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The Trouble with Borders

Debates on interstate boundaries focus on where a boundary ought to lie. Scholars study disputed boundaries in places such as Kashmir and the Golan Heights to account for the persistence of these disputes and their potential to escalate. Other scholars focus on secession, ethnic conflict, and attempts by well-armed ethnic groups to carve out their own ethnically homogeneous states. Others advocate redrawing boundaries and partition; Bosnia, Jerusalem, and Iraq are prominent examples of whether and how to redraw interstate borders in order to keep peace. The study of borders in the social sciences is largely concerned with location.

This book is about none of those debates. Historically and in the present, states and their outlying populations have faced tremendous security challenges along boundaries that are in fact not disputed. Nineteenth-century European states struggled to prevent bandits and mercenaries from committing violent acts and fleeing to neighboring states across stable but poorly defended borders. Currently, Iran is struggling to contain smugglers and bandits along its shared boundary with Afghanistan and – much like the United States and Israel – is constructing expensive barriers to deter infiltrators into its frontier territories.[1] Zimbabwe's attempt to monitor and regulate the flow of goods and people is so irregular that government statistics register annual population losses of nearly one million people. Rebels smuggle weapons back and forth across the poorly administered boundaries

[1] On the United States, see Marek (2005) and the Secure Fence Act of 2006, H.R. 6061. On Iran, see Walsh (2006); AFX News, March 17, 2006, "Afghan Bandits Kill 22 in Iran"; and Agence France Press, May 4, 2006, "Iran Arrests Rebels in Restive Border Regions." On Israel, see Gavrilis (2004, 2006).

of the D.R. Congo, launching rebellions in a well-organized rotation. In most of these cases borders are not disputed; rather, borders are sites of extreme instability and mismanagement.

One way to explain this cross-border insecurity is to investigate state strength. Many states are too poor or too weak to respond to challenges to their authority in outlying territories (Fearon and Laitin 2003). The weaker the state, the less secure its boundary against threats posed by smugglers, insurgents, and bandits. This book argues that this seemingly plausible explanation is misconceived. The difference between an insecure border and one that is well administered has much more to do with how states organize their institutions at the boundary than with how strong they are. Institutional design trumps state strength. A state with powerful coercive institutions and a capable military can easily intervene to manage borders, but such intervention may produce perverse effects, such as minor border skirmishes escalating into major incidents and a counterproductive micromanagement of the actions of border guards. By contrast, a state that delegates and surrenders authority to its boundary administrators has a better chance of achieving a secure border. Its guards are more likely to cooperate with their counterparts along the other side, pool resources to secure the border, and adopt innovative policing methods to cope with emerging security problems. I dub such a locally embedded, bilateral institution a "boundary regime."

The pages that follow will explain that boundary regimes, despite their durability and effectiveness in providing security for states and outlying populations, exist as exceptions rather than the rule. The reason for this presents a paradox: states often attempt to micromanage their borders in order to enhance their security, yet the delegation and surrender of authority to boundary administrators ultimately leaves states more secure. Put another way, if strong states have been lacking in much of the world, even fewer states have been able to manage their borders efficiently.

Throughout this project, I pursue three objectives that relate to the institutional dynamics of borders: (a) to understand the relationship of a state to its border security institutions, (b) to account for variation in institutions of border control, and (c) to model how different ways of organizing border administration at the local level have variable outputs on security. A few words on each of the three are in order.

Security studies approaches within international relations typically treat the relationship of states to their borders as static. They assume an instinctual state drive to use a border as a line of defense against aggressors and in

particular against enemy states.[2] All states have a vital interest in maintaining well-patrolled borders. What varies is their capacity to defend them. Mearsheimer argues that common borders between great powers provide direct and easy access for putting military pressure on a common foe (2001: 271). Others find that borderland terrain and the proximity of a capital city, roads, and rail to a boundary affect the incidence of conflict (Siverson and Starr 1990; Starr and Thomas 2002; Buhaug and Gleditsch 2006). Fazal (2007) argues that borders and geography hold the key to why some states die while others survive. She explains that before 1945 buffer states, whose borders placed them between two stronger rivals, had a high likelihood of being aggrandized into nonexistence. After 1945, norms against territorial conquest ensured that relatively weak buffer states with easily violable borders would survive. These accounts treat borders as tools of brinkmanship and proxies for strategic geographic variables. While appealing in their parsimony, they do not account for variation in how states design and organize their borders to provide security for themselves and for their outlying territories.

Taking a cue from Prescott's *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* (1987), we can divide the function of boundaries into positional and administrative tasks. Positional tasks include the actual delimitation and demarcation of the boundary on the ground and the creation of neutral zones or grey areas along that boundary. Administrative tasks include prevention of border jumping, suppression of smuggling and contraband, extraction of customs duties, and the regulation and facilitation of legal crossing of goods and people.

Not all states perform these functions equally well, nor do they value them equally. Some states pursue the delimitation of their borders immediately after independence, while other states age inside poorly delineated boundaries.[3] Other states deploy customs officials but not border guards. Still others use military units, while others use irregular or civilian police forces. Some states police their borders unilaterally, while others cooperate

[2] This Hobbesian account shares some commonalities with studies of how other groups – from primate societies to ethnic groups – create defensible and distinguishable borders. For general discussions, see Malmberg (1980), Sack (1986), and Hechter (2000).

[3] Territorial disputes are altogether different from delimitation and demarcation disputes. Delimitation refers to the affixing of a border in a treaty or on a map. Demarcation refers to the placement of on-the-ground markings to identify the route of the border. States may have undelimited and nondemarcated borders without necessarily making overlapping claims to the territory of their neighbors (Gavrilis 2009).

with neighbors to address common security problems. On the African continent, some states do not bother to police their borders at all; others attempt to fence their borders; and still others experiment with joint patrols involving their neighbors' border guards (Asiwaju and Adeniyi 1989; Anderson 1997; International Crisis Group 2004b). Consider also the example of post-Taliban Afghanistan, where cross-border drug and weapons smuggling has drastically increased. The state-capacity explanation might lead us to conclude that the Afghan state simply cannot control its borders. A closer look, however, suggests that the government in Kabul has little interest in controlling its borders; open borders permit the drug trade to continue and generate revenues that keep provincial warlords content and the state afloat. State capacity is irrelevant; state preferences for an open border are critical.

The second analytical goal is to explore variation in states' strategies toward their borders. A cluster of excellent studies in history and the social sciences has demonstrated a link between domestic political processes and states' attempts to control their borders. In an influential study of the United States–Mexico border, Andreas (2000) argues that the intensification of border policing and attempts to fence off the boundary are not the result of increasing illegal activities such as drug smuggling. Instead, more aggressive policing occurs at times that are opportune for political elites and the media. In his work on African borders, Herbst (2000) explains how international and domestic processes combine to prevent African states from policing their outlying borders. The states have inherited vast territories whose borders are perceived as legitimate by the international community but are nonetheless far beyond the coercive reach of their respective authorities. In such a benign international environment, states have little incentive to institute border control. In his sweeping historical study of the Spanish-French frontier, Sahlins (1991) shows how centuries-long modernizing and centralizing state-building processes on each side of the frontier created an increasingly regulated and militarized line. While the sum total of all of this scholarship indicates that strategies for border control vary in nature and intensity, it has not resulted in a singular framework that links domestic politics to state building. Here, I develop a framework that spans both continents and centuries.

The third goal of this book is to model how different organizations of border control at the local level have variable outputs on security. This area has received the least sustained attention from social scientists. Yet studying the behavior of border guards and customs officials is essential

for understanding how local state agents implement centrally devised directives. Organizations and personnel deployed at borders are vested with authority to implement and enforce binding rules for crossing and accessing the border. Passports are checked, customs taxes are collected from lorries laden with goods, and insurgents are chased down by military units on patrol as they attempt to infiltrate the border. Understanding how border personnel carry out these duties, improvise solutions to emergent threats, and interact with their counterparts on the other side is essential to understanding why some border zones are more porous, more dangerous, and more corrupt than others.

The Argument

Borders are institutional zones, not lines of separation between states. Borders regularize and structure contact and interaction between states (Luhman 1982; Kratochwil 1986; Sahlins 1991; Ron 2000a, 2000b; Newman 2006; Simmons 2006). Andreas (2003) underscores this point cogently in a study that examines changes affecting the borders of postindustrial states in the twenty-first century. He argues that while many boundaries are becoming demilitarized and more open to trade, other cross-border activities, such as immigration, are becoming more regulated.[4] This view contains both a macro- and a micro-level dynamic. On a macro level, states make choices about what they will attempt to police and regulate along their borders and about who they will vest with the task of policing. At the micro level, the local organization of border authority is responsible for managing and policing the boundary.

The macro level argues that borders are institutions that directly contribute to state formation and state authority. Passport controls at official crossings and policing of unofficial crossings can deter the entry or exit of individuals who challenge authority or attempt to evade capture.[5] The restriction of the import or export of certain goods across borders

[4] He refers to this latter process as "criminalization." He also notes that when states deregulate controls on the flow of goods and cooperate to criminalize certain activities, they are effectively pooling their sovereignty. The implication of his point is that frontiers have more in common with modern boundaries than has previously been thought. I agree with this definition, although I tend to limit myself to the terms "boundaries" and "borders."

[5] The area that lies along the length of a border between official crossings is called the "green border." This should not be confused with "grey areas" or "neutral zones," terms that refer to unclear sovereignty over small pieces of land along boundaries.

protects domestic markets. The collection of customs duties adds to precious revenues that governments require in order to rule. The delimitation of a border signals the point at which a state's authority ends and provides officials and populations with a point of reference beyond which their activities are not authorized. Borders, in short, are local manifestations of the claims of a state's authority. They enable coercion and extraction and signal ownership.

However, no two paths of state formation are exactly alike. As work on state formation demonstrates, state leaders practice a wide array of combinations of extraction, co-optation, coercion, and legitimation to enable rule and ensure compliance (Ardant 1972; Hirschman 1978; Levi 1988; Tilly 1992; Herbst 2000; Migdal 2001; Boone 2003; Thies 2004; Hui 2005). There are many variations on these general practices. In a sweeping study of how states generate revenue, Levi (1988) finds that the types of revenues collected and methods of collection change across time and place due to a number of constraints that include the bargaining power of state authorities, the cost of extracting such revenues, and the emphasis that authorities place on short- versus long-term gains. For our purposes, the details of these arguments are less important than their implication: state-building strategies vary.

This variation in state-building strategies, consequently, should explain the variation in how states perceive their borders and intervene at them. Borders are potentially sites of coercion, extraction, and demarcation of territory, yet all states do not maximize these practices at their boundaries. I argue that state-building processes explain several counterintuitive puzzles: why states differ in how they value demarcation procedures, customs agents, and border guards; why there is tremendous variation in the local organization of border authorities; why neighboring states fail to coordinate their border policing even as they face seemingly mutual threats; and why states and border authorities do not react uniformly to what scholars or analysts may see as an objectively grave threat.

This variation also has a micro-level component. At the micro level, I argue that border authorities vested with administrative autonomy and the ability to interact with their counterparts on the other side will tend toward cooperation in order to manage the shared boundary. Border guards who have the ability to regularly interact and communicate with their counterparts along the other side of the border will use those arenas of interaction to pool their efforts, propose solutions to common problems of administering the border, and locally resolve disputes before they escalate.

My argument runs counter to a large body of work in the social sciences that insists that effective governance and policy implementation require states to monitor and directly enforce the actions of their agents in the field (Solnick 1998; see also Hardin 1968; Migdal 2001; Fearon and Laitin 2003). The unifying strain in this literature is that agents vested with authority will shirk work, abuse their power, and derail the implementation of state policies unless they are monitored adequately from above. This literature warns against giving local agents broad discretion. Such discretion may tempt border authorities to skip patrol duty, seek bribes to let unauthorized goods through, and collude with weapons smugglers and militants. In the case of interstate borders, this literature has limited applicability.

I do not argue that local officials will not abuse their authority. To some degree, this is inevitable along any border. However, intervention from above is no panacea for the problems of border security. Central states are located far from their borders. This distance is not necessarily geographic; it is conceptual and hierarchical. If high-level authorities broadly tailor border administration to fulfill selective and particular policies of top-down state-building, they may very well ignore security problems along their borders that do not affect their preferred policies. Under the right conditions, the local organization of border administration may resolve the countervailing tendencies between the broad strategies of states and the particular needs of border zones.

This project stands on the shoulders of the literatures on institutions and cooperation. Institutions are the rules of the game (North 1990). They are chosen strategically and deliberately by constrained but goal-minded actors (Levi 1988; Ostrom 1990; March and Olsen 1998; Boone 2003). I argue that states deploy institutions to their borders that best match their preferred state-building policies. At the local level, I rely on the literature on the evolution of cooperation, which models how actors may self-organize and develop durable cooperation in order to solve social dilemmas (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom, Walker, and Gardner 1992; Axelrod 1997). Local authorities have traditionally policed long stretches of boundaries with meager resources and under dangerous conditions. Given this, it is important to understand the conditions under which guards cooperate with the other side to innovate policing strategies.

This study has substantive and theoretical motivations. All states have borders, and few, if any, can credibly claim to have resolved the dilemmas of policing, extracting resources at their borders, and delimiting their boundaries. At the same time, social scientists have paid scant attention to

the dynamics of border security even as the number of new states in the international system has multiplied.[6] In 1900, there were forty-two states. In 2006, there were 192 (Carter and Goemans 2007; Fazal 2007). The mileage of violable borderlines has drastically increased. Yet a substantial body of work implies that boundaries are increasingly irrelevant (Rosecrance 1996; Adler and Barnett 1998) or that the forces of globalization are unleashing illicit flows the likes of which states cannot hope to contain.[7] As one prominent globalization scholar put it, "If a paranoid state such as North Korea is incapable of controlling its borders and deterring illicit trade, there seems to be little hope for open, democratic, and technologically advanced nations seeking to uphold their common borders" (Naim 2006). Such a pessimistic view neglects institutional design. Moreover, the focus on globalization, with its high-technology, virtual flows across borders, obscures the fact that for most states the dilemmas of border policy remain much the same as in the past: preventing challenges to state authority by rival groups in remote regions, suppressing the flow of weapons, and deterring bandits and extremists.

My theoretical motives are twofold. The first is to explain state behavior. The second is to demonstrate that local institutions matter. These objectives require linking the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, I use theories of state building to explain the institutions deployed by states to their borders. At the micro level, I specify the constraints and conditions that these institutions face at the local level.

Connecting the two levels allows me to bridge the large gaps between international relations, comparative politics, and sociology even as it may seem that my approach condemns international relations approaches for their conspicuous lack of a theoretical perspective on boundaries. Strategic approaches that study state-to-state interactions have yielded tremendously valuable conclusions on the limits and successes of international cooperation (e.g., Snidal 1985; Wendt 1999; Mitzen 2005). However, it would be wrong to model a theory of boundaries by focusing on the interactions that occur across central states. This is effectively how such approaches model behavior and outcomes. They either personify the state as an actor

[6] Studies in the social sciences that prominently feature the word "borders" or "boundaries" are rarely about interstate boundaries. Rather, they typically concern social boundaries (Abbott 1995; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Gibson 2005; Tilly 2005a).

[7] On different positions and views regarding these debates, see Kahler and Walters (2006) and Adamson (2006).

or measure its interactions with other states via its diplomatic agencies. This is a valid enterprise. However, in the case of interstate borders, the most dense and formative interactions occur at the micro level and across borders. Taking interactions seriously would mean that a research agenda on the institutional dynamics of interstate boundaries would necessarily have to shift the scale of observation down to the level of the border.

The approach in these pages benefits audiences beyond those interested in boundaries, institutions, or international relations. This work also expands the boundaries of contentious politics. It explains the origins of political claims that states make via their borders and the variations in these claims across time and place. It also shifts the usual focus from contention against governments (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) to contention *within* and *across* the institutions of states. Such contention occurs when border guards find their preferred way of administering a boundary to be in conflict with the aims of their superiors in the capital. Contention also occurs when border guards alternately communicate, cooperate, collude, monitor, and sanction their counterparts.

This project will also interest scholars who study territoriality and territorial disputes (Kapil 1966; Mandel 1980; Goertz and Diehl 1992; Hensel 2001; Fravel 2005; Diez, Stetter, and Albert 2006; Kahler and Walter 2006; Fazal 2007). The cases in this project demonstrate that cross-border cooperation can occur even in the context of a territorial dispute, despite arguments that territorial disputes lead to belligerence, tension, and escalation (Vasquez 1993; Huth 1996; Hassner 2006).

The Cases

This book focuses on successful and failed boundary regimes in new states. As the next chapter explains, new states allow the researcher to isolate the effects of state building on borders. Cases span region and time to include the nineteenth-century Ottoman-Greek boundary as well as the present-day borders of newly independent states in Central Asia. At first glance, such cases would seem to lead to incongruous comparisons. Following a protracted rebellion, the Greek state emerged from the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s with scant political institutions and makeshift governments seated in different towns. A new nation-state faced a declining multiethnic Empire. In Central Asia, five new republics emerged from Soviet collapse without a shot being fired and with old Soviet borders and capital cities intact. What can a nineteenth-century beleaguered imperial border share

with the twenty-first-century borders of nation-states that are relatively more modern and technologically advanced?

The security threats that new states face today are strikingly similar to those that confronted nineteenth-century states and empires. The Ottoman Empire and the Greek state commissioned a ragtag force of former bandits, toll collectors, and provincial police to take up positions along the boundary and guard against bandits, weapons smugglers, and insurgents. Central Asian states became collectively independent in 1991 and had to confront mutual problems of militant insurgencies and weapons and drug smuggling. In both regions and times, states had to make decisions about whether and how to demarcate their borders, how much to regulate access to boundary zones, where to open crossings, whether to deploy border guards and/or customs officials, and how much to police the areas that fell between official crossings.

The similarities end there. In the Ottoman-Greek case, foreign policy makers of the time warned that the ex-bandits would do little to prevent violence along the newly established border. British and French diplomats predicted that the former bandits would shirk policing duties and opportunistically participate in banditry and insurgency in frontier regions. Nonetheless, the Ottoman and Greek guards proved to be effective managers of the boundary, mainly because their respective governments granted them substantial autonomy and allowed them to establish posts that facilitated communication and monitoring across the boundary. In Central Asia, the new states faced mutual threats, pledged cooperation from the moment of independence, and hosted international organizations that attempted to foster cross-border cooperation. Yet most Central Asian state borders became dysfunctional. Instead of cooperating and pooling their efforts against smugglers and militants, most states resorted to escalation and closure even as these policies did little to provide security to outlying territories.

The goal in these cases is to identify and explain consistent patterns in the dynamics of interstate boundaries and to show that my explanation is stronger than alternatives. Along the Ottoman-Greek boundary, I search for cooperation where diplomats predicted conflict and closure. Along Central Asian borders, I search for conflict and unilateral management where plausible alternatives suggest that pooling of resources and cooperation would have been the standard, given common interests.

The Ottoman-Greek border offers a particularly rich account of the evolution of a boundary regime. I study the boundary over its fifty-year life span (1832–82). This allows me to trace how border guards used their