

Book Review

Simon Reich (2010)

Global Norms, American Sponsorship and the Emerging Patterns of World Politics

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

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Unites States (US) foreign policy is examined outside conventional parameters relying on standard 'isms' – imperialism, unilateralism, multilateralism. Reich conveys an alternative approach to leadership in international relations. Instead of focusing on a traditional, military dominance (labelled as "hard power"), which faces increasing erosion by enemies' non-conventional attacks on US interests all over the world, the author emphasises how sponsorship enables leadership outstripped from the nuisances of military and often unilateral action. One of the advantages of sponsorship, Reich argues, is the veil of legitimacy that follows. This in turn breaks up with recurrent criticisms towards US foreign policy when imperialism or unilateralism is the option.

Reich starts by conceptualising sponsorship. The outcome is the enactment of global norms at the international level with the support of the US government. Nevertheless, agenda-setting falls outside the initiative of US authorities. Agenda-setting is promoted by different coalitions of non-governmental actors (mainly NGOs). The author points at the legitimacy background of this alternative dimension of foreign policy, since the process of recognition of global norms follows a bottom-up procedure. This comes in line with the awareness that state actors lost influence as world politics stakeholders, which in turn opened a window of opportunity for NGOs. Advocacy coalitions, in which non-governmental actors are prominent, bring global norms to the fore and attract the support of the US administration in office. Reich warns that only norms supported by the US are likely to be accepted. To this extent, he also acknowledges the normative dimension embedded in global norms, notably the emergence of moral imperatives and a social and economic model emphasising the benefits of transparent governance and capitalism. They are instrumental to values or interests that match the US foreign policy agenda.

In contrast with traditional, military leadership provided by the US, sponsorship relies on "soft power". For this purpose, Reich recalls the unsuccessful ventures of US military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. He then stresses the following paradox: of how a "hyper power" (resorting to hard power) has been unable to meet the prescribed goals; and how, in contrast, examples of global norms sponsored by US administrations (soft policy) have resonated with success. The paradox emphasises the negative correlation between resources available and outcomes. While hard power requires a considerable amount of military force and human resources, thus increasing overall costs, soft power entails modest resources. Since the enforcement of global norms asks for a hegemonic power,

this paves the way for the US to play an influential, but discrete, role in international relations. The new paradigm of foreign policy allows the US to perform a hegemonic power that, nevertheless, meets the requirements of efficiency and legitimacy.

The changing pattern of US foreign policy is to be understood within the context of the increasingly transnational nature of foreign policy ("the dark side of globalisation", p. 34). The outcomes are the erosion of the problem-solving capacity of influential countries and the vulnerability of powerfully military countries (even the US). Therefore, foreign policy undergoes adaptation. This explains why and how the locus changes from hard to soft power. In the face of stable scepticism on surveys concerning US foreign policy, sponsorship is the appropriate way to change the perception about the role of the US in the world. Interestingly, as noted by the author, the largely dominant bad image of US foreign policy is unchanged despite the "Obamania" around the world, thus revealing that the problem is one of credibility regardless of the US President's charisma. The bottom-up procedure of bringing global norms encompasses a threefold process. It starts with "aggressive moral entrepreneurs" setting the agenda of a global norm. Second, at the intermediate level, global norms must be codified and monitored by international organisations. This contributes to boost the legitimacy of US foreign policy when the US promotes sponsorship of the global norm. Third, the process is completed when the US government commits to the global norm supplying resources for policy implementation.

In the empirical part of the book, Reich examines three case studies of US foreign policy that do not match sponsorship. The first focuses on the influence exercised by successive US administrations on the World Bank (a case of imperialism). The US sought to pursue an agenda of its own (which changed between the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations), imposing the goals of the World Bank. According to the author's threefold conceptualisation of sponsorship, only the third condition (US commitment and resources for enforcement) was present. The second case study is the worldwide respect for pre-emptive and preventive intervention (a case of unilateralism). In this case, both the second and third conditions of sponsorship were met (formal codification of global norms by international organisations, and US commitment and resources for implementation), but aggressive moral entrepreneurs were absent. The third case study is the coordinated effort to fight against cyber-crime (a case of multilateralism). This chapter (written by Panayotis A. Yannakogeorgos) shows how the combination of aggressive moral entrepreneurs with the US commitment to enforce a global norm at the international level was not enough to meet agreement, as other countries showed divergent approaches to the regulation of cyber-crime. As a consequence, the codification of such global norms within the international organisations involved in the negotiation process was not possible, which explains the failure of sponsorship. Conversely, the chapter on anti-trafficking global norms is the best example of how a bottom-up process ended up in the codification of such rules by international organisations with the enforcement of US authorities. For Reich, this is the paradigm of sponsorship whereby US foreign policy is able to attract support at the international level.

Reich concludes by suggesting an alternative theorisation of US foreign policy that falls outside the conventional 'isms' debate (imperialism, unilateralism, multilateralism). He focuses instead on a "third dimension of power" (p. 224) according to which others formulate the relevant agendas and the US promotes the effective enforcement of those that receive their own approval. The outcome is a different kind of leadership - one in which the US plays a less aggressive and more legitimate role, making US foreign policy more effective. Furthermore, Reich warns, this is coherent with the ongoing economic crisis that asks for budget cuts and a less aggressive role in the international arena and involves huge savings in the defence budget.