *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy* paints an incoherent picture of nuclear crisis bargaining. If the theory were correct, adversaries could simply compare nuclear arsenals during a crisis, and the weaker side would capitulate, recognizing that it could not escalate further than its opponent. But this raises awkward questions for the theory. Most importantly, why would the weaker state

enter such a crisis in the first place? The book devotes an entire chapter to assessing relative nuclear capabilities with open-source information; presumably leaders could perform the same exercise to avoid crises they are destined to lose. The author's formalization of the theory, published elsewhere but referenced in the book, does not solve the problem, because it simply stipulates the existence of a crisis rather than modeling participants' choices to initiate it. The fact that nuclear crises occur at all is confounding for the theory.

A natural reply to this objection is that the true nuclear balance is difficult to ascertain, so perhaps states escalate crises with misguided optimism about their relative capabilities. Once they realize their nuclear inferiority, they back down. This is a plausible argument (although Kroenig does not make it), but it creates a new problem: if a crisis occurs because of inaccurate beliefs about the nuclear balance, how does crisis bargaining correct them so that the crisis can end? Does brinkmanship somehow help states learn new information about the relative nuclear balance? If so, the book does not explain how.

Ultimately, this is the fatal flaw in Kroenig's theory: by defining resolve in terms of material capabilities, it misses the essence of crisis bargaining. If capabilities and resolve are the same thing, then when the nuclear balance is known, nuclear crises should not occur at all. Conversely, when the true balance is not known, then it cannot shape leaders' decisions to back down or escalate, and therefore it cannot determine who prevails. Either way, the theory culminates in a logical dead end.

Still, it could be the case that nuclear-superior states historically achieve better foreign policy results. If so, however, the book does not make a convincing case for this result. The quantitative analysis of crisis outcomes, based on just 20 crises, relies heavily on idiosyncratic data adjustments, questionable case selection, and disputed historical interpretations. The case vignettes, moreover, do not provide evidence that beliefs about comparative nuclear damage, as opposed to absolute capabilities, drive crisis escalation decisions. In the end, although the book aspires to provide guidance to US practitioners of nuclear policy, its theoretical and empirical foundations are too shaky to justify its fervent conclusions.

Vengeful Citizens, Violent States: A Theory of War and Revenge.

By Rachel M. Stein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 266p. \$99.99 cloth, \$34.99 paper.

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Rachel Stein's *Vengeful Citizens, Violent States* is a fascinating study of how societal values shape foreign policy. Stein's argument proceeds in three parts. First, revenge, or "the belief that wrongs deserve to be repaid" (p. 8), can be

thought of as a “core value” or a “deeply held and enduring belief(s) about ‘desirable modes of conduct or desirable end states of existence’” (pp. 7–8). As a core value, revenge shapes beliefs about appropriate responses to perceived wrongs and in turn can influence attitudes about using military force.

Second, Stein argues that there exists cross-cultural variation in vengefulness. This claim is intuitively plausible, yet difficult to verify. She draws on cross-disciplinary literature that views vengefulness as a cultural norm that arises where property rights are weakly enforced. In places and times in which individuals could not count on the state to address wrongdoing, actors tended to take it on themselves to enact vigilante justice. In such cultures, a strong moral belief in revenge arises. As one example, Stein draws on well-known research identifying a particular “honor culture” in the American South (pp. 54–55). This point is bolstered by references to cross-country studies finding that cultural traits like vengefulness tend to have deep roots and are remarkably persistent, although large-scale societal change and geographic mobility can disrupt them.

Third, given that vengefulness can influence attitudes about the use of force and that vengefulness varies cross-culturally, the degree of constraint that public opinion poses for the use of force should also vary across countries. Here, Stein brackets democracies apart from autocracies, arguing that the latter are less constrained by mass publics (though they are often constrained by elites). Leaders of vengeful democracies can more effectively use revenge as a framing device for justifying the use of force. These democracies then will be more likely to initiate force.

The theoretical portion of *Vengeful States, Violent Citizens* is carefully constructed, drawing on evidence from varied scholarship. Potential counterarguments are discussed and addressed. For instance, Stein uses a comparison of presidential rhetoric before the 1999 Kosovo bombing campaign and the 2003 Iraq War to show how leaders might use a revenge framing. President Bush depicted Saddam Hussein as guilty of transgressions against his neighbors and emphasized his personal responsibility. This framing helped generate popular support for the war by activating the core value of revenge. Yet the comparison also demonstrates when and why leaders might not invoke a revenge frame, as when President Clinton repeatedly emphasized joint blame for the Kosovo conflict. It was only after it was abundantly clear that talks had failed that Clinton authorized force. This, Stein argues, reflected a desire to keep open a peaceful solution, which could be precluded by invoking a revenge frame. The key point is that leaders possess a number of strategies about how to “sell” the use of force. Even leaders of relatively vengeful populations will sometimes avoid a revenge frame. Thus, the claim that democracies with more

vengeful citizens will be more likely to initiate conflict is a *ceteris paribus* expectation, not an iron-clad law.

The remainder of the book presents evidence for the book’s argument. Chapter 3 establishes that a belief in revenge varies across individuals and influences their support for policies like corporal punishment, the death penalty, and police enforcement. If there is a shortcoming of this chapter, it is that the analysis relies on two datasets that are both from the United States and represent somewhat arbitrary snapshots in time. The first is the author’s original nationwide survey from 2010, and the other is the 1969 *Justifying Violence* study by Monica Blumenthal and colleagues (pp. 71–72). The two offer different types of questions, but analysis of both supports the notion of revenge as a core value. Notwithstanding the difficulty of finding good survey data on this topic, it would be helpful to see more cross-cultural variation in this chapter (though the Southern exceptionalism noted earlier is reflected somewhat in the data).

Chapter 4 uses a mixture of observational survey data and an original survey experiment to examine how revenge framing affects public support for war. The results support the claim that framing matters, particularly for vengeful-minded citizens. The chapter further exploits the comparison of the 2003 Iraq War and the 1999 Kosovo campaign by testing whether support for the death penalty predicts support for these uses of force. The findings show that death penalty support predicts support for the Iraq War, but not the Kosovo operation, and Stein’s interpretation is that this difference is accounted for by the different framings used by the Bush and Clinton administrations. This section adds detailed case analysis to the broader evidence, and although there are a number of potential confounding explanations, such as partisan affiliation or other latent attitudes, the analysis is consistent with the broader claim that framing matters.

Chapter 5 sets out to establish patterns of cross-cultural variation in vengefulness and to show that these are related to patterns of international conflict initiation. This chapter makes creative use of available data. Naturally, the available data have limitations, as one might expect when attempting to measure something as complicated as core values across countries. The first measure is from the 2000 Gallup survey, which covered 59 countries. The closest item on the survey to a measure of vengefulness asks respondents what purpose is served by imprisonment. Those who answered “to make those that have done wrong pay for it” (p. 137) were coded as vengeful. Indeed, by this measure, there is considerable cross-cultural variation ranging from 13% of vengeful respondents in Denmark to 54% in South Korea. The United States is right in the middle, with 30% of vengeful respondents, which is the sample mean (pp. 137–138). Although this item has some face validity, one cannot help but wonder whether the intricacies of measuring core

values across cultures might require a more developed, multi-item measure. To her credit, Stein employs this measure mainly as a “gut check” to establish variation.

Because the 2000 Gallup measure does not vary over time, Stein uses original data on death penalty laws across countries and time. Here, Stein should be commended for finding a proxy for vengefulness that can be objectively assessed across countries. Yet this remains an indirect measure. It is meant as an indicator of support for vengeance, the behavior that should be predicted by the core value. But the assumption that support is driven by this value is one degree of removal from the central concept. A second degree of distance is that death penalty laws may be driven by many causes, only one of which is the general vengefulness of a population. Stein is aware of these limitations and addresses them as best as possible, but the limitations remain.

The remainder of chapter 5 presents cross-national, over-time, multivariate regressions examining whether this measure—death penalty retention in a given year, as well as change from year to year—is associated with militarized interstate dispute (MID) initiation. This evidence is well explained and meticulously presented. It is hard to argue with the findings: countries that have the death penalty are more likely to initiate MIDs, even after controlling for a variety of predictors of initiation. This evidence is intriguing, to say the least, and is suggestive that cultures of vengeance matter for foreign policy.

Vengeful Citizens, Violent States is an ambitious book that will make a strong contribution to the study of domestic politics and interstate conflict. It makes a bold claim: that revenge can be thought of as a core value that influences actors’ political choices and that in turn it can constrain or enable national leaders. The evidence is comprehensive and, putting aside the limitations mentioned earlier, paints an overall picture of how core societal values shape the use of force.

Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power. By Clifford Bob. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 280p. \$29.95 cloth.
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Reading Clifford Bob’s new book, *Rights as Weapons*, made me uncomfortable. I found myself assuming a defensive crouch throughout the early chapters, clashing with Bob (who was not in the room at the time) and reasserting human rights orthodoxies in response to each charge he levels. With my intuitions under siege and my anxiety peaking, I reloaded only to be outgunned by a relentless barrage of compelling arguments supported by a global arsenal of rich examples. At the risk of metaphor sliding into pun, my final capitulation to the persuasiveness of *Rights as*

Weapons acknowledged a need to be uncomfortable in this space but also forced me to reconsider what it means for human rights to sit at the intersection of morality and power.

Rights as Weapons uses military symbolism in a non-violent setting in an effort to focus our attention not on the moral dimensions of rights struggles, but on the way in which rights are deployed as strategic tools in political conflicts. The book follows Bob’s previous works that, taken together, challenge us to look past the warm, fuzzy veneer of advocacy movements. In *The Marketing of Rebellion* (2005), readers considered how campaigners operate in a competitive environment and make decisions on the basis of material needs, not merely on righteousness. In *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (2012), transnational advocacy networks are revealed as constellations of illiberal political actors, even though scholars conventionally focus solely on progressives. The thread throughout Bob’s writing is a self-reflective critique of moral movements that see themselves and project themselves as heroic underdogs fighting the good fight against their evil, abusive overlords. Instead, and this point is a central pillar of *Rights as Weapons*, none of this should be taken for granted.

Not that it isn’t true: rights campaigners believe this very deeply, but we, as observers and researchers, short-change the analysis by foregrounding the moral convictions of these actors. In the final pages, Bob accuses scholars and journalists of treating subjects like human rights advocacy uncritically because of their personal desires to see the project succeed, preferring instead what he calls a “clear-eyed view” (p. 210). To recalibrate the study of contentious politics toward “objectivity” (unsubstantiated and undiscussed, but not at all uncontroversial), Bob instead depicts adversaries in a political environment trading swipes in an effort to have their particular vision realized, and in an era in which rights talk is a currency of its own, he finds that parties of all persuasions leverage such talk in conflicts with one another.

The book covers expansive territory. The arguments stack up as follows. Campaigners use rights claims to mobilize supporters both within their movement and among third-party outsiders. They do so by proclaiming that rights apply naturally to all: they are universal, absolute, and apolitical. “Today all four of these rhetorical moves are often mistaken as incontrovertible facts. Certainly, activists advertise them as such, and trumpet them from the ramparts” (p. 14). Rather than dissecting any of these notions, each of which is a subject of serious scrutiny among academics and practitioners (neither incontrovertible nor certain), Bob identifies them simply as tactical choices. It is unimportant whether these claims are true or essential; it is only important here that they are key components of external messaging that rights campaigners use to persuade others. Presenting these “rallying cries”