

# Jebb, Cindy R. Bridging the Gap: Ethnicity, Legitimacy, and State Alignment in the International System.

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Jebb, Cindy R. *Bridging the Gap: Ethnicity, Legitimacy, and State Alignment in the International System*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004.

Professor Cindy Jebb examines the hypothesis that a state's foreign policy apparatus will have greater strategic freedom of choice if the state's population is ethnically homogenous than if its population is ethnically mixed. The specific area in which this freedom of choice is examined is alignment, essentially taking sides in a particular conflict or in power-balancing alliances. The focus of the latter is on the Cold War when the two states being examined aligned with opposing camps. The focus of the former is on the first Persian Gulf War.

The two states are Egypt and Syria – timely choices given the tensions that exist inside the Middle East and between much of the Islamic Middle East and the West. As Jebb notes, the increasing focus of both countries on their respective roles in regional politics in this important part of the world makes a better understanding of the interplay of their domestic and foreign policies important for scholars and statesmen alike. The case studies are supported by thorough summaries of the political, economic, and social trends that shaped both states.

The second Syrian case study is particularly interesting for the insight it shows into a regime that is often thought of as a powerful autocracy. Jebb demonstrates that, despite the regime's evident willingness to exert force domestically to retain its hold on power, its foreign policies in the post-Cold War case were constrained by the need to broaden support from segments of the population outside the in-group that has dominated the government under Asad. Asad sought to do this by emphasizing his status as a regional leader by forging solidarity with the Arab states opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and speaking out in support of Palestinian rights. He also sided with the anti-Iraq coalition on the expectation that economic benefits would follow and would placate Syria's Sunni population, all the while refusing to embrace the United States for fear of alienating Sunni and other Islamists. The first Syria case argues that the alignment with the USSR during the Cold War was also influenced by ethnicity, in the sense that the alignment gave the regime resources and political cover that it used to violently repress non-Alawi opposition. Jebb's analysis gives the reader a useful prism through which to interpret Syria's foreign policies today relative to the insurgency in Iraq, foreign investment in country, and the Israeli-Palestine peace process.

The picture that Jebb paints of Egypt's foreign policy calculations is considerably different. She sees Egypt's population as virtually homogenous and argues based on expert analyses of elite opinion and limited polling data that the population as a whole has long thought of itself as a national entity, not as tribal or religious entities. That being the case, the divisions that count inside Egypt are economic, not ethnic, and the absence of ethnic division translates into generalized support for the regime's foreign policy and, perhaps until recently,

patience with the regime's slow progress in improving the Egyptian economy. This analysis adds another layer of support for the conventional wisdom about the motivations of the Sadat government in the late 1970s and the Mubarak government in the early 1990s.

The last chapter of the book draws inferences about the contemporary world from the case studies. For both Syria and Egypt the main features of the story really haven't changed. Syria's leadership still lacks legitimacy due to its narrow political base in the Alawi community, and the Egyptian government is still struggling to forestall the day when lackluster economic growth completely erodes its legitimacy. Among the things that have changed is the ability of non-government groups to communicate with each other and with "the people," and thereby contest governments' claims on citizen loyalty – complicating the balancing act in Syrian foreign policy and perhaps introducing the need for one in Egypt.

While it seems likely that national identities will eventually form in states such as Syria – as they did over time in Europe and other parts of the world where provincial, religious, or tribal loyalties were once dominant – that day is a long way off and the Syrian policies that Jebb describes only postpone that day. With respect to Egypt, it will be interesting to observe whether the sense of common national identity will continue to enable a flexible foreign policy in the future after more years of economic underperformance and the transition to a post-Mubarak regime.

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