



RESENHA: “WAR, RELIGION, AND EMPIRE”

PHILLIPS, Andrews. *War, Religion, and Empire: The Transformation of International Orders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 978 0 521 12209 2.

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The issue of international orders is a specially pressing one in the field of International Relations. Orders change with times, either being transformed by circumstances and/or being outrightly abandoned and substituted with another such form. Notwithstanding, these shifts bring in their wake very important consequences and can even change completely the way peoples, nations, polities and states view themselves in relation to each other and in relation with the world.

No matter how one sees international orders, which are understood by Phillips as an ensemble of constitutional norms and institutions through which co-operation is fostered and conflict undermined and contained between different polities, it is difficult to play down their importance to International Relations, as a discipline, and as a practice. That is precisely the theme addressed by Phillips in his book. The author addresses three basic questions in this work: 1) what are international orders?; 2) what elements contribute to and can be held accountable for their transformation?; 3) and how can they be maintained even when faced by violent shocks challenges? Drawing on two basic empirical cases, Christendom and Sino-centric East Asian order, he contends that, despite their idiosyncrasies, both cases share some common characteristics. Based on these common elements he builds his conception of order



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which is, to some extent, a synthesis exercise between the constructivist and realist traditions of IR.

The constructivist strata tend to ontologically place more importance on how ideas can transform orders. Such a view overshadows the role played by material constraints and factors, if not not considering them also permitting factors, along with ideas, placing them as something alienated from ideas themselves. What is consistent with the claims and critiques that constructivist revolutions lack on "blood". On the other hand, realist strata tend to place too much importance on economic and military power and prowess, revolutions in military technology, territory, and so on and so forth, almost ignoring altogether how important resistance to the consolidated order on the ideational level can be important to contributing to order transformation and, ultimately, to order substitution. What is consistent with the claims that realist revolutions are understood as inherently top-down phenomena. Thus, studies carried out exclusively under one or the other ontological heading tend to have constrained explaining power and scope, leaving the readers with the constant feeling that some of these studies lack "some juice". That is exactly what Phillips intends to counter with his book. It is interesting to note that such an attempt is not exactly unprecedented as there is already a some scholars trying to build bridges between constructivism and realism. Good examples are the "cultural realist" and "constructivist realist" theoretical constructs. However, seldom are the studies with such a focus, international orders, and investigating such an empirical case, Christendom and Sino-centric East Asia.

Working with an eclectic approach, he plays down neither material factors nor ideational ones, equating both in terms of importance and establishing both as permitting and necessary factors in promoting order change. Such an exercise is incredibly needed for, as the author puts it, is the only way of completely grasping in full the elements that comprise inherently complex phenomena such are international orders.



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He argues in favor of a view that international orders are composed of two core features. First, that they are based on either ideational factors, which he calls *authoritative forms of power*, and material factors, which he labels *coercive forms of power*. Second, that irrespective of its idiosyncrasies, orders tend to end sooner or later. This way, it would be only logical to say that orders carry within themselves frailties and tensions which tend to accentuate themselves over time, if explored, could prove to be their undoing leading, *ad postremum* to their complete fraying. That is exactly where Phillips is getting at. Orders tend to be created with some basic assumptions and objectives in mind. In other words, they tend to be created to address some specific issues and problems. After or even in the process of dealing with these questions others, however, tend to arise and it should the newly established order not adapt to them, either by inherent incapacity and lack of flexibility or by outright lack of political will and resistance, ensuing struggles would tend to follow, culminating in their substitution or, at the very least, forced transformation.

Thus, in order to acquire the empirical evidence needed to support these claims Phillips deals with his two proposed cases in a comparative historical fashion. By observing how either Christendom and Sino-centric orders, each at their own turn, were transformed, with the regions shifting to a sovereign international order, he is able to come up with convincing arguments about the interplay of both material and ideational factors in order shifting and how both are necessary to such an outcome. Especially important were factors such political polarization, a component of what he labels *ideological schism*, and military innovation. Both factors were paramount in order transformation.

With such lessons in mind, he also addresses the issue of contemporary order and how it is faring in the face of shocks in the guise of transnational terrorism growth, religious fundamentalism, post-colonial state failure, spread of weapons of mass destruction. Stricken by such security concerns, the author contends that states and the international community need to understand the origins of the main "vectors" pressing for change and act accordingly if the present order is to be preserved. Albeit its many flaws it would be interesting to preserve the current order for it has



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institutionalized moral valuable advances, examples being norms of non-aggression, of non-intervention, and human rights covenants.

Interestingly enough, for Phillips international orders can be distinguished from one another following four axes: 1) *principle of differentiation*; 2) *purposive orientation*; 3) *institutional form*; and 4) *distribution of capabilities*. These axes inform the different degrees of international systems change. *Positional change* signifies that the relative distribution of power and prestige shifts between the actors but the basic institutions and values remain. As for *institutional change*, some rather large changes occur on the institutions of the given order. *Purposive changes* entails both the transformation of the underlying moral assumptions and institutions. Finally, *configurative changes* entail shifts occur on three areas: the order's principle of unit differentiation, the values, and the fundamental institutions.

The book is comprised of three parts and ten chapters, apart from introduction and conclusion. In the first part, which is comprised of chapters one and two, is laid the conceptual framework. In part two, composed of chapters three through nine, are presented the empirical evidences supporting the author's claims. In part three, consisting of chapter ten, are analysed the constraints and threats to the current international order. The book is very interesting in that it offers an insight rather different from that provided by constructivist and realist mainstreams. It is an excellent exercise of synthesis, showing us readers, one more time, that bridges can be constructed between constructivism and realism and that such efforts do not from great theoretical tension by default. It is a good read and might interest students and practitioners of International Relations (especially constructivists and realists), History and Sociology alike.

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