

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **The Importance of Restraint in the Exercise of Power**

Review by JEFFREY A. HART

*Department of Political Science, Indiana University*

*Defining Power: Influence and Force in the Contemporary International System.* By John M. Rothgeb, Jr. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. 205 pp. \$18.70, \$39.95.

This book is a worthy successor to *The Power of Nations* by Klaus Knorr (1975). Like Knorr's earlier work, *Defining Power* attempts to clarify the concept of power as it is applied in international politics, and then illustrate how it is used to analyze concrete issues. We are still quite far from a general theory of power in international affairs, but until there are more efforts like this one, we will not get any closer. A major advantage of this work over previous ones is the increased attention paid to economic issues as they relate to definitions of power as a supplement to the usual stress placed on solely military/strategic concerns.

The basic underlying assumption of the book is that international politics is still a game of power, but that the sources of power and the issues over which there are conflicts have changed a great deal since 1945. Rothgeb focuses particularly on the increased constraints on the use of military force by major powers and the increased importance, especially in recent years, of attempts to influence others by nonmilitary means. The book is unusual in devoting serious attention to noncoercive influence and to issues of "economic defense and deterrence." It is not, however, a work of political economy, as most of the text is dedicated to explicating the concepts of power, influence, coercion, deterrence, and compellence. Thus, most of the examples and data deal with military/strategic issues.

One of the important arguments here is that the successful exercise of international power requires restraint on the part of the government attempting to influence another so that compliance cannot be interpreted by critics in the target country as an abandonment of sovereignty. For example, at the end of Chapter 8, the author writes "an examination of international coercion leads to the observation that an important part of success is found in the degree to which actors are able to moderate their demands so that targets feel they can comply without too great a loss of dignity. Unless this is done, coercion is a difficult road to travel, no matter how many resources the actor possesses and how much resolve it has" (p. 184). We are certainly seeing the wisdom of this approach in the recent agreement between Israel and the PLO.

The author of *Defining Power* goes beyond earlier works on power by integrating the results of quantitative studies on wars, civil wars, and attempts at economic coercion into his arguments. It is good to know that there is now

enough of this work to allow systematic analysis and argumentation. Quantitative analysis was particularly important in assessing the conditions under which coercion could be successful (pp. 172-182).

Another important argument in *Defining Power* is that increased international economic interdependence has intensified the domestic and international debates about the use of governmental policies to impede or channel international economic flows for national advantage, a phenomenon Rothgeb calls "economic defense." According to the author: "advocates of defense may be expected to maintain that it is necessary [to engage in it] if one is to avoid significant losses in income, investment, employment, and local political control to foreign interests. The opponents of defense most probably will point to the loss in efficiency and to the high costs that usually accompany defense. Each argument is correct, at least in part" (p. 197).

This book would be suitable for advanced undergraduates or graduate students. It could be used in courses on foreign policy, international security, or international political economy. It is a bit too densely written to be used as a supplementary text in an introductory course. The book would be quite useful for academics attempting to grapple with the concept of power. Policymakers would benefit from the discussion of the importance of restraint in both military/ strategic and economic coercion.

In conclusion, *Defining Power* is an excellent contribution to the small but important set of works on power in international affairs. It attempts to clarify the terminology of power analysis and presents many useful examples of how to apply those terms. It makes a number of original and well-argued points about the exercise of power in the post World War II period.

### **References**

KNORR, KLAUS. (1975) *The Power of Nations*. New York: Basic Books.