

Book Review

Technologies of International Relations: Continuity and Change

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How does technology affect International Relations (IR) both in terms of practice and discipline? Do core IR concepts, such as security, power, sovereignty, and global order need to be reconsidered in the face of fast technological advancements? Are traditional IR theories adequate to problematize and theorize technology in the digital age? Did, and if yes to what extent, authors of IR classics incorporate and elaborate technology in their empirical and theoretical work? Is there anything to be learned from the early IR scholarship, or technology's unique transformative power in the new millennium has made earlier analyses obsolete? *Technologies of International Relations: Continuity and Change*, edited by Carolin Kaltofen, Madeline Carr, and Michele Acuto, focuses on these and alike questions to examine IR-technology nexus –one of the timely and hottest research agenda in contemporary IR.

Technologies of International Relations: Continuity and Change does not offer an analytical examination of technology and its impact on IR. Rather, each chapter except the introduction is a transcription of an interview conducted with a distinguished IR scholar, all of who represent the earlier generation and have shaped the field with path-breaking contributions. Hence, each chapter presents a semi-formal scholarly discussion in an interview format made with Ole Wæver, Susan Sell, Saskia Sassen, Mark B. Salter, J. P. Singh, Christian Reus-Smit, Tony Porter, Joseph Nye, Keith Krause, Yale H. Ferguson, Barry Buzan, and Toni Erskine, respectively. Along with other issues, the authors briefly explain (chapters are about eight to fourteen pages) how they define and make sense of technology, incorporated or considered technology in their earlier works, technology's impact on various IR concepts and concerns, and main challenges and opportunities that technology pose to IR and IR scholarship.

In the introductory chapter, the editors provide a basis for the interviews by elaborating “the growing centrality of technological questions to the investigation of international relations and world politics, the presence of a tradition of engagement with technology throughout the ‘classics’ of IR, and the need for a renewed discussion on this theme at the core of the discipline” (1). The editors make a case against the accounts which readily disregard earlier IR due to negligence of technology, as IR classics did examine technology and its impact although sometimes an explicit attention lacked. Thus, the editors warn, “the general apprehension that studying technology in IR could result in ‘straw manning’ and dismissing traditional IR undoubtedly warrants closer attention” (9). At the same time, the editors highlight the need to go beyond traditional IR by speaking more with other disciplines, such as Science and Technology Studies, Media and Communication Studies, and Criminology. They note the intergenerational consensus on the need to re-examine traditional IR –both the early/mid-career scholars who conducted the interviews and the earlier generation who are interviewed agree on this need. In fact, the pairing of interviews (new generation with the previous one) is done on purpose to more effectively comprehend technology’s role in IR “through the thoughtful mediation between the heights of past achievements and the current generation of creative and critical thought” (10).

One can find many interesting discussions and insights in the book while distinguished IR scholars elaborate their careers, early works, thought processes, and predictions in relation to technology and IR. Each interview touches upon these points with a varying degree of emphasis and the discussions have different contexts depending on the authors’ specializations. Thus, for anyone who is especially interested in Ole Wæver, Susan Sell, Saskia Sassen, Mark B. Salter, J. P. Singh, Christian Reus-Smit, Tony Porter, Joseph Nye, Keith Krause, Yale H. Ferguson, Barry Buzan, and Toni Erskine in regard to the mentioned issues, the book is quite appealing. Here, I briefly discuss the content of each chapter.

In Chapter 2, Ole Wæver discusses theorization of technology in IR and questions whether novel technologies necessitate new theories in the discipline. Among many issues, Wæver elaborates how autonomous character of contemporary technology is something new and transformative, and conveys his doubts on the ways that ‘new materialism’ examines technology as it tends to “[miss] the most important side of technology...the *politics of technology and technology as political acts*” (15). In the following chapter, Susan Sell elaborates intellectual property rights in relation to technology and development and notes how intellectual property rights have become more important in terms of shaping technological development. Sell also comments on technology’s influence on core IR issues including security, power, and global governance. She describes technology as a “double-edged sword” since depending on its utilization it can be an asset or

vulnerability—enhance or hinder security, power and global governance. Furthermore, Sell highlights how digital technology can strengthen social movements to create a “counter-hegemonic movement”. In the worlds of Sell, “I guess I’m old-fashioned in that I believe in the old enlightenment perspective that knowledge is power, and the more that people can be informed about what’s going on and how it affects them, it creates opportunities for political agency that with these technologies, just a few people can make a lot of important things happen” (31).

In Chapter 4, Saskia Sassen particularly highlights the importance of “more mundane and less popular technologies...[as] technology comes in many different shapes...and [one] shouldn’t be seduced by the cult of the new and remember the truly revolutionary emerges in many shapes and places” (37). Sassen points at the fact that many scholars are more interested in advanced sectors and more exciting domains like the Web as they discuss technology, but they pay far less attention to the mundane-yet-revolutionary. Sassen exemplifies Women of the Polisario, Women who had utilized stove technologies and captured solar power to meet basic needs in the Western Sahara Desert. Not only did stove travel the world as an innovation and a symbol of the Western Sahara struggle, it also represented “the power of finding ingenious solutions to pressing and very localized needs” (37). The key message is, what is commonly seen and overlooked as “mundane” is also significant and needs to be studied. In the subsequent chapter, Mark B. Salter discusses many issues from technology in his own work to the meaning and importance of technology in IR. Salter notes that even though current technologies may be revolutionary and novel, it is not the first time that societies react to revolutionary changes. One can learn a lot by studying how humanity dealt with such changes in the past to be able to better understand how it is reacting now.

In Chapter 6, J. P. Singh investigates IR-technology nexus as he makes references to his own studies on telecommunications technologies and touches upon important discussions including technology’s autonomous character and neutrality. Singh especially provides detailed information on the historical development of technology studies in IR by giving striking examples. For instance, he notes, “I got a position at the University of Mississippi, which was funded by BellSouth, and the department chair was offering me the position even without really interviewing me because there were so few people doing technology that they said — ‘BellSouth, we found somebody who can do technology and IR’” (58). In the next chapter, Christian Reus-Smit elaborates the place of technology in his own work, notes technology’s socially embedded character, and stresses the need to study technology in relation to social and cultural relations. Reus-Smith highlights the importance of questioning technologies’ origins, that is reasons behind their emergence, before passing to the debate on their impact.

In Chapter 8, Tony Porter examines technology in relation to many IR and in-

ternational political economy (IPE) issues including international industries, accountability, public-private contrast, constructivist-rationalist dichotomy, governance, and Actor-Network Theory. Among other remarks, Porter points at the power that technology experts yield as they claim to speak on behalf of technology and the consequent accountability problems that arise in democracies. In the following chapter, Joseph Nye deliberates how he had elaborated technology in his work by making references to nuclear weapons and non-state actors' empowerment. In response to a question on IR's limits in engaging with technology, Nye gives an instructive answer: "Well the kinds of debates that we have about realism vs neo-liberalism vs constructivism—I don't think they help very much. No one of those has the answers and the question is how can you take the insights from all three of these broad theoretical approaches and use them to understand things" (95).

In Chapter 10, Keith Krause particularly focuses on technologies of violence. He also touches upon other important issues, such as measurability of knowledge and its implications, and technology's impact on academic careers and the underlying power relations. Regarding the latter, Krause refers to an article on economics profession to note, "co-authored papers by women [are] discounted systematically in tenure decisions, that is to say if there [is] a man and a woman co-authoring, the woman's contribution [is] devalued. And so, the disclaimer is: do not co-publish if you are a woman" (104). Here, Keith emphasizes that even though technology in the form of measurable metrics in citation counts and journal rankings enables a relatively transparent account, power relations are there. In the subsequent chapter, after briefly introducing postinternationalism, Yale H. Ferguson elaborates technology, change, and continuity from the perspective of postinternationalism. In connection with his discussion throughout the text, Ferguson points at five research areas: possible unintended consequences of new technologies, normative and practical examination of the past, present, and likely future technological advancements, negative impacts of technologies and their mitigation through regulatory frameworks (regulations are political and require discussions in their own right), historical development of certain inventions, and well-analysed impact of big data on present and likely future global trade.

In Chapter 12, Barry Buzan deliberates technology from various angles including its role in his work, definition, and impact on IR. Buzan stresses the fact that engagement with technology is unavoidable in IR as "[one] can hardly conceptualize anything in IRs without thinking about the background technological conditions" (117). Buzan also comments on the advantages of discussing IR and technology by making references to science-fiction series. Discussing IR in the context of series such as *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica* is not only useful in teaching as elaborations resonate better with students, but also a welcoming opportunity

to think outside the box. Regarding the latter, Buzan encourages IR scholars to think more seriously on what may lie in the future, such as artificial intelligence that is at least equally superior to humans or potential outcomes of a nuclear war. In the final chapter, Toni Erskine evaluates her studies in relation to technology and especially discusses new technologies' moral aspects by touching upon issues varying from companies' responsibilities in producing certain technologies that (may) have negative effects to the conditions under which a machine needs to be considered as a moral agent. Erskine provides many illuminating examples and emphasizes technology's importance in IR: "if we think that it is enough to have some scholars working in a separate 'technology and IR' sub-field, then we have a problem. Everybody who is working on international politics needs to be aware of technological developments and...[their] impact" (135).

In the words of the editors of *Technologies of International Relations: Continuity and Change*, the volume is "a promising field report, rich in evidence and detailed insights, curious quotes and inspirational thoughts" (10-11). Indeed, the book has all these qualities and is a must-read for scholars who are interested in technology's effects on IR both in terms of practice and discipline. The book would also be interesting and helpful for PhDs and early-career academicians as it not only touches upon and hints at future research avenues, but also offers crucial insights from distinguished IR scholars.

Bio

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