Beyond the National Interest

Tom Fedyszyn
despotic power on the ruins of republican freedom. Studying this checkered past with care, both Niccolò Machiavelli (whom some see as the founder of realism) and Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (who could be considered a founder of liberal internationalism), sought ways to combine the security advantages of large empires with the freedom (from military rule especially) of healthy republics.

What practical use might this mixed success of republican security theory be today? Clearly, it lies at the origins of the two grandest experiments in international cooperation of the twentieth century—the League of Nations and the United Nations. Rather than view the less-than-complete success, and sometimes patent failure, of either as proof that republican security theory has reached a point of diminishing returns, Deudney concludes with an analysis of how early experiments in nuclear arms control might suggest ways to apply republican security theory to avoid the danger of nuclear violence while preserving individual freedom. In this respect, Deudney appears to have more in common with contemporary liberal internationalists than with today’s realists, but he has no patience with charges that his project is utopian. It has worked in the past, and it continues to work in the American union. With enough intelligence and determination, he argues, it might be the only practicable solution to the global problems of this century, which no single state can address on its own. In making this claim, Deudney has gone, like the starship Enterprise (which served a federation of republics!) where few today have gone before, to help found a new discipline, one that might be called “world political theory.” At a time when U.S. maritime strategy has become ever more concerned with the security of the global system, this is a book that thoughtful strategists will need to read again and again.

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It should come as little surprise that Jean-Marc Coicaud, a noted French scholar with extensive experience at the United Nations, sees the need for a fundamental change in the way the international system addresses its most pressing security problems. He bemoans the fact that “narrow national interests” have made prompt, effective multilateral peacekeeping interventions on behalf of humanitarian needs very difficult. In his Beyond the National Interest he offers prescriptions to alleviate this situation.

This short book covers in some detail the history of international humanitarian interventions since the 1990s, in search of trends and lessons learned. The author conveys a sense of optimism that the end of the Cold War presented a perfect opportunity for universal human values to displace traditional values according to which sovereignty was sacrosanct and nation-states responded only to direct external threat. He optimistically proclaims that NATO was moving forward progressively in this direction.

Unfortunately, his detailed historical examples consistently belie this
optimism, as some protagonist (nor-
mally the United States) always allows
its conduct to be driven by the atavistic
notions of sovereignty and physical se-
curity. In fact, the United States (partic-
ularly the last Bush administration)
comes out as the book’s principal vil-
lain, although the Clinton administra-
tion also takes its hits. Owing to its
superpower status, the United States is
directly involved in every incident in
which humanitarian intervention is a
possible course of action, and its
responses never meet the author’s high
standards.

While Coicaud’s facts and historical
analysis are correct and fundamentally
sound, a reader might get the impres-
sion that it is only a matter of time be-
fore the entire world is persuaded to see
the responsibility to protect—the inter-
national community sending in forces
to protect the citizens of an offending
country—much as an enlightened Eu-
ropean does now. I am certain that
Coicaud is buoyed by the advent of the
Obama administration in hopes that
the United States will eventually join in
this enlightenment. Unfortunately, his
optimism is probably misplaced, for
two reasons. First, none of today’s
emergent powers (China, Russia, India,
or Brazil) have been proponents of
what the author calls “conditional” sov-
eignty. If anything, they hold dearly
their sovereignty and support this right
for other nation-states. The second
point forces us to focus on the title of
the book.

That is, national interest is the real cul-
prit. As long as nations constitute the
world’s central cast, there is little like-
lihood that it will achieve Coicaud’s
idealistic standards. Even his recom-
mendations to strengthen the United
Nation’s peace-enforcement and
humanitarian roles are largely bureau-
cratic and peripheral, suggesting that
the author is also aware of the funda-
mental resistance. As long as the UN
remains nationally based, the likeli-
hood that its members will be driven
by “supranational” interests will be
slim. Indeed, simply getting beyond the
national interest is not enough. The in-
ternational community must adopt su-
pranational interests or it will forever
be hampered by the primacy of “secu-
ritv issues” and “self-centered nation-
alism,” which, unfortunately for
Coicaud, is likely to be a long time
coming.

Although a welcome addition to those
advocating for the rights of individuals
over those of nation-states, the book
unfortunately fails to deal meaningfully
with the real obstacles to the ideal. Fur-
ther, since much of this book is a dia-
tribe against the Bush administration,
its salience is increasingly historical.

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Cohen, William A. A Class with Drucker: The Lost
Lessons of the World’s Greatest Management
$24.95

Krames, Jeffrey A. Inside Drucker’s Brain. New

Peter Drucker, considered the father of
modern management, died in 2005 at
the age of ninety-five. For six decades
he consulted with industry and govern-
ment leaders and taught at New York
University and the Claremont Graduate
School of Management, publishing
thirty-nine books, including one on