

Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security

Barry Buzan and Ole Wøever. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press - 2003
xxvi+564 pages. References. Index.

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The explanation and understanding of the patterns of international politics is once again at the heart of Buzan and Wøever's inquiry. As in their previous collaborative work, they seem to suggest that the experience of debating theory as a result of the end of the Cold War indicates that causal explanations of complex events play some role in evaluating analytical frameworks. However, *Regions and Powers* goes beyond such argumentation and provides a perceptive organisation of the oeuvre of what has become known as the Copenhagen School of security studies. Indeed, the volume is not simply a reiteration of Buzan's and Wøever's previous work, but also (and mostly) an inspiring effort to map the methodological tools of a perspective on international studies. In this sense, *Regions and Powers* is both a testimony to this encyclopedic endeavour to chart the gist of the Copenhagen approach as well as a cornucopia of the authors' insight. Moreover, it is extremely refreshing to come upon a work in the field of security studies, which does not make '9/11' the focal point of its corollaries, while at the same time taking account of its import.

For the fans of the security studies' framework suggested by Buzan and Wøever (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), this latest instalment develops further the sophistication of their propositions by concentrating mainly on the territorial aspects of security structures, thereby better contextualising the authors' analytical insights on securitisation. For the detractors, this volume is perhaps another proof of the self-fulfilling prophecy of the conceptualisations of the Copenhagen School, since it is relatively easy to rebuff the authors for providing cherry-picked evidence for their argument. However, even in the latter instance, one needs to take into account (if not admire) the consistency and circumspection with which Buzan and Wøever present their analytical approach.

In its essence, *Regions and Powers* systematises the authors' earlier analysis of regional security complexes (RSC) into a regional security complex theory (RSCT). The value-added of the volume derives from the contextualisation and application of the security complexes framework to a multitude of global environments spanning the orb of international politics.

The thrust of the RSCT proffered in this volume is premised on analyzing post-Cold War developments as well as suggesting possible scenarios (rather than predictions) for the future. In spite of this contemporaneous outlook, the authors' corollaries are at the same time informed by the study of history. Their point of departure is the year 1500, which (according to Buzan and Wøever) marks the end of the division of the globe into separate worlds and initiates the age of regions (p. 14). *Regions and Powers* represents the dissolution of the Soviet Empire in a similar dramatic fashion. It insists that the Cold War was an instance of the freezing of the pace (but not of the processes) of region-building. Buzan and Wøever evidence this circumstantially, in the context of the subsequent acceleration of the structuration of the world along regional lines. On the one hand, according to the authors, regionalisation has been the result of particular global dynamics (p. 28); on the other, the operational autonomy of regions has been triggered by the advent of 'non-military actors' (p. 17). Thereby, the RSCT proposed by Buzan and Wøever emphasises the centrality of territoriality in the study of security dynamics. Such conceptualisation provides them with a basis for the analysis of the different levels of securitization in current international affairs (p. 29).

Indeed, *Regions and Powers* furthers its authors' attempts to improve the neorealist framework by problematising its ideational grid and incorporating into it elements of Wendtian constructivism. Of particular interest in this respect is their conceptualisation of sub-system analysis, which is still above the unit (state) level. Premising their arguments on this perspective, Buzan and Wøever proffer an attractive conceptualisation of power; and in particular of the agents of power. In effect they develop a hierarchy of powers: one superpower – the US, four great powers – Japan, China, Russia, France/Germany/the EU and a multitude of regional powers. The impact of these

'powers' is defined in terms of 'penetration' and 'overlay' (p. 49). Another improvement on neorealism is their re-evaluation of the notion of polarity. According to the authors, regions themselves do not possess an actor quality (perhaps with the exception of the EU – see pp. 352-74). Instead it is the projection of power and the extent of its reach (both materially and ideationally), which defines polarisation in international interactions.

In this way, Buzan and Wæver explicate the main elements of their RSCT: (i) regions are the appropriate levels of analysis of security studies; (ii) regions provide a useful organisation of and structure for empirical studies; and (iii) regions provide analytical scenarios for testing possible developments in the future. Therefore, the global map presented in *Regions and Powers* sketches a graticule of mutually exclusive RSCs, whose patterns of amity and enmity are dependent upon both proximity and specific roles (enemy, rival, friend). The latter aspect is a particular influence of constructivist theory, which Buzan and Wæver take on board in order to improve the depth of their propositions.

However, it is the very marriage of often-contradictory analytical perspectives (such as neorealism and constructivism) that most readers would take an issue with. Regardless of its well-thought-through methodological framework, *Regions and Powers* does not entirely convince in the applicability of its theoretical make-up. This is particularly the case in the discussion of the variables for the gradation of 'powers'. Although noteworthy, the current hierarchy in international relations suggested by Buzan and Wæver fails to establish a consistent justification for its selection of the particular 'powers'.

Regardless of some of the above-mentioned shortcomings, *Regions and Powers* is an extremely valuable contribution to the study of post-1989 security arrangements. The erudite perspectives presented by the authors respond to a nascent requirement to initiate a process of evaluation and theory-building of the global experiences of regionalisation. Buzan and Wæver provide a powerful insight into the dynamics of the structuration of international security. Moreover, rather than supplying merely a first-cut at the problem this volume represents and enduring contribution. *Regions and Powers* will likely remain as a primary source on how the discipline of security studies reacted to a crucial development occurring at an important stage of its intellectual development. Therefore, it is going to be a very helpful and lasting repository for anyone studying the post-Cold War period and looking for critical and highly-informed perspectives on its experience of regionalisation.