

## *Book Review*

### **NAZLI CHOUCRI. 2012. CYBERPOLITICS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. CAMBRIDGE: MIT PRESS.**

Mark Thomas

In the last half of the twentieth century, the world was transformed by the internet. Every facet of life has been affected by the revolution in telecommunications, from commerce to entertainment to academics. In the past few years social networking has been highlighted as a major factor in political revolutions and popular protest, and recent headlines warn of hackers from Russia to China to the United States who target governments and corporations to disrupt operations and steal secrets.

There is no shortage of commentary on the internet's catalytic role in the world today, but it can be difficult to grasp how the frameworks of the real world and the cyber world interact. This book admirably fills that gap by systematically covering each aspect of the internet and how it fits into the already-charted political and economic landscape. Specifically, Ms. Choucri draws on the lateral pressure theory of international relations that she helped pioneer to discuss the implications for the web. Lateral pressure theory holds that external activities by states are the result of internal drivers, in particular three "master variables." The master variables of population, technology, and (natural) resources are described in proportion to one another, and result in six possible state profiles. Each profile is defined by a particular arrangement of resources – for example, Profile 1 is the category for states that have more resources than they do population, and more population than they have technology. As states are fit into the six categories, behavioral patterns emerge. Chapter 4 demonstrates data for each of the six profiles, like GDP per capita, life expectancy, and other measures. Unfortunately, these secondary analyses, not the six profiles, are used to analyze trends in cyberpolitics. While the subsequent conclusions are interesting – for instance, having effective e-governance is correlated with GDP per capita but not with government stability – they fail to leverage the full power of the lateral pressure theory.

Ultimately, the great strength of the book is not in its empirical analysis but in its theoretical framework. Ms. Choucri uses the idea of an "image" to break down cyberpolitics into a few primary components. The first image is at the individual level – individual users of the internet, their demands and capabilities. The second image is the state, with its efforts to regulate and utilize the internet. The third is the level of international or-

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organizations and bodies, and the fourth is the global level that combines all of those actors in the literal ecosystem of the world, including environmental and other concerns. The systematic progression of analysis in the book through the different images results in a completely thorough coverage of the topic at hand. In the first image the book discusses issues of cyber access and the empowerment of the anonymous individual. The second image is concerned with the attempts by the state to regulate cyberspace using techniques designed for real space, and the potential advantages of the internet afforded through e-government. The third image discusses the international implications of cyberspace, namely the increased power given to non-state actors and the movement away from a US-centric internet. Finally, the fourth image covers the global system and compares the commons of the internet to the environment to understand the different futures we might face.

The analysis is thorough and convincing. Marshaling the results the past few decades of cyberpolitics scholarship, *Cyberpolitics in International Relations* is concise yet comprehensive. Organization of ideas is emphasized, with numerous charts and graphs scattered throughout the book, but it remains accessible to any interested reader. It is most useful practitioners of international affairs who wish to incorporate cyberpolitics into their current conceptualization of international and domestic politics. *Cyberpolitics* avoids the technicalities of computer engineering and programming to emphasize the consequences of existing trends in those fields for politics. As a book of theory, it focuses on creating a framework to think about cyberpolitics and resists making any strong conclusions. *Cyberpolitics* lays the groundwork for a burgeoning field and outlines the categories in which further research is needed.

One of the most interesting discussions Ms. Choucri provides, which tends to be grossly overlooked by other commentators, pertains to the governance of the internet. Chapter 6 of the book lucidly outlines the extant governance structure, which is a loose conglomeration of international entities dominated by private US organizations originally established by the government. These groups, most notably the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, make the decisions that determine how the internet will run – the fundamental structure of interconnectivity upon which the World Wide Web is based. Those decisions ultimately determine the limits on the use and regulation of the internet by private and state actors. These relatively obscure decisions recently came to the media's attention during the Edward Snowden leaks. One leaked memo indicated that the US's National Security Agency may have intentionally provided a flawed random number algorithm to the National Institute of Standards and Technology to give itself a backdoor into supposedly secure encryptions based on the algorithm, which is used worldwide. Many are beginning to question the US-centric model of the internet, a trend Ms. Choucri predicts will gain momentum and the resolution of which may determine the future of the internet. Most notably, the Brazilian government has begun a series of steps to distance its citizens' data from US access, a move that some experts worry could herald the breakup of the internet.

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Cyberpolitics in International Relations will only continue to grow more relevant as time passes. As Chapter 5 states: “[cyberspace] is rapidly becoming politicized. Serious political contentions arise concerning both the underlying problems and the potential solutions.” (p. 87) The great contribution of the book is to help stakeholders understand both the fundamental conflicts at the heart of internet expansion and the array of possible resolutions.

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