

Weird IR

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Weird IR

Deviant Cases in International Relations

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PREFACE

The Charlie Brown's Steakhouse on Raritan Avenue in Highland Park was an inauspicious place to inspire a book project. Every Thursday, Ph.D. students from the Rutgers Political Science department would take over the bar because it was the cheapest place to get a beer. We were among them. Those Thursdays were one of the brighter spots of our weekly routines because it was a chance to talk about office politics, regular politics, and political science.

Not too long into those Thursday night sessions, we began to tell funny stories about international relations. We told stories about stupid things that leaders said or did; bizarre loopholes in international law; diplomatic incidents; and generally, we waxed on the unanticipated consequences of the politics among states. Naturally, we spent most of our weeks trying to find the best possible anecdotes to share on Thursdays. Maybe we should have been spending more time on our dissertations. Then again, if we had, this book might not have happened.

At some point, we realized that our beer-fueled storytelling meant that we were also amassing a large catalog of amusing anecdotes. After we left Rutgers with our degrees and took positions as professors, we also learned that we could use these weird Thursday night stories in our teaching. We discovered that they held the potential to inspire new research questions for ourselves and for our students.

Even though we went our separate ways after Rutgers, our accumulated knowledge of Weird IR stayed with us. In fact, it became something of a co-vocation for each of us.

Fast forward to 2012, when we realized that we were getting older and dumber. Thus, we created *The Weird IR Blog* in order to preserve all of the stories that we had collected over the previous decade. We knew that we had coined the term “Weird IR” and that we were the only academics working on something like this. We were not prepared, however, for the attention that the blog received. As we continued to collect, research, and post some of our favorite stories, the blog’s readership grew. By 2017, we were getting a few hundred daily visitors to our website. We had no idea that so many people would be interested in Weird IR. So, we did what any reasonable author would do. We wrote this book.

Even though a few of our favorite vignettes made their way into this volume, it is not a collection of recycled blog posts. We think that we are better than that. We found new stories. We followed new leads and conducted interviews. Most importantly, we grouped our vignettes by themes that we feel are interesting, useful, and perhaps, understudied by IR scholars.

In that sense, this project has matured substantially since we started trading funny stories over beers in Highland Park. After a decade of experience as researchers and teachers, we realized that Weird IR can make a valuable contribution to our discipline. By paying more attention to deviant cases, researchers are more likely to question the key assumptions that underlie existing explanations. As a result, scholars and students alike might develop new and useful research questions. They can also conceive of better research designs and use them to explore established topics. By using Weird IR in the classroom, instructors can encourage students to think critically and creatively about a multitude of relevant subjects.

Naturally, we think that *Weird IR: Deviant Cases in International Relations* is worth reading. It is useful. We should also note that it is not normal, either.¹ We wrote it with multiple audiences in mind. Researchers and graduate students will find inspiration from our vignettes and will ponder how extant theory can or cannot explain them. Undergraduates will enjoy the stories and relate them to the classic IR concepts (e.g. sovereignty) and paradigms (e.g. realism) they study in

¹Did you really expect a book called *Weird IR* to be written like every other boring IR monograph?

class. Anyone, whether in academia or not, can appreciate the subtle and overtly bizarre nature of Weird IR. Because our goal is to make Weird IR as accessible and useful as possible, we wrote it with the old journalist's maxim "show, don't tell" in mind. We understand that this might be sacrilege in the social sciences, where scholars are expected to explain and interpret everything for the reader. We do nothing of the sort here. As much as possible, we leave the inferences up to you.

Accordingly, we have some unsolicited advice for reading this book. If you want to be entertained and do not care about the scholarly study of international relations, skip the introduction and epilogue and read chapters two through twelve. Alternatively, if you are interested in more scholarly pursuits, start by reading our introduction and think deliberately about deviant cases and their role in what we do as researchers. Then, read the rest of the book and we expect that you will have a different experience. Of course, your mileage may vary, but we think that there are different lessons to take from this book based on your own goals and how you approach our work.

We would like to acknowledge the support that made this book possible. We are both indebted to Palgrave Macmillan and its editorial staff, particularly Dr. Anca Pusca; our colleagues at our home institutions and throughout the discipline; Ashby Henningsen; Saizeriya; Kratz (the snack food); Krat (the feral cat); Mario Kart; and our supportive friends and families, especially our infinitely patient significant others.

While we have your attention, David has a few things he needs to get off his chest. First, he wants to thank his first-year seminar students, who provided useful feedback on this project. He also needs you to know that someone at Yokohama City University drank a Strong Zero in the faculty lounge and had the audacity to leave the empty in the recycling bin. Philip wants you to know that he could not have written this book without migrating to Japan so that he could leave heavy teaching loads behind and work at a research university. Special thanks to the nice folks at Japanese Immigration!

We always found it funny to see scholars dedicate long, tedious monographs on war or trade to their significant others or their parents, so we decided to take a different route. David dedicates this book to Philip, and Philip dedicates this book to David. Welcome to Weird IR.

Washington, USA
Suita, Japan

David Bell Mislan
Philip Streich

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