

ESSENTIAL READ ON SECURITY?

Review of Peter Hough, Shahin Malik, Andrew Moran and Bruce Pilbeam. 2015. *International Security Studies. Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

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War in Ukraine and Syria, North Korea's nuclear ambitions, militarization of the South China Sea, the migration crisis, terrorism in the European Union, cyber threats, and environmental issues are just few examples exposing both the quantity and the diversity of contemporary security challenges. Not surprisingly, the extent of these security issues has motivated scholars to expand the literature on security by writing books and articles on the theoretical implications, issue-specific security challenges, and the security of particular regions and countries. The textbook by Peter Hough *et. al.* stands out among the aforementioned literature because it does not limit itself to theory, particular security concepts and challenges or a certain region. Instead, it ambitiously attempts to provide: "students with a comprehensive and accessible introduction to the subject of Security Studies, with a strong emphasis on the use of case studies" (p.2). Not only does the book distinguish itself by its wide scope, but also stands out by its ambition. The authors see their work as an essential read for: "all students of security studies" (p.2). Thus, they perceive it among classic textbooks used for teaching¹ introductory courses on security.

¹ The book contains many pedagogical features, such as textboxes, summary points and recommended further reading.

Is it an essential read on security for newcomers in the field as the authors claim? The answer to this question is mostly subjective, because it largely depends how one perceives an introductory course on security. It might be solely focused on theory highlighting the discrepancy between theoretical approaches, exposing their advantages and limits for analyzing a particular object of security studies. The courses might include a conceptual or topical focus on the diversity of security sectors, such as military, economic, cyber, energy, water, food security, etc. and their impact on security at global, national and individual levels. The introduction on security can also be organized geographically, highlighting the security challenges for some countries or regions. Finally, it can be some kind of mixture of the above. Therefore, in order to answer if the book is an essential read on security, one has to recognize that introductory courses on security are different and the book might be a better option for some, while not a good choice for others at the same time.

If one considers the content only, it seems that the editors did a remarkable work and achieved their objective successfully. The book begins by introducing the diversity of security studies and continues by covering both conventional and unconventional theoretical approaches to security. In the following two sections it focuses on diverse security challenges and most important concepts by classifying them as military related and unrelated security issues. The book proceeds by analyzing the role of institutions in contemporary security architecture and concludes with case studies on security in particular areas, for example U.S., Russia, China, Europe, Africa, the Arctic, Latin America, Middle East, etc. Thus, the composition of content shows that the book is well balanced between classical and unorthodox theoretical approaches, conceptual and policy-related security issues and that it has avoided Western-centrism by diversifying the geographical scope of case studies. Most importantly, it seems that such

content can match the expectations of most introductory courses on security.

The book also excels by well summarized and persuasive presentations of the most important arguments the authors try to make. Each chapter is opened by a short summary and concluded with the most important points and suggestions for further reading. The way the authors use boxes is admirable. They contain interesting examples either summarizing the essence of long discussions or short case studies that supplement their arguments with the analysis of specific events or descriptive statistics. The usage of the latter is both original and convincing, for example, the comparison of fatalities caused by man-made disasters and warfare gives an opportunity to imagine the true extent of each security threat (p. 267). Not only do such editorial decisions make the book more convincing and pushes the reader to think critically, but it is also helpful for the teaching process. Case studies and statistical comparisons in boxes provide an excellent teaching resource.

On the other hand, the book is not without shortcomings. It fails to capture the full scope of security issues. Even though it covers topics that are frequently omitted from the security literature, such as food security, environmental security and the relationship between security, health, disasters and crime, it does so at the expense of such fundamentals as energy security and migration. The current refugee crisis in Europe and numerous Russo-European energy conflicts makes the textbook less relevant in comparison to the books that address these issues. Security challenges associated with migration and refugees were known long before the migration crisis in Europe – they were on political agenda of Italy, Greece, United Kingdom, U.S., etc., something reflected in older textbooks, such as the one of Jef Huysmans (2006).

Another problem of the book is the lack of balance between the complexities of each section. The theoretical section is not for newcomers, even if the authors perceive it that way. The

theoretical part is prepared for graduate students or those with a background in international relations theories as there is a stark contrast between the book and classic introductory literature on international relations theories, such as “Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches” by Robert Jackson and Georg Soresen (2013). Some chapters, such as the one on food security, fit the needs of a less advanced readership in security studies, while others, namely the ones on nuclear proliferation and the rise of private military and security companies, are fit for those with more prior knowledge. Even though the case studies can be read separately and are mostly written for newcomers into a certain geographical area, a common denominator for the complexity of the entire book is lacking.

Furthermore, the connection between the conceptual and empirical framework is debatable in terms of its applicability for teaching introductory courses on security with a topical focus.² The book provides a deep conceptual analysis of relevant security issues, but does not support them with comprehensive case studies on particular policy issues. For example, the book has a solid chapter on nuclear proliferation but only supports it with a one-page case study on Iran’s nuclear ambitions (p. 127). For courses with a topical focus, such an approach is too narrow as the concepts need to be elaborated with deeper insights into current policy issues, such as Iran or the North Korean nuclear talks. In this context, the book favors a wide as opposed to deep approach. It presents the main security concepts, but does not relate its case studies to them. Instead, it continues with the analysis of a wide range of security issues in various countries and regions.

The final point in terms of criticism is that the novelty of the book is mostly limited to a concentration of case studies and its recent publication gives it a temporary advantage over textbooks that

² The authors themselves used this book as their main teaching material for an introductory course on security with a topical focus: “Security Challenges in a Contemporary World”.

were written earlier. Advanced readers will not find something they have not seen before in the works of Randal E. Osborne and Paul Kriese (2008), Elke Krahnman (2005), in earlier books of Peter Hough himself (2013) or in other literature on security. However, they will find a solid concentration of theory, concepts and topical issues, relevant institutions in security architecture and case studies in particular geographical areas.

Having said that, can one consider this book as an essential read on security studies for the newcomers in the field as the authors ambitiously strive for? The answer is no due to the following reasons. First, even if the theoretical section is very insightful, it is far too complicated for newcomers, especially ones having no background in international relations theory. Furthermore, the imbalance between the level of complexity in conceptual sections does not correspond to the needs of beginners. Finally, the book fails to include chapters on important concepts, such as energy security and migration, and, most importantly, does not support other concepts with exhaustive case studies on related policy issues – a necessity for courses with a topical and conceptual focus. Thus, its applicability for introductory courses on security is constrained both on a theoretical and topical level.

However, saying the book is not essential does not make it bad. The ambition was there, and even if the execution was not perfect, it was good nevertheless. The book is a valuable contribution for both security studies and its teaching process in ways that the authors have not intended it to be, for example, it is a good option for teaching advanced students about theoretical issues in security studies. It has a solid theoretical framework, covers a wide range of security concepts and maps most relevant security issues in diverse areas making it a good reference book in general. The book includes relevant and original information in separate boxes and excels at summarizing lengthy discussions in short points. If the editors manage to update the second volume by adding chapters on migration and energy security, whilst also simplifying the

theoretical section, and if they relate their case studies to security concepts, whilst maintaining the current level of excellence, then further volumes might become an inseparable part of introductory courses on security studies in Western and non-Western universities alike.

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