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Helen V. Milner, Dustin Tingley. *Sailing the Water's Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 352 pp. $27.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-691-17481-5.

Reviewed by Phil Potter

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At the outset of ***Sailing the Water's Edge,*** Helen Milner and Dustin Tingley posit that foreign policy can be every bit as contentious as domestic politics. This is a bold assertion in our turbulent political times, but they marshal such a convincing array of evidence that I found myself happily conceding the point.

This book, which has already become a staple in graduate courses around the country, is the present apex of a burgeoning literature on the domestic underpinnings of US foreign policy. By now it is old hat to talk about how system-level theory kept questions such as those posed in ***Sailing the Water's Edge*** relegated to the background for decades. We are a long way past that, with "second image," national-level arguments firmly established as some of the most active and innovative areas of research in the discipline.

What has been missing to date are the big synthesizing efforts that pull together what we know about the domestic politics of US foreign policy into a coherent picture. Absent such frameworks, our knowledge has been fragmented in ways that obscure the deeper institutionalized processes that consistently drive American foreign policy across time, policy domains, and actors. This ambitious book delivers exactly this. Prior work has challenged the notion of "two presidencies," mostly by exploring the underappreciated constraints that Congress places on the use of military force.[1] Other scholars have explored individual policy instruments.[2] Milner and Tingley pull the strands together into a single, coherent theoretical picture.

In the simplest formulation of their question, Milner and Tingley ask why presidents choose the foreign policy tools that they do. Their answer is that most presidents have limited choices because politics most definitely does not "stop at the water's edge"—other political actors constrain both what presidents can do abroad and how they do it.

The argument departs from the premise that presidents choose from a variety of policy instruments with which to pursue their foreign policy preferences. Presidents can respond to a situation militarily, but might also employ aid, trade, sanctions, or other policy options that accomplish their ends. All the items on this menu, however, are not equally feasible all the time. Their availability is conditioned by the constraints that other political actors place on the president. Policy options that are ideologically charged or that have major distributive consequences tend to be contested by the president's political competitors.

From here, the authors derive a variety of arguments that they assiduously test, but the most significant contribution is the finding that this re-

lationship between options and constraint leads to an overprovision of militarized policy. The implication is that there is pressure on the president to pursue policies that cut against the liberal internationalism that has underpinned US strategy since the end of World War II.

Milner and Tingley are essentially reversing the prioritization that scholars have traditionally imposed between high and low politics. They see militarization as the path of least resistance, and policies that reinforce the existing global order as both much more valuable and much harder to achieve. This is a crucial insight that recasts how we think about foreign policy, but also redirects our thinking about the direction that American politics will go from here. Given that the book was published in 2015, it was also remarkably timely and prescient given the speed with which the United States appears to be distancing itself from the postwar institutional order under the Trump administration.

What really sets this book apart is its scope. Milner and Tingley make comparisons across policy areas including trade, aid, immigration, sanctions, and military force. The chapters are organized according to the constraints imposed by a full spectrum of political actors: interest groups, Congress, and the federal bureaucracy. Each chapter delves deeply into multiple foreign policy issue areas, with mixed methods. The combination raises the bar for work that follows. Where it was previously sufficient to consider a single policy area, the book makes it clear that doing so will bias findings to such an extent that there is little to be learned.

One might quibble with the details, but it is hard to avoid the impression that the authors are broadly correct about the basic mechanics of interaction between domestic politics and foreign policy in the United States. That they are able to explain the outlines of so many policies and the behavior of so many actors with a single parsimonious theory suggests that they have hit on something fundamental about the way the US foreign policy process works.

It is obviously unfair to praise a book for being expansive in its scope only to immediately critique it for omissions, but books that set up grand frameworks inevitably invite readers to think about extensions and the following should be viewed in that light. While this is an admittedly selfish appeal from someone with an interest in a particular element of statecraft, one notable absence in the book is a serious discussion of diplomacy. Diplomatic engagement is dispensed within a footnote in the introduction and again in the theory chapter, but never really emerges as a fully fledged policy instrument. I take Milner and Tingley's point that diplomacy permeates all sorts of foreign policy actions and therefore might be thought of as part-and-parcel of the other policies they explore in detail. However, an emerging body of work treats diplomacy as a distinct option in much the same way that Milner and Tingley think about the use of force, aid, and sanctions.[3] It is also central to foreign policy trade-offs as they are popularly and politically understood. When we consider some of seminal foreign policy decisions of the past two decades such as those in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the fundamental choice has been between continuing to talk diplomatically or resorting to force.

On a different note, while I am highly sympathetic to Milner and Tingley's core point that political actors aside from the president deeply influence our foreign policy, I also caution that this revisionist streak in the literature runs the risk of going too far. As Milner and Tingley document, until relatively recently the prevailing trend has been to treat the president as nearly all-powerful in the realm of foreign policy. Congress was viewed as derelict in its foreign policy duties, limited as they are, and other political actors were seen as almost entirely disengaged to the extent to which scholars bothered to consider them at all. The more recent literature, including ***Sailing the***

Water's Edge, convincingly resurrects the role of Congress and other sources of domestic constraint.[4] These forces are meaningful constraints on the president, and we are better off for books like this one that make that clear. But, like all revisionist trends, it is worth keeping in mind why the original argument existed in the first place. Presidents remain very powerful in foreign affairs nearly all the time. Constraint emerges only sporadically and incompletely. Milner and Tingley themselves are quite careful to acknowledge this, and the future work that follows on this seminal volume should replicate that caution.

I applaud Milner and Tingley for bringing to light the role of understudied actors in the foreign policy process, especially since the reason these areas are understudied is that they are hard to research. In particular, attention to interest groups and the bureaucracy is relatively unusual and sorely needed. Continuing on the theme of letting no good deed go unpunished, I wonder about still others. The first of these is the public, which is addressed in chapter 6 but not as an independent actor in the policy process. Rather, the authors use public opinion findings to confirm key theoretical holdings about information asymmetries and ideological divisions among other political actors. But much of the early work on constraints on presidential foreign policy focused squarely on public opinion, particularly in wartime and as driven by casualties. It would be interesting to know the extent to which those process apply to the arguments made in the book. Second, particularly given the aggressive independent role that the media has taken in confronting Trump administration, it might be productive to explore the media as an independent actor in the the foreign policy process.

To conclude, this is one of those rare books that will provide an organizing principle for a substantial body of work that will inevitably follow it. By reframing the discourse of foreign policy in terms of competing actors and policy substitutions, Milner and Tingley have fundamentally changed how future scholars will both theorize about and measure foreign policy decisions. The discipline soured some time ago on simple models of the frequency, timing, and probability of specific events such as the use of force, but a replacement was not immediately forthcoming. This book provides a much clearer indication of precisely why that approach is so problematic, and, more importantly, where we might find a more productive path. I congratulate the authors on a tremendous achievement.

Notes

[1]. Douglas L. Kriner, *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[2]. See, for example, Margaret E. Peters, "Trade, Foreign Direct Investment, and Immigration Policy Making in the United States," *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (2014): 811-844; Broz, J. Lawrence and Seth H. Werfel, "Exchange Rates and Industry Demands for Trade Protection," *International Organization* 68, no. 2 (2014): 393-416; and Nicholas L. Miller, "The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions," *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (2014): 913-944.

[3]. For example, see James H. Lebovic and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "The Diplomatic Core: How the United States Employs High-Level Visits as a Scarce Resource," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2016): 107-23; and Philip B. K. Potter, "Electoral Margins and American Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2013): 505-518.

[4]. Douglas L. Kriner and Eric Schickler, *Investigating the President: Congressional Checks on Presidential Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, *War and Democratic Con-*

straint: How the Public Influences Foreign Policy
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

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