Restraint in International Politics

This is the first comprehensive examination of restraint in international politics, considered across a range of psychological, social, political, and institutional contexts as a political process, device, and strategy. Surveying how restraint has been understood in International Relations and political theory, with focus given to Aristotle and Machiavelli, Steele utilizes Carl Jung’s theories of complexes and the libido to broaden the conceptual definition of restraint as a phenomenon that is not only individual and inward-looking, but also relational and societal. Exploring its development, uses, expressions, and challenges through history and in contemporary times, this book analyzes the politics of restraint in processes of security, political economy, foreign policy, and global public health. Situating restraint alongside similar concepts such as moderation, containment, and constraint, Steele asks against what, and from what, are we restraining ourselves, who authorizes restraint, and what are the risks and rewards (both ethical and practical). Steele concludes with a balanced political and normative argument for restraint going forward.

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Restraint in International Politics

Brent J. Steele

University of Utah
For Annabelle and Joe and our many adventures to follow
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Acknowledgments

This book is about restraint, something I am not known to practice very frequently. But I have had to practice it in writing this book, and I’ve learned patience in the process because I think restraint is incredibly important for politics, and especially for international relations. I continued to slog away at this book precisely because I received so many comments, notes of encouragement, and critically important pieces of advice from friends and colleagues who also shared a sense that there needs to be a book like this one on restraint. It has taken me well over five years to research, present, write, revise, and re-revise the content that went into it. In my more melodramatic moments I’ve referred to this book as my “white whale.” This book’s publication would have never been possible without the assistance of a wide community of colleagues and associates.

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