



## Review of Arturo Sotomayor's *The Myth of the Democratic Peacekeeper*



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**Arturo C. Sotomayor. 2014. *The Myth of the Democratic Peacekeeper: Civil-Military Relations and the United Nations*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 280 pages, ISBN 978-1421412139 Paper (\$39.95); ISBN 978-1421412146 Electronic (\$39.95).**

In the *Myth of the Democratic Peacekeeper* Arturo Sotomayor sets out to reverse the usual political science research focus on peacekeeping. Rather than investigating the ways peacekeeping missions succeed or fail at the mandates assigned to them, or examining the politics and economics of peace operations, Sotomayor looks instead at the way participation in peacekeeping affects the militaries that serve in United Nations peacekeeping. In particular he is interested in evaluating theories that suggest that participation in peacekeeping missions leads militaries from newly democratizing countries to accept more democratic civilian control.

In order to do this he asks three research questions: “(1) Does peacekeeping reform military organizations? (2) Can peacekeeping socialize soldiers to become more liberalized and civilianized? (3) Does peacekeeping improve defense and foreign policy integration?” (3). In order to answer these questions, Sotomayor looks at the experiences of three countries: Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Each of these countries has a different democratizing experience and a different set of political motivations for contributing troops, which Sotomayor usefully distinguishes by comparing the “Signaling,” “Domestic Reform” and “Economic Incentive” motivations that led each country to contribute troops to United Nations Peacekeeping.

In my view, one of the strengths of this book is its methodological sophistication. Sotomayor’s approach is qualitative and rigorous. He makes a controlled comparison among the

three countries using a variety of data sources. In addition to historical and documentary reviews, confidential interviews with military officers, official United Nations records and documents, he also uses as sources papers presented at conferences, lectures, and other documents prepared by military officers (100). The selection of the three case countries is also well motivated, focusing on countries that provide variation rather than uniformity in their historical and political contexts. Sotomayor's study thus approximates the multi-trait, multi-method approach to ensuring validity in research proposed by Campbell and Fiske (1959) in their influential paper.

Sotomayor finds little support for the idea that participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions has a socializing effect on the militaries involved, and on the defense and foreign policies of the contributing countries. Rather, he observes that a variety of factors limit the effects that such participation might achieve. Among these is the small number of troops who serve in peacekeeping missions relative to the size of the contributing militaries. As well, and perhaps most importantly, Sotomayor concludes that the effects of participation in United Nations peacekeeping will not be uniform; it is wrong to expect a "one size fits all" effect of participation. His conclusion, rather, is that the historical and contextual differences among the cases lead to these countries having different experiences.

Before turning to some conceptual concerns, I note that the book is highly readable. Indeed, for *The Myth of the Democratic Peacekeeper*, Sotomayor received the Luciano Tomassini Latin American Relations Book Award from the Latin American Studies Association. Because it is a model of rigorous qualitative investigation, the book can be profitably read by professional researchers and students alike. In particular, the methodological instruction that can be gained from a close reading of the book would serve students in graduate classes well, including seminars devoted to research methodology, and to policy research.

For me, one drawback of Sotomayor's fine book is that its theoretical motivation is exceedingly narrowly drawn, focusing on evaluating specific theories within political science. In that context the reversed focus on the experience of peacekeepers, and through them on the countries from which they are deployed, is an innovative and useful contribution. Yet, while it is unfair to fault an author for failing to do something s/he has not set out to do, in the context of a book that looks at the effect that participation in peacekeeping operations has on military participants, it is curious that Sotomayor makes little use of a significant literature on this topic from outside of political science. In the broader context of this literature, Sotomayor's main conclusions that the effects of peacekeeping participation are variable and vary according to contextual, historical, and experiential dimensions is somewhat unsurprising. It is a shame that such an elaborate, and tightly conceptualized methodological approach leads to such a relatively

meagre conclusion. And in this respect, the potential contribution to the field of peacekeeping studies (as opposed to political science theory testing) is less than it might otherwise have been.

Despite this reservation, *The Myth of the Democratic Peacekeeper* is an instructive book—one that deserves close attention, and that can be read with great profit by those interested in the evaluation of political science theories about United Nations peacekeeping.

### References

Campbell, D. and D. Fiske. 1959. “Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix.” *Psychological Bulletin* 58(2): 81-105.

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