ABSTRACT
PUTTING STATESMANKSHIP BACK INTO STATECRAFT: THE ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIVE AMBITION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

By
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In this dissertation, I explore how changes in foreign policies are in large part a result of the political ambition of national leaders. I critically examine how prevailing theories in international relations conceive of leadership. Specifically, I reevaluate the role of political ambition in international-relations and foreign-policy theories. Neorealism couples leaders’ ambition to the state’s imperative to survive in the anarchic international system; leaders display either restrained (security maximizing) or unlimited (power maximizing) ambition. Institutional theories of strategic interaction focus on leaders in domestic arenas but narrowly focus on their ambition for political office. Personality theories rightly assume that leaders’ motivations vary, yet these are seen as the product of idiosyncrasies; they mistakenly reduce the ambition for power and achievement to unconscious drives and character defects. I investigate leaders who have greater and a qualitatively different kind of ambition than is ordinarily recognized in political science. I carve out a sphere of autonomy for statesmen by introducing the notion that leaders with transformative ambition not only rise above constraints but also change the rules of the game. Such high acts of statesmanship depend on the redefinition of ordinary political ambition into great ambition, which is something leaders are self-aware of. Drawing on Aristotle’s idea of magnanimity and Niccolò Machiavelli’s lessons to princes through his examples of great founders, I distinguish between ordinary and great ambition. The latter is usually a precondition for transformative ambition, which leads an individual to challenge the rules of the day and can be revolutionary as leaders seek to make their marks on the world. As such, these leaders’ foreign policy is not defined by the structure of international relations, but by their view of what can be accomplished through international politics. They are not blind to constraints, but use state capabilities and the art of statesmanship to push others to accept their worldviews. Through the force of their initiative, personalities, and the practice of statesmanship, leaders with transformative ambition try to accomplish great goals despite international and domestic constraints. Successful leaders manage to change the conventions and rules of international politics and (re)set the relations between states. In support of this argument, I examine various cases studies, including Otto Von Bismarck, Woodrow Wilson, Charles de Gaulle, and Pericles.