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Danilo Di Mauro. The UN and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: American hegemony and UN intervention since 1947. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

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Danilo Di Mauro. *The UN and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: American hegemony and UN intervention since 1947*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

In this book, which started out as a PhD dissertation in political science, Danilo Di Mauro tackles the question of the intervention of the United Nations in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Based on thorough statistical analysis of voting patterns in the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as data on UN mediation and peacekeeping missions, his somewhat unexpected conclusion is that UN activity in the Arab-Israeli conflict has not been determined by developments in the conflict itself but rather by the internal dynamics of the UN organization.

Di Mauro sets out to examine UN “activity” on the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1947. He defines activity as “the sum of all the deliberative (resolutions) and operative (mediation and peace mission) acts, intended to control and resolve the conflict” (p. 1). In other words, activity is what takes place inside the “black box” of the UN (p. 2). Few conflicts in modern times have received as much attention as the conflict in the Middle East, and the choice of this particular conflict, therefore, offers a wealth of material for analysis. The book’s introduction defines the concepts, sets up a theoretical framework, and lists a number of hypotheses for each of the four areas to be examined (Security Council voting, General Assembly voting, mediation, and peacekeeping missions). Chapter one then offers one of the major contributions of the book, with its extensive description of UN activity on the Arab-Israeli conflict in the period since 1947. Chapter two defines in more detail what is meant by the “Arab-Israeli conflict” and describes the conflict related variables used in the analysis. Chapter three analyzes the relationship between UN activity (measured here as Security Council and General Assembly resolutions) and the evolution of the regional conflict. In chapter four, Di Mauro analyzes voting behavior in the General Assembly in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict and identifies a crucial shift after the change of majority in that body in the mid-1970s, while chapter five looks at voting behavior in the Security Council. Chapters six and seven then investigate UN mediation and UN peacekeeping missions in relation to activity in the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as their relations with the dynamics of the conflict itself.

The analysis throughout strives to be thorough, empirical, and objective. The pervasive use of statistical methods contributes both to the book’s major strengths and its weaknesses. Di Mauro states that the intended audience for the book are scholars interested in third party interventions in conflicts, and, indeed, his finding that the UN activity in this particular conflict owes more to the configuration of groups of states inside the organization than to developments on the ground in the conflict itself goes against conventional wisdom and offers a substantive contribution to that literature. This finding is particularly evident in the analysis of UN mediation and peacekeeping missions, where Di Mauro finds that there is no influence of variables describing the conflict (e.g., intensity of the dispute, number of victims, level of hostility, type of conflict, or involvement of the major powers) on the activity of mediation (pp. 188-189), while there is a negative relationship between the number of security-related drafts introduced in the Security Council and the numbers of and budgets for peace operations (p. 224).

A second contribution of the book lies in its theoretical explanation of the United States’ ambivalent relationship to the organization. After decolonization, the majority in the General Assembly shifted, and the third world states have, since the mid-1970s, composed a distinctive voting bloc on the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States found itself in opposition to this bloc and has increasingly had to rely on its veto in the Security Council to get its way on this issue. Di Mauro’s book provides clear evidence for this shift in voting patterns and also provides a compelling explanation for why the United States nevertheless

remains a member of the UN and still accepts the organization's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a hegemon, the United States could have left when the organization went against its wishes; however, says Di Mauro, even though the United States is the most powerful state in the world, it still relies on the UN for legitimization of its policies. The UN is a constitutive part of the international order in which the United States is the hegemon, and the United States is therefore unable to exclude the UN completely even when the US disagrees with the organization's policies. Following the same logic, UN decisions on the Arab-Israeli conflict will still be legitimate even if they may not always be followed up with action (pp. 238-239).

Despite the robust results they offer, the overwhelming use of statistical methods in this book will undoubtedly also serve to alienate potential readers. The book is full of figures and tables, and the text would have benefitted from further editing to make it more easily accessible to a non-specialist audience. Furthermore, the reliance on such methods leads, on occasion, to instances in which the book is unable to answer the questions posed because the method cannot work with the available evidence. For example, in the introduction, Di Mauro hypothesizes that "groups and majorities [in the Security Council] are led by the P-5, who affect the number and the subjects of the drafts proposed" (p. 9). However, it later proves impossible to test this hypothesis with the available statistical methods because of the constantly changing identity of the non-permanent members of the Council (p. 136, 231). But this does not mean that it's impossible to analyze changing coalitions within the Security Council and whether such majorities are being led by one or more of the permanent members. This is one instance where Di Mauro's analysis could usefully have been supplemented by the use of qualitative methods such as detailed narrative process tracing of key moments and decision.

A second weakness of the analysis resulting from the reliance on statistical methods lies in the problem of operationalization of the variables. Di Mauro explains convincingly why he is interested in UN "activity" – what goes on inside the UN "black box" – rather than "output" and that he therefore chooses to count the number of roll calls in the Security Council and the General Assembly instead of simply looking at the number of final resolutions. Unfortunately, the method's need for a quantifiable measure prevents Di Mauro from going deeper into the dynamics of the UN to look at the full picture of its "activity." As anyone who has studied the decision-making process at the UN can attest, the majority of activity takes place outside the formal setting of meetings and roll calls – in corridors, behind closed doors, and in the delegates' lounge – and the majority of draft resolutions never even make it to the voting stage. For any one issue, several states may propose resolutions or talk about various proposals, but rather than having formal votes on all these proposals, draft resolutions will be withdrawn once it becomes clear that they're unlikely to receive the necessary majority. As Di Mauro himself points out, the General Assembly rejected only 3% of all proposals before it (pp. 16-17), while the Security Council, rejected 18.6% of the proposals it voted upon (p. 22). In both cases the two organs accepted the vast majority of proposals which were put to a vote. These numbers illustrate that despite the effort to expand the evidence beyond merely looking at adopted resolutions, the chosen measure of roll calls is not adequate to analyze the complexities of UN activity in the General Assembly and the Security Council on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Overall, this book makes a contribution to the study of UN intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict because this is an area few have studied before. The descriptive chapter in particular, as well as the theoretical explanation for why UN activity is more related to the internal dynamics of the organization than to developments of the conflict itself, offer valuable insights into the subject. However, the book neglects the very large existing historical literature on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even though the author's stated goal is to

contribute to the field of conflict resolution, the book's findings should be of interest both to historians of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to historians of the UN. Unfortunately, both of these groups are unlikely to take much notice of the book because it doesn't engage with existing debates in those disciplines.

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