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**Patrick C. Coaty (2019) *Small state behaviour in strategic and intelligence studies. David's sling*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 173pp, hbk, ISBN: 978-3-319-89446-1. €96.29.**

Nuclear weapons have attracted long-standing scholarly interest. They have been studied from various perspectives, such as their impact on the international system, their role in shaping foreign and security policy, and their proliferation since 1945. Patrick C. Coaty's book adopts the last viewpoint and looks at the decisions that affected elite decisions to acquire nuclear weapons. As the title suggests, the book aims to contribute to several streams of scholarly literature, namely strategic studies, small states scholarship, and IR theory. Composed of a comprehensive theoretical chapter and five empirical chapters, besides the introduction and conclusion, it analyses the strategic thinking behind nuclear proliferation. The book draws two conclusions, one analytical and one policy-oriented. Proliferation, it argues, is a result of domestic elites' efforts to increase their international legitimacy. Second, it offers a policy recommendation along the classic neorealist lines: the safest way to prevent war is to proliferate nuclear weapons as much as possible so that conflict becomes too costly for everybody.

The first thing that catches the reader's eye is the extremely confusing title of this volume. Coaty's book is a different book than the title suggests. It is not about small states' behaviour in strategic and intelligence studies. It is, in fact, not about intelligence at all, if we do not consider the technical expertise necessary to develop nuclear weapons "intelligence". Unfortunately, the book is not about small states either. Most of the case studies focus on countries that can hardly be considered small states, however we define the concept: China, India, Pakistan, Iran. Only Israel is close to being, in some respects, a small state and we can consider North Korea small with a certain flexibility, at least in comparison to other countries

in the region. The first empirical chapter that analyses the development of nuclear weapons in the US is, arguably, used as a yardstick to study the rest of the cases; but that also raises an issue of comparability between a superpower and what the author claims are small states.

The book is, in fact, about weaker states in an adversarial relationship. It does not engage the literature on small states. It ignores that the concept of the small state has a specific meaning, and there is serious scholarship that develops ideas about the behaviour of small states in the international system. Except for Israel, all studied cases are just weaker powers that search for an efficient way to face their stronger opponent. Still, they are not small states that would be structurally disadvantaged in any significant way.

So what does the book do instead of studying small states? It employs an adjusted analytical framework by John Boyd (an OODA Loop – Observe, Orient, Decision, Action) to recount how the elites of the weaker powers concluded that they needed to develop or acquire nuclear weapons. Coaty spends a lot of time describing how political elites understood their situation and how they could draw in experts who provided technical knowledge. It is somewhat unclear, however, what added value this description brings. It surely is not a new perspective on the cases themselves. Coaty uses very few primary sources and takes most of the empirics from more detailed academic sources. It is not a comparison between and among the cases either. There is little effort in this direction, and no explicitly comparative conclusions are drawn. That is a missed opportunity in particular. The book includes various types of countries – autocratic and democratic, regional powers and underdogs. It would be interesting to read more about how the alleged domestic elites strive for international legitimacy plays out in these different settings. What remains is just the application of the adjusted OODA loop that brings little new knowledge and understanding.

In the end, the reader is left wondering if the book's primary purpose was the final policy-oriented conclusion: that proliferation of nuclear weapons leads to a more stable international system. The problem is that this point does not follow directly from any analysis within the book. All of the empirical material focuses on the period before the countries develop nuclear weapons, not on how they behave afterwards. Paradoxically, the research focuses on security cultures and on how domestic elites understand and deconstruct reality; but then culminates with a quotation by Kenneth Waltz. The final claim also ignores the broad academic literature on non-proliferation and remains restricted to the simplistic neo-realist argument that disregards non-state actors, individuals and various misunderstandings. Mutual deterrence may work among a limited number of nuclear powers that are capable of handling the technology and the materials involved. In the world of failing states, ever more capable non-state actors and decreasing costs of technology, however, a call for more proliferation sounds dubious at best.

Patrick C. Coaty's book deserved a title that better reflects its content. It contributes little to small state scholarship, as suggested above. It contributes to the proliferation literature somewhat; but that community will have read much more detailed accounts of the cases included in this book before.

*Tomáš Weiss*

*Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University*

*Prague, Czechia*

[weiss@fsv.cuni.cz](mailto:weiss@fsv.cuni.cz)