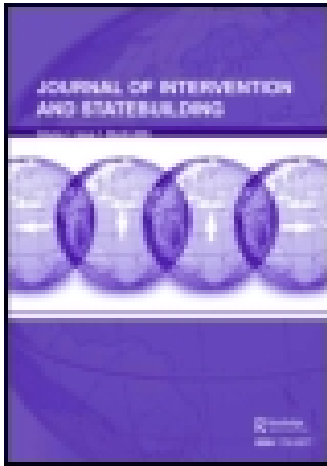


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How Peace Operations Work: Power, Legitimacy and Effectiveness

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BOOK REVIEW

How Peace Operations Work: Power, Legitimacy and Effectiveness by Jeni Whalan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 221 + bibliography + index. £55 (hbk). ISBN 978-0-19-967218-9.

In general, our understanding of *how* international interventions achieve particular outcomes – intended or otherwise – is remarkably poor. The literature on statebuilding, peace operations, international economic sanctions and so forth too often focuses on success rates, not the mechanisms by which they (supposedly) operate in target societies, with explanations of outcomes frequently relegated to ad hoc lists of factors in case studies. *How Peace Operations Work* is thus a welcome contribution, as it builds an analytical framework that asks not ‘do peace operations work?’ but rather ‘how do they work (or not work)?’ This generates the correct focus on how international intervention interacts with local dynamics, a mode of inquiry requiring careful fieldwork rather than mere desk research. The book is also part of an emerging constructivist literature in International Relations that focuses on the ‘implementation’ of international norms and principles, having at long last realized that their mere ‘institutionalization’ is no guarantee of their enactment in practice. *How Peace Operations Work* is thus situated at the cutting edge of mainstream IR.

Whalan’s basic argument is that the outcome of peace operations is determined by an operation’s power *and* its legitimacy among local actors. Given that a central weakness of much IR work is the false distinction between power and legitimacy, reflecting the relentless realist/constructivist controversy, it is refreshing to see them treated together. Whalan recognizes that legitimacy is a product of, and productive of, power, and that coercion, inducement and legitimation all occur simultaneously, including in peace operations – none suffices alone. The book presents a very solid discussion of how these mechanisms interrelate. It argues that variation in peace operations’ outcomes can be explained by their varying legitimacy and power resources. This framework is then applied to Cambodia and Solomon Islands.

This approach is – unfortunately – clearly one-sided, containing no theory of domestic politics in target states. Whalan instead foregrounds ‘the agency of peace operations’ (p.2). Logically, however, it is impossible to understand the

outcome of any intervention solely by reference to the intervening force; what matters is its influence on pre-existing socio-political and economic dynamics. Whalan implicitly concedes as much by starting each case study with an overview of the conflict setting and the interests of local actors. This then appears to serve as the baseline structural constraints faced by the peace operations, dictating whether local/national actors are likely to assess it as being legitimate, whether the operation will be able to coerce and induce them, and so on (e.g. pp.91–2). In Cambodia, for example, the structural limits for the United Nations Transitional Administration in Cambodia (UNTAC) were set by the fundamental rift between the State of Cambodia (SOC) and the Khmer Rouge (KR): neither were willing to disarm since both sought the other's destruction. Hence, the KR accused UNTAC of aiding the SOC, while the SOC engaged in only mock compliance with UNTAC disarmament efforts. The incompatible interests of key socio-political forces rendered UNTAC powerless, regardless of what it threw at the situation (ch.3). Only where these interests were not at stake was some success possible, as, for instance, on the issue of refugee repatriation (ch.4).

Consequently, it would make far more analytical sense to begin with a theorization of target societies, then show how peace operations intervene upon, are constrained by and/or transform these dynamics. Some scholarly work does do this, including the burgeoning literature on 'hybrid' statebuilding and my own modest contribution on East Timor, but oddly such works are excluded from the literature review. The most surprising oversight is Whalan's failure to engage with or even to cite Hameiri's *Regulating Statehood* (2010), which not only theorizes the transformative interaction between statebuilding operations and domestic forces in an extremely sophisticated manner, but even uses the exact same case studies. As so often, it seems easy for mainstream scholarship to overlook critical work, while critical scholars are routinely compelled to engage with every mainstream alternative before being permitted to even articulate their arguments in print.

How Do Peace Operations Work is a problem-solving text designed to appeal to policymakers: by understanding how operations (do not) work, Whalan's hope is that the United Nations can enhance the coercive or inductive power and/or legitimacy of its forces to achieve greater success. Doubtless this will attract enthusiastic interest from policymakers. But what do her cases seem to suggest? In Cambodia, Whalan persuasively suggests that more coercion would not have helped: the KR would not have changed course without a massive military assault, which would have compromised other goals like refugee resettlement (pp.99–100). Similarly, she argues, more inducement would have been ineffective: Operation Paymaster, whereby UN funds were used to pay the army and thus prevent a military coup, was necessarily temporary and could not control local actors' behaviour indefinitely (pp.136–7). If not more coercion or inducement, then, could UNTAC have had greater legitimacy? Here, Whalan argues that legitimacy is determined by the 'fit' between the operation's mandate and local interests and perceptions. So, does this mean that, to succeed, peace operations must adapt to local demands and conditions, as suggested in the 'hybrid'

peacebuilding literature? If so, is this really feasible, given that mandates are determined by the UN Security Council and thus the values and interests of the great powers, not local actors? This is arguably the perpetual dilemma of any UN intervention: they are unable to really implement their mandates because of their weakness relative to local power structures, but unable to change their mandates due to international power structures. No amount of institutional tinkering can change that.

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