

---

BOOK REVIEWS

---

Colin Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and US Foreign Policy since World War II*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp.386. \$26.95, PB. ISBN 978-0-691-14182-4.

In *Hard Line*, Colin Dueck asks what explains the various Republican foreign policy stances since World War II. He posits four ‘tensions or dichotomies’ that delineate American foreign-policy thinking and essentially serve as dependent variables: realism versus idealism, hawk versus dove, nationalism versus accommodation, and intervention versus anti-intervention (p. 29). Drawing from these distinctions, Dueck sketches ‘four distinct archetypes’ that he argues have recurred on the right half of the political spectrum since World War II: conservative realists, conservative hawks, conservative nationalists, and conservative anti-interventionists (p. 31).

*Hard Line* then briefly describes four competing explanations of foreign-policy outcomes, roughly corresponding to foreign-policy theories based on liberalism (domestic politics and domestic economic interests), realism (systemic pressures), and constructivism (collectively-held ideas). Dueck suggests that each of these independent variables falls short, and proposes a different explanation. According to Dueck, presidential candidates’ need to build domestic coalitions leads them to adopt certain policy positions (p. 36). Presidents’ positions subsequently influence the broader party stance on foreign affairs.

Although Dueck does not lay out the theory clearly, it seems the argument is that the independent variable – the need for presidents to win elections – is mediated through an intervening variable, ‘presidential leadership’, which produces Republican presidents (and Republican Parties) rooted either in conservative realism, conservative hawkishness, conservative nationalism, or conservative anti-interventionism.

Indisputably, US presidents have wielded tremendous influence in shaping foreign policy, particularly in the era after World War II. Since then, Congress has never declared war, instead delegating its constitutional authority on war and peace to the president. Problematically, though, Dueck points out that foreign policy is rarely the decisive factor in American presidential elections, draining much of the value from his independent variable and leaving him to focus on

'presidential leadership'. This sets the stage for a somewhat circular argument where presidents adopt the foreign-policy strategies that they prefer. The trouble is that unlike realism, liberalism, and constructivism, there is no theory here to explain why presidents prefer what they do.

This problem tarnishes the remainder of the book. After Chapter One offers the author's explanation for GOP ('Grand Old Party') foreign policy, the seven chapters that follow describe the foreign policy thought of Republican leaders since World War II: Robert Taft, Dwight Eisenhower, Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, Bush the Elder, and Bush the Younger. Each chapter is a catalogue of foreign-policy events during the periods in question, derived primarily from secondary sources. There are few new historical interpretations and little examination of competing explanations. Dueck's theory itself is almost entirely absent from the narrative history chapters, which should have been used to evaluate the author's own explanation against competing theories.

In the introduction the author identifies himself as a conservative and promises to pass judgment on the foreign policies of each GOP leader, but the chapters generally read like a lawyer's brief defending each figure. Only the final chapter evaluating George W. Bush is genuinely critical. Readers may take issue with Dueck's rulings on the figures in question. While Henry Kissinger helped set the table for 'America's greatest foreign policy failure' in Vietnam (p. 179), the reader learns that his legacy is one of 'realism, competence, and success' (p. 184). While the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) was wrong to suggest that the Soviets were thinking about launching a nuclear first-strike against the United States, the reader is informed that 'in many other ways the CPD was essentially right about Soviet intentions and capabilities' (p. 198).

Dueck engages in *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning, particularly in defending Nixon (p. 184) and Reagan (p. 227), arguing that because the American position internationally improved during their tenure, they should be judged as successes. Similarly, Bush the Younger saw his second term to an end without another terrorist attack on US soil, which 'probably had something to do with the administration's policies on counterterrorism' (p. 288). This sort of argument precludes the possibility that exogenous factors may influence America's position or security independent of the actions of a particular leader.

The Republican leaders examined regularly migrate between archetypes without explanation. These transformations could have served as opportunities to evaluate competing theories, but they are not used in this way. To take one example, realists would likely argue that the

reason Robert Taft changed from a 'conservative anti-interventionist' into a 'staunch cold warrior' (p. 81) and 'conservative nationalist' (p. 86) was the emergence of the Soviet Union as a credible peer competitor to the United States. Dueck does not explain how the need to build a winning political coalition better explains that outcome.

There are also problems and inconsistencies with Dueck's taxonomy. For example, although he includes 'conservative hawks' and 'conservative nationalists' as two of his distinct archetypes, he argues that 'a hawkish and intense American nationalism' has been the 'one overarching constant' in right-of-center foreign policy circles for decades (p. 2). How then can conservative hawks and conservative nationalists be separate categories?

President Eisenhower, for example, is described as a 'cold war internationalist' (p. 85) who was animated by 'a deep American nationalism' (p. 115), who effectively balanced the two factions of Republicans in Congress, who were themselves 'badly divided ... between nationalists and internationalists' yet 'had more in common by [that] time than is usually recognized' (pp. 91–2). So was Eisenhower a nationalist or an internationalist – or both? Were Congressional Republicans in the 1950s badly divided between nationalists and internationalists, or did they have more in common than is usually recognized? Barry Goldwater is described as a nationalist and a hawk on the same page (p. 121). The chapter on President Reagan describes him as representing 'the idealist as hawk', yet he, too, was a nationalist (p. 193).

Similarly, 'hawks' and 'interventionists' are distinguished from one another in that 'hawks may believe in the utility of force without always supporting military intervention abroad' (p. 30). In the chapter on President Bush the Elder, Dueck redefines the four distinct archetypes, doing away with 'hawks' and replacing them with 'interventionists' (p. 254), but the reader is left wondering what changed and why. The slipperiness and considerable overlap of Dueck's archetypes raises questions about their purpose and value.

*Hard Line* could have been either a work of political science that explained why the GOP adopted the various policies it has since World War II, or it could have been a history book that provided a new interpretation of the events that occurred during the same period. Unfortunately, as political science, *Hard Line* is underspecified, under-theorized and perplexing. As history, it is drearily derivative and provides little that readers with a passing familiarity with American diplomatic history will find illuminating.

JUSTIN LOGAN © 2012  
Cato Institute, Washington DC