

**A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China. Dale C. Copeland. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024.**

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***A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China.* Dale C. Copeland. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024. ISBN Figures. Tables. Index. 978-0691172552. Pp. 504. Hardcover \$38. eBook \$24.89.**

Reviewed by Dr. Michael Hampson Ph.D.

Creating a theory to explain one small part of the world is a difficult task. Creating a grand theory that seeks to explain how entire countries interact is a truly daunting task. Dale C. Copeland's *A World Safe for Commerce: American Foreign Policy from the Revolution to the Rise of China* creates a grand theory of international relations that bridges offensive and defensive realism, thereby creating what he calls dynamic realism. Copeland structures his book into three distinct sections with the first two chapters outlining his theory of dynamic realism, with the middle seven chapters covering the history of United States foreign policy in relation to economic interests, and the last chapter applying his theory of dynamic realism to current US-China relations. Copeland provides a sorely needed addition to realist theory by including the role of economics, which then informs a compelling analysis of how China and the United States might behave given their relative economic projections.

Copeland's overall goal is to merge elements of offensive realism and defensive realism by using commercial or economic interests to explain what type of stance a state will take against an opposing state. Copeland argues that commercial interests will factor into a state's thinking about relative power, and if a state is powerful economically then they will be more apt to take a hardline stance. States will take more hardline stances against other states if they feel their economic standing might be hurt, which can explain why states oftentimes take stances that neither defensive nor offensive realism can account for.

Having established the importance of including commercial interests in realism, Copeland then expands this theory by outlining how states will use commercial interests in their security calculations. According to Copeland, when looking at an opposing state two external variables must be examined: the opposing state's behavior as a rational security

maximizer, and the anticipated economic and military power of the opposing state. From there Copeland outlines a trade-off logic between the two variables working in tension with one another, which then forms three propositions. The essence of his propositions is that states are going to increase their economic power to create a better security environment for themselves. This creates a security dilemma with economic access, and thereby creates conflicts between states. This tension between growth and security will then drive the behavior of the states in how they treat one another.

The history of United States foreign policy Copeland articulates takes up the bulk of the text and provides a comprehensive analysis to show how commercial interests have intersected with security interests from the inception of the United States to the end of the Cold War. Copeland shows in these chapters that much of United States foreign policy has been defined by securing good economic standing, thereby providing the empirical evidence needed to show the validity of his theory of dynamic realism. Copeland is exhaustive in the scope of the history he covers, and clearly shows the importance that economic interests have played in United States foreign policy.

The last chapter of Copeland's book applies his theory of dynamic realism to US/China relations. Copeland frames this chapter by articulating two competing views of China: an optimistic view where China does not overtake the United States economically, and a pessimistic view where China does overtake the United States economically. Copeland avoids predicting exactly how China will grow and behave, but instead wisely gives different scenarios about what might happen. The scenarios Copeland articulates are analyzed upon to what degree China behaves as a rational security maximizer and whether China can overtake the United States in economic power. Four scenarios can then be drawn from those two variables, and Copeland draws out the pathways between each scenario and describes how China and the United States will interact in each given scenario. According to Copeland, the optimal situation for the United States is for China to remain a rational security maximizing state and have a lower gross domestic product (GDP) than the US. This way the United States can have leverage over China and can also allow the United States to provide inducements to China to adhere to United States desires. The worst situation would be for China to become a non-rational security

maximizer, and for China to overtake the United States in terms of GDP. In this scenario, China would have the ideological drive to be combative and would also have the relative power to enact whatever aggressive stance it wishes. Copeland's goal for his analysis is to have a typology that allows for policy makers to think reactively about China and not get stuck in static projections.

Copeland's empirical study of United States foreign policy and inclusion of economic factors into realism deserves much praise, but there are two overarching problems with his work in this book. The first problem is that while I applaud Copeland for including commercial interests into a realist theory, this does beg the question of why not add other variables into realism? By adding in another variable into realist thought, Copeland opens the door to a multitude of other variables to be added. A larger problem for Copeland is the scope of the book. With such a wide scope, each section feels disjointed and needs to be more concretely tied together.

The work Copeland lays out could have been more coherently presented as three separate projects. The core analysis by Copeland of including economic power, however, provides a brilliant move in that he folds in an oft neglected variable into realist thought. Including commercial interest in a theory of realism provides a wonderful explanation for why great powers behave the way they do. I would recommend this book to any student of International Relations or policymaker who has an interest in China, since it provides a unique view of United States foreign policy that does not get bogged down in the orthodoxy of some forms of realism.