

By highlighting the importance of composition of interveners, Nalbandov provides a glimmer of hope to those who feel cynical towards the current practices of foreign intervention.

*Suk Chun*

Turchin, Peter & Sergey A Nefedov (2009) *Secular Cycles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 349 pp. ISBN 9780691136967.

The core thesis of this book is that demographic trends and their wider implications generate 'secular cycles' in the rise and decline of political orders. The authors point to how population growth in agrarian societies beyond 'carrying capacity', or in excess of productivity gains, has important social effects, including land scarcity, declining living standards, urbanization and greater inequality. Population growth initially provides for economic growth and an expanding elite. However, elite extraction gets increasingly excessive as population growth eventually leads to a declining surplus. The resulting intra-elite competition and increasing class tension generates social and political instability and state failure. Instability in turn leads to a decline in elite numbers through mechanisms such as civil war, purges and downward social mobility. An end to overpopulation (either through population decline or an increase in carrying capacity) allows for the rise of a new imperial cycle. The theory is evaluated through two cycles in four 'states' (England, France, Rome and Russia). Although I am generally sceptical of many variants of Malthusian arguments and claims about regular cycles in political dynamics, it is hard not to be impressed by this book. The authors provide a rigorously developed theoretical model and evaluate this by an impressive wealth of historical data for the cases studies, including innovative sources such as coin hoards as a proxy for internal warfare and instability. The book provides a strong case for parsimonious theories and quantitative historical analysis. However, I missed a discussion of the theory's wider implications, in particular whether it only applies to agrarian-based empires or whether demographic-structural trends may tell us something about future prospects for conflict and stability.

*Kristian Skrede Gleditsch*

Newman, Edward; Roland Paris & Oliver P Richmond, eds (2009) *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*. New York: United Nations University Press. xi + 392 pp. ISBN 9789280811742.

Post-Cold War peacebuilding mainly rests on the central assumption of the liberal paradigm of international politics – that promotion of democracy and market liberalization is an appropriate means of fostering durable peace. In practice, however, this assumed relation between democracy, free market and peace appears to be precarious. *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding* critically examines the liberal premise

of international peacebuilding interventions and brings together current debates. By combining thematic and case study approaches, it explores the nature, effectiveness and legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding. The first section provides an overview of the current debate and challenges to liberal peacebuilding. It critically explores the flaws of the liberal peace project and suggests a new research agenda to a post-liberal peace. It also discusses weaknesses of criticisms on liberal peacebuilding. Considering welfare as well as transitional justice, it provides valuable insights. While the contributors acknowledge that liberal peacebuilding results in at least a negative peace, most of them doubt its ability to foster sustainable peace. Particularly in its neo-liberal form, the authors conclude that contemporary peacebuilding tends to create a virtual or hybrid peace, lacking context sensitivity and inclusion. The second section reflects this diagnosis, indicating gaps between political and economic dimensions of liberal peacebuilding. With a respectable number of theoretically well-informed case studies, the volume provides comprehensive insights into challenges to current efforts to consolidate conflict-prone and post-conflict societies. A final chapter merging the conclusions of the studies with suggestions for a new research agenda would have been desirable. That such an agenda is urgently needed is demonstrated convincingly, making this book a crucial and rewarding read for scholars and practitioners alike.

*Valerie Waldow*

Thyne, Clayton L (2009) *How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict: Cheap Signals, Costly Consequences*. Lanham, MA: Lexington. 239 pp. ISBN 9780739135464.

Quantitative studies have demonstrated that civil wars are more likely in poor, semi-authoritarian states with rough terrain and exploitable resources. While these variables tell us which states are at risk of conflict, they generally do not change and, thus, give little information about the timing of conflict. In *How International Relations Affect Civil Conflict*, Clayton Thyne addresses this gap by arguing that external states affect the likelihood of civil war by sending signals about their support for the government or the insurgents that may be interpreted differently by each side. These different interpretations lead to information asymmetries, which cause bargaining failure and the outbreak of war. Thyne uses the example of Nicaragua – while structural features did not make conflict there more likely in the late 1970s than in previous periods, a shift in support from the USA following Jimmy Carter's election emboldened the opposition and was misinterpreted by the government. In addition, Thyne conducts a quantitative analysis of the onset, duration and outcome of civil war, showing that signals sent by external states before and during war have dramatic consequences on conflict processes. In doing so, he helps explain a puzzling finding in quantitative studies – interventions by external states prolong civil wars. Thyne argues that the effect of interventions must be understood in