

North America*

Reassuring the reluctant warriors: US civil–military relations and multilateral intervention. By Stefano Recchia. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2015. 296pp. £19.00. ISBN 978 0 80145 291 8. Available as e-book.

Stefano Recchia has made a fascinating contribution to the literature on the bureaucratic politics of military interventions. Recchia argues that America's senior generals play a vital role in pushing administrations to adopt a multilateral approach towards humanitarian interventions and that, contrary to what we might expect, liberal interventionists are far more sceptical about having international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council or the North Atlantic Council sanction such initiatives.

Using over 80 interviews with senior US officials, as well as declassified material from the Clinton White House, Recchia demonstrates that it is those in uniform who frequently push for a mandate from the UN or NATO. The idea that US generals are 'reluctant warriors' is nothing new: much of the literature on post-Vietnam intervention makes a similar point. What is innovative, however, is Recchia's argument that generals are likely to insist on a multilateral approach to intervention precisely when multilateral support is most difficult to get: in situations where they fear the US will be left with an unduly large share of the burden of intervention and where exit strategies are unclear. Conversely, liberal hawks see bodies such as the UN and NATO as obstacles to effective intervention, and tend to regard questions of humanitarian intervention as too urgent to be left to the deliberation of international bodies. Recchia makes the vital point that interventionists tend to focus on *why* the US should intervene, whereas military officials tend to think of *how* intervention might occur, which makes them acutely aware of the potential costs of such interventions.

Recchia uses four case-studies—the US interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq in 2003—to provide a detailed analysis of just how the 'pulling and hauling' on questions of intervention plays out. In a largely convincing fashion, he shows that administrations are willing to incur relatively high costs—in terms both of the efficacy of the intervention and the political cost of building international support—to secure international organization approval for intervention when the generals express a reluctance to intervene. In Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo, intervention was essentially impossible until the Clinton administration managed to find a way to placate the military by gaining international approval, as a way of sharing the burden of intervention and ensuring some sort of viable exit strategy.

Much as Recchia builds a strong case for the influence of 'reluctant warriors', his case-study selection does mean there are some limitations to his approach. Of the four cases he examines, three are from the Clinton era, and the fourth, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, doesn't really conform to the model, as there the generals were silent rather than vocal in their dissent. Recchia provides good reasons for this—the senior military leadership of the time were hardly profiles in courage—but it is at least possible that his conclusion that powerful military actors push reluctant interventionists towards a multilateral approach is in part due to the particular politics of civil–military relations in the Clinton era.

First, Recchia slightly overstates his case at times. In an effort to construct a usable theory, he can be too dismissive of other relevant factors. For instance, in Kosovo, revitalizing NATO surely played a role in the Clinton administration's use of the alliance in the intervention, even if it is also true that generals were reluctant to intervene without multi-

* See also Bruce Jones and David Steven, *The risk pivot*, pp. 472–3.

lateral support. Similarly, the presence of civilian doves means that we should be careful about assigning too much veto power to the generals; other actors within the Clinton administration were often equally reluctant about the merits of intervention. For instance, Secretary of State Warren Christopher often played a restraining role, and during the Bush administration's intervention in Liberia Vice-President Dick Cheney and the Secretary of Defense were chary of any US humanitarian intervention.

These quibbles aside, this is a fine book. Recchia's extensive interviews with senior national security officials alone make the book worth reading. For scholars interested in military intervention, this interview material provides a wealth of insight and Recchia certainly makes a compelling case that senior military officials are often multilateralists, however cynical their reasons for embracing multilateralism, and—surprisingly—that liberal interventionists can be strikingly unilateral in their approach, whatever their public rhetoric suggests. Recchia's argument may be counter-intuitive but the evidence is largely persuasive.

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Ballots, bullets, and bargains: American foreign policy and presidential elections. By Michael H. Armacost. New York: Columbia University Press. 2015. 288pp. Index. £19.50. ISBN 978 0 23116 992 9. Available as e-book.

For readers looking for one book to explain the possible effects of the 2016 US presidential election on America's foreign policy, *Ballots, bullets, and bargains* is a fantastic starting point. It provides a great read for newcomers and aficionados of US politics alike.

Michael H. Armacost served for decades at some of the highest levels of the US foreign service, including as ambassador to the Philippines and Japan, and more recently as president of the Brookings Institution until 2002. Armacost demonstrates both authoritative and encyclopaedic knowledge of the American system, while simultaneously peppering the book with fascinating personal insights. The subject of Armacost's enquiry is both vast and—surprisingly—rarely assessed comprehensively in one book. Indeed, given the vulnerability of American foreign policy to the political winds around presidential elections, Armacost notes that it is fortunate no adversary has taken advantage of the regular paralysis it causes to strategic policy-making.

Armacost uses history to illuminate the more obscure issues which have had a huge impact on policy. For example, he charts the inauspicious history of the handovers between presidents who did not see eye to eye. He explains how the US system regularly produces presidents with scant experience of foreign policy—and vice-presidents who are even more ignorant of it. But the book isn't all doom and gloom: the author highlights the strengths of the American system and how it regularly produces vital course corrections. At times, the issue at hand is sometimes presented in a way that obscures the importance of domestic policy. While this is not the focus of the book, there are many places in the analysis where more in-depth discussion of the domestic context would improve the argument.

While the book's core strengths are its effective utilization of history and its well-presented case-studies, they also lead to one of the problems with *Ballots, bullets, and bargains*: Armacost occasionally spends too much time retelling the past. Many case-studies are repeatedly made use of to support several different points and are retold in different sections of the book. On occasion, well-worn history, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, is given a long explanation, where more analysis would have been preferable. This is not to say that any of Armacost's history is questionable, in fact the opposite. Some of his most